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Demonetisation is immoral, theft of people's property: Steve Forbes



(News Agencies) Calling India's demonetisation drive as immoral, Steve Forbes, Editor-in-Chief of Forbes magazine, said it also amounted to theft of people's property. The November 8 move to spike the Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes had damaged the Indian economy, future investment and was also an assault on the privacy of common man life by inflicting more state control.

"India's government perpetrated an unprecedented act that is not only damaging its economy and threatening destitution to countless millions of its already poor citizens but also breathtaking in its immorality," the respected magazine said. Demonetisation has triggered an unprecedented cash crunch across the country, forcing millions to stand

(Contd on page 21)

Heart for Mart sake

The stent is a life-saver, that is all a patient knows. But, for the doctor, what often hangs in balance is a huge cut, bribes and vacation abroad.

(News Agencies) One of the signs of a healthy heart, they say, is that you don't even notice it. The same could be said about scams: whatever be the size of the swindle, it's roaring business as long as it passes under the radar. An on going scam of huge proportions popped briefly into view on December 7 when the Delhi High Court ordered the Department of Pharmaceuticals

(DoP) and other parties to fix and label the maximum retail price (MRP) of every cardiac stent, used for angioplasties, sold in India. Cardiac care is anyway an area where patients often bear a double cross, pun intended. To begin with, they are desperate to live; and then, being mostly medically illiterate, they are totally at the mercy of the experts.

(Contd on page 23)



Putin's Revenge

Humiliated by the 1990s, Russia's strongman is determined to win Cold War 2.0. He may be succeeding.

(Special Report) Twenty years before Vladimir Putin began his ingenious campaign to influence the U.S. presidential election, his predecessor as Russia's president stood on a dark street near the White House. (Contd on page 21)

Pension manager accused of accepting hookers, cocaine, and a \$ 17,000 watch in \$ 2 Billion Scam

(By Our Staff Reporter) If a person becomes a cocaine, and weekend getaways to Canada. portfolio manager at a pension fund and is tasked with investing in excess of \$50 billion in fixed-income assets, that person has two choices: (1) direct funds to investors on the "approved" list to do business with and not receive bribes in exchange or (2) funnel the money to whoever is going to say thank you in the form of, among other things, prostitutes,



Fund officials taking part in pay-to-play schemes. (Contd on page 21)

Jharkhand: 4-year-old girl raped, eyes gouged out, hands chopped off

(Insider Bureau) The rape and murder of a missing four-year-old girl, whose eyes were gouged out and hands chopped off, brought back horrors of witchcraft in Jharkhand where killings linked to superstitious beliefs are rampant. The mutilated body of the girl, missing since December 15, was found near her village in East Singhbhum district on Thursday. Villagers suspect a sorcerer was behind the gruesome crime. (Contd on page 21)



US attorney Bharara charges Pakistani man in \$140-mn fake diploma mill scam



Wednesday.

“As alleged, while promising the rewards of a higher education, Umair Hamid was actually just peddling diplomas and certifications from fake schools. Hamid allegedly took hefty upfront fees from young men and women seeking an education, leaving them with little more than useless pieces of paper,” Bharara said.

FBI assistant director William Sweeney Jr said: “Thousands of people’s hopes were crushed as this alleged diploma mill scheme came crashing down. Victims took at face value the lies Hamid and his co-conspirators are alleged to have sold them. Today, we’re rewriting the lesson plan.”

Hamid, who belongs to Karachi, could face up to 20 years in jail for charges of conspiracy to commit wire fraud. The investigation into the scam in the US is being jointly

conducted by the FBI, the US Postal Inspection Service and the justice department.

Executives and call centre employees of Axact allegedly “made false and fraudulent representations to consumers on websites and over the phone to trick them into enrolling in purported colleges and high schools, and issued fake diplomas upon receipt of upfront fees from consumers”, the justice department said in a statement.

In Pakistan, authorities launched an investigation against Axact, which started as a software company, soon after the expose by the Times. Investigators raided Axact offices and arrested several people, including the firm’s CEO Shoaib Shaikh. In August this year, Shaikh and 14 others were granted bail by a court in Karachi and he was acquitted in

a separate money laundering case for lack of evidence.

The initial expose had revealed how Axact allegedly scammed thousands of people, including an Indian accountant in Abu Dhabi who paid more than \$30,000 for a fake online master’s programme in business administration, a fake English language training certification and a “State Department authentication certificate” allegedly signed by secretary of state John Kerry.

The US justice department alleged Hamid and others from Axact “made misrepresentations to individuals across the world, including throughout the United States and in the Southern District of New York, in order to dupe these individuals into enrolling in supposed high schools, colleges, and other educational institutions”.

(Agencies) US attorney Preet Bharara has charged a Pakistani executive for his role in a \$140-million “fake diploma mill” scam that allegedly defrauded thousands of people around the world, including Indians.

Umair Hamid, 30, who served as “assistant vice president of international relations” of Pakistan-based Axact, was charged for conspiracy to commit wire fraud

and aggravated identity theft in connection with the scam that collected “at least approximately \$140 million from tens of thousands of consumers”.

The fake diploma scam operated by Axact was exposed by The New York Times in May 2015, triggering investigations in the US and Pakistan. American authorities arrested Hamid, who used the aliases Shah Khan and Shah, on December 19 and presented him in federal court on

Obama Permanently Blocks Arctic, Atlantic Drilling



(Agencies) President Barack Obama will use his executive authority to permanently block offshore drilling in large swaths of the Arctic and Atlantic oceans, the White House announced Tuesday.

Likewise, neighboring Canada will halt oil and gas exploration in its own Arctic waters, according to a joint statement from Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

The move to protect the planet in the face of climate change ? just weeks before President-elect Donald Trump, who appears set on sidelining America’s climate fight, takes office ? is among Obama’s most noteworthy.

A White House official said in a call with reporters Tuesday afternoon that the president’s action recognizes the unique ecological value in these areas. The withdrawal includes 115 million acres in the Arctic and 3.8 million acres in the north and mid-Atlantic Ocean, according to the Interior Department.

Interior Secretary Sally

Jewell said in a statement that the president had taken a “bold action” that “will help build the resilience of these vital ecosystems, provide refuges for at-risk species, sustain commercial fisheries and subsistence traditions, and create natural laboratories for scientists to monitor and explore the impacts of climate change.”

The permanent protections ? which are separate from the temporary bans announced as part of the Obama administration’s five-year oil and gas lease program ? rely on a provision of the 1953 Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act. The provision gives presidents the power to “from time to time, withdraw from disposition any of the unleased lands of the outer continental shelf.”

Environmental organizations, including NextGen Climate, have urged Obama in recent months to use his power to safeguard these areas from future drilling, noting Trump’s “dangerous agenda.”

NextGen Climate President Tom Steyer called Tuesday’s

announcement “historic and heroic.”

“As Donald Trump stacks his cabinet with Big Oil cronies and polluters, President Obama has acted to protect our oceans, our air and our climate for our coastal communities and future generations of Americans,” Steyer said in a statement.

Of course, it is likely that Trump, who has called climate change “bullshit” and a “hoax,” will attempt to rescind such a ban. But as the White House official told reporters, there is no provision in the law providing for such a reversal.

“No president has every acted to reverse an indefinite withdrawal,” the official said. “And we believe there is a strong legal basis that these withdrawals ... will go forward and will stand the test of time.”

Stoking fear amongst the scientific community, Trump has said he would increase America’s production of coal, oil and natural gas, as well as do away with Obama administration regulations aimed at cutting greenhouse gas emissions. He has also pledged to pull the U.S. out of the historic Paris climate agreement and cut all federal spending for climate change

research.

In the waning months of his presidency, Obama has taken numerous actions to further cement his climate legacy, including outlining a path for climate change resiliency, formally joining the Paris climate pact and quadrupling the marine monument surrounding the remote northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

Last month, the Interior Department moved to institute a temporary ban on drilling in the Arctic’s Beaufort and Chukchi seas between 2017 and 2022, thereby limiting offshore drilling to the Gulf of Mexico and Alaska’s Cook Inlet. Obama’s permanent withdrawal encompasses the entire U.S. portion of the Chukchi Sea and

significant portions of the Beaufort Sea. It also covers 31 canyons in the Atlantic, stretching from New England to the Chesapeake Bay.

As it did following last month’s Interior announcement, the American Petroleum Institute blasted Obama’s decision, saying it “ignores congressional intent, our national security, and vital, good-paying job opportunities.”

“Fortunately, there is no such thing as a permanent ban, and we look forward to working with the new administration on fulfilling the will of American voters on energy production,” Erik Milito, the industry trade group’s director of upstream and industry operations, said in a statement.



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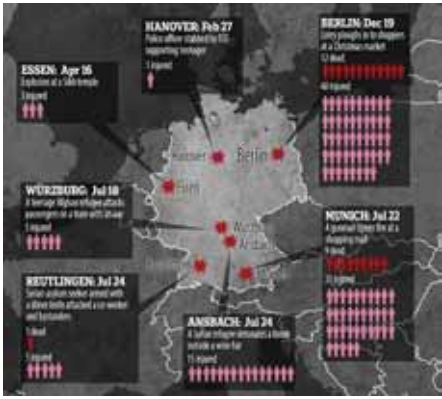
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Germany's year from hell

How the country has been rocked by seven terror attacks leaving 22



(News Agencies) On February 27, a teenage girl stabbed a policewoman in Hanover, northern Germany. The attacker, known only as Safia S told detectives she wanted to strike at home because she could not get to Syria.

A month earlier, she had tried to sneak into ISIS-controlled territory after flying to Turkey but was brought back by her mother. Her brother Saleh is in jail in Turkey after being discovered also trying to cross into Syria to join ISIS.

Three German-born Muslim teenagers have gone on trial for the



April 16 attack on a Sikh Temple in the western city of Essen.

The teenagers are accused of leaving a fire extinguisher containing a bomb outside the temple having met online and became radicalised seeking to kill 'infidels'. On July 18, ISIS claimed Muhammad Riyad had attacked commuters on a train outside Wurzburg with an axe.

Five people were wounded during the

attack while German police shot dead Riyadh as he tried to flee the scene. On July 22, a German-born Ali

Sonboly, who is of Iranian origin launched a gun attack on a McDonalds Restaurant in Munich leaving nine dead and 35 injured.

Investigators discovered he had purchased his firearms on the dark web and spent more than a year planning his deadly attack. In Reutlingen on July 24, Polish mother-of-four Jolanta Kijak, 45, was murdered at a kebab stall by a Syrian refugee. The victim and five bystanders were attacked by the killer with a large kebab knife. On the same day in Ansbach, southern Germany, another Syrian refugee tried to blow up people at a music festival. 15 people were injured outside a wine bar after the terrorist was denied access to the open-air venue. On December 19, a hijacked truck was used to kill 12 people and injure 48 in a terrorist attack on a Berlin Christmas market



(Agencies) Russian uniform at the Vnukovo International Airport in Moscow. The ambassador's family were supported by Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, who also attended the military ceremony.

Widow Marina was reported to have had a 'nervous breakdown' in the moments after he was assassinated in Ankara

Murdered ambassador's widow and mother weep over his coffin as he arrives in Moscow to a full military guard of honour after being gunned down before his wife's eyes in Turkey

on Monday. As Karlov was gunned down from behind by off-duty policeman Mevlut Mert Altintas, 22, Marina fell to the floor like others in the audience at the photographic exhibition.

She was rushed to hospital, and was accompanied by the embassy doctor and psychologists when she flew back to Moscow with her husband's remains.

Earlier today, Marina attended a memorial ceremony at Ankara airport before her husband's body was taken back to Russia. Holding two red carnations, she wept as her husband's flag-draped coffin was carried by a Turkish honor guard. Deputy Prime Minister

Tugrul Turkes said Karlov had, 'become the eternal symbol of Turkish-Russian friendship.'

In a statement to the Turkish secret services, Marina recounted the horrific moment her husband was killed.

'I was lying on the floor along with the others. There were many people at the exhibition. All of us were shocked with what had happened. I recovered only when we were already on the way to the hospital,' she said. 'I think my husband was already dead by then. He shot at him 11 times. We did not have any security guards at all. 'Only an interpreter accompanied us from time to time,' Marina revealed. 'When we came to the hospital,



the mayor of Ankara came too, and people from Health Ministry.

'They talked together for a long time and later they said that my husband was dead. I was shocked. I immediately felt unwell. 'My husband did not do anything wrong, nobody even put any threats against him, I would have known. Well, many knew that we were going to attend that photo exhibition, this event was planned beforehand.

At least 31 dead, 72 hurt in Mexico fireworks market



(Agencies) A massive explosion gutted Mexico's biggest fireworks market, killing at least 31 people and injuring 72, authorities said. The conflagration, in the suburb of Tultepec, set off a quickfire series of multicoloured blasts and a vast cloud of smoke yesterday that hung over Mexico City. The market was packed at the time with customers buying pyrotechnics for traditional end-of-year festivities. Christmas and New Year's parties in many Latin American countries very often wrap up with clattering firework blasts.

"We recovered 26 bodies at the scene of the incident," Mexico state prosecutor Alejandro Gomez told reporters at the site.

Federal police, who had reported an initial death toll of nine, said on Twitter that 70 people were hurt and were being transported to emergency rooms. Fire crews struggled for three hours before bringing the blaze under control. The head of the civil protection service, Luis Felipe Puente, said they had to wait for all the fireworks explosions to stop. The damage was beyond vast. "The entire market is gone," he said. He added that several of the injured were in "delicate condition," and searches were under way for more casualties in the scorched area that looked like a scene from a post-apocalyptic film. Homes and vehicles nearby were also damaged.

Clinton allies rip into FBI after search warrant unsealed

'It is salt in the wound to see FBI rationale was this flimsy,' Clinton's former spokesman says.



(Agencies) Hillary Clinton's allies blasted the FBI on Tuesday after court filings were unsealed showing more details about the law enforcement agency's basis for renewing its probe into Clinton's private email setup and roiling the presidential race just over a week before Election Day. Clinton's camp says the FBI had remarkably little evidence to go on when it sought a search warrant on Oct. 30 to look for classified emails on a Dell laptop belonging to Anthony Weiner, the estranged husband of longtime Clinton aide Huma Abedin. The FBI says it discovered Clinton-related emails on the computer after initially seizing the device during a probe over Weiner's alleged sexually explicit online exchanges with a minor. The court filings unsealed Tuesday show that the FBI said in an affidavit that the laptop was

likely to contain evidence of illegal possession of classified information, apparently by Weiner or Abedin, although neither has been charged with a crime. "There is probable cause to believe that the Subject Laptop contains evidence, contraband, fruits, and/or other items illegally possessed in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 793 (e) and (f)," an FBI agent wrote, citing felony Espionage Act provisions for illegal possessions of classified information.

However, Clinton's attorney and many of her allies said Tuesday the paperwork suggests all the FBI knew was that it had stumbled across more emails like the tens of thousands or more messages agents weeded through before the agency announced in July that it was not close to having the kind of evidence needed to bring a prosecution against her or anyone on her staff.

"Today's release of the

FBI affidavit highlights the extraordinary impropriety of [FBI] Director [James] Comey's October 28 letter, publicized two days before the affidavit, which produced devastating but predictable damage politically and which was both legally unauthorized and factually unnecessary," longtime Clinton lawyer David Kendall said in a statement. "The affidavit concedes that the FBI had no basis to conclude whether these e-mails were even pertinent to that closed investigation, were significant, or whether they had, in fact, already been reviewed prior to the closing of the investigation."

"What does become unassailably clear, however, is that as the sole basis for this warrant, the FBI put forward the same evidence the Bureau concluded in July was not

sufficient to bring a case — the affidavit offered no additional evidence to support any different conclusion," Kendall said. Former Clinton campaign spokesman Brian Fallon also expressed outrage at the lack of information the FBI had to indicate that the files on Weiner's laptop would lead to any change in the agency's announced findings. "The unsealed filings regarding Huma's emails reveals Comey's intrusion on the election was as utterly unjustified as we suspected at time," Fallon wrote on Twitter a few hours after the court filings were released. "There was nothing in search warrant filing to controvert Comey's statements from July and truly establish probable cause of a crime. On day when new election data freshly suggests decisive impact of Comey letter, it is salt in the wound to see FBI

World on terror alert

Security ramped up in major cities over Christmas after Berlin lorry tragedy sparks fears of another attack on the West



(Agencies) The West has been put on increased terror alert over the festive period following the Berlin lorry tragedy.

Security has been ramped up in major cities including, London, New York, Paris, Vienna and Dusseldorf, as fears grow of another 'ISIS' attack on the West.

Tanks were seen in the streets of Budapest, Hungary, and soldiers were pictured at the Christmas markets in Antwerp, Belgium.

The Metropolitan Police has said it is to review its plans for protecting public

events over Christmas and New Year following the 'awful incidents' in Berlin and Ankara.

Twelve people were killed and 48 injured after a lorry ploughed into a crowded Christmas market in the German capital in what police believe was a deliberate terrorist attack.

The carnage came hours after Russia's ambassador to Turkey was gunned down at a photography exhibition in Ankara.

In a statement today, Scotland Yard said they have 'detailed plans for protecting public events

over the Christmas and New Year period'.

The force said: 'These already recognise that the threat level is at 'severe', meaning an attack is highly likely, and have considered a range of threats, including the use of large vehicles.

'As a matter of routine, as a precaution, we review our plans after attacks overseas, and we are doing so at present following the awful incidents in Berlin and Ankara last night.'

Visitors to London's Winter Wonderland have raised security fears over the huge crowds queuing to get into the attraction in the wake of the Berlin Christmas market attack.

The annual event in Hyde Park draws in millions of visitors from around the world to its fairground rides, Christmas markets and food stalls.

But after the attack on a similar attraction in Germany yesterday, revellers fear the long, penned-in queues waiting to get past security could be hit by terrorists.

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India's War On Cash Needed A Very Different Approach : Foreign Media

Fewer than 10 percent of Indians have ever used any kind of non-cash payment instrument. Less than 3 percent of the value transacted in the year ending March 2014 used

As India continues its scorched-earth campaign against cash, the question baffling many analysts is why a country so unfamiliar with digital payments would outlaw 86 percent of its currency, the most-favored method of settling transactions.

Sample the following three factoids from a study led by Tufts University researchers:

Fewer than 10 percent of Indians have ever used any kind of non-cash payment instrument. Less than 3 percent of the value transacted in the year ending March 2014 used cards. Fewer than 2 percent of Indians had used a mobile phone to receive a payment, compared with over 60 percent of Kenyans.

Beyond showing the enormity of the challenge facing Prime Minister Narendra Modi, these statistics are of little relevance now. What's done is done. With PM Modi asking people to embrace electronic payments as

a way of life, investors want to know what shape these digital networks will take, and who'll own them: banks, or non-banks such as telcos and e-wallet apps? Either party's dominance will be wholly artificial.

Indians who have used a mobile phone to receive a payment Less than 2%

The Tufts researchers see it differently. India, they say, has erred in choosing a bank-led model over a telecoms-led one. "Consumers have been left unaware of how they might use mobile phones for services other than communications, texting, or Facebook." It's true that India doesn't have anything like China's Tenpay, controlled by Tencent Holdings Ltd., which runs the WeChat social network, or its larger rival Alipay, owned by Alibaba Group Holding Ltd.'s banking and payments affiliate, Ant Financial. Paytm, the most popular Indian wallet, is tiny versus Ant, which services 450

million customers in China and was valued by CLSA at \$75 billion in September. Although the Indian startup has witnessed explosive growth since the government's Nov. 8 currency ban, tapping opportunities isn't proving to be easy. Paytm launched an in-store payment app last month, only to withdraw it amid security concerns.

Paypal-style wallets, which customers fill from their bank accounts, won't pose too serious a challenge to traditional lenders. But Paytm, as well as mobile operators Bharti Airtel Ltd. and Reliance Industries Ltd., are close to establishing so-called payment banks that can accept customer deposits so long as they only invest in government bonds and don't make loans.

These newer payment systems could have an edge over ATMs and cards from commercial lenders. The latter are simply too smug. Even basic maintenance of infrastructure —



like switching ATMs out of Windows XP, which is no longer supported by Microsoft Corp. — is a cost that full-service banks in India avoid incurring, blithely ignoring the security risks.

But with both banks and telcos suffering from a deficit of trust and access, neither should be the No. 1 choice for replacing cash. The only institution whose balance sheet people actually want is the one they've always used to settle transactions: the Reserve Bank of India.

That's not such a bad thing. The government could still meet its goal of a "less-cash" society if physical money were to be gradually replaced by a national digital currency, whose lawful use would be certified by a network of distributed ledgers. It would be an official bitcoin, or BharatCoin, as some

commentators have called it.

The central bank's balance sheet is already available to the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker, but only via cash. RBI has no idea who owns its currency. With BharatCoin, it would know the identity of owners, though transactions would be scrambled for privacy. As Gadfly's Tim Culpán and Christopher Langner have noted, the goal of a national digital currency is to take "the banking out of cash."

Even at the Bank of England, the idea is still just a research project. If PM Modi had embraced it, the pain of demonetization would have become unnecessary. Given people's preferences, it's still not too late to consider. This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of Bloomberg LP and its owners.

Russia, Turkey and an Assassination

For the moment, the most important thing to say about Monday's dramatic assassination of Russia's ambassador to Turkey by a lone gunman is that it has not ruptured relations between the two countries.

It might have, given past tensions and Turkey's dismay at Vladimir Putin's role in the devastating civil war in Syria. Fortunately, the two sides appear to have chosen a more constructive path and decided to work together on a possible end

to that war, remote as that seems. Despite the shooting, a meeting scheduled for Tuesday in Moscow involving the Turkish, Russian and Iranian foreign ministers went forward, followed by a statement later from the Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, that the three had agreed to expand a fragile cease-fire in Syria, help the rebels and the Syrian government fashion a peace agreement and act as guarantors if a solution can be found.

That is a long shot, given past failures to reach agreement. But conditions in Syria have changed so significantly and the slaughter, especially of civilians, is so large that new pressures are building for an end to five years of relentless bloodshed that has claimed more than 400,000 lives — and may take more as the Assad government closes in on a major victory in Aleppo.

Apart from President Bashar al-Assad, no one has been more responsible for the carnage than

Russia, which has provided fighter planes and troops, and Iran, which finances Hezbollah fighters. By the same token, should they choose, Moscow and Tehran can play a central role in ending the war.

At first blush, the killing of the ambassador might easily have been interpreted as an

expression of anger at Russia's role in Syria. And Russia, with a large Muslim population in the Caucasus, has to worry about how its Syrian involvement is perceived. Just before he fired, the assassin, Mevlut Mert Altintas, screamed: "Don't forget Aleppo. Don't forget Syria." But it is not clear what his motives were, and whether he was connected to a jihadist group opposed to Mr. Assad, or acting alone, or simply trying to cause trouble for the Turkish government.

In any case, Turkey's collaboration with Russia is a measure of how much the Syrian game board has shifted. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey was one of the first leaders to call for Mr. Assad's overthrow. He has been a major supporter of rebel groups and for years allowed militants, including from the Islamic State, to cross into Syria.

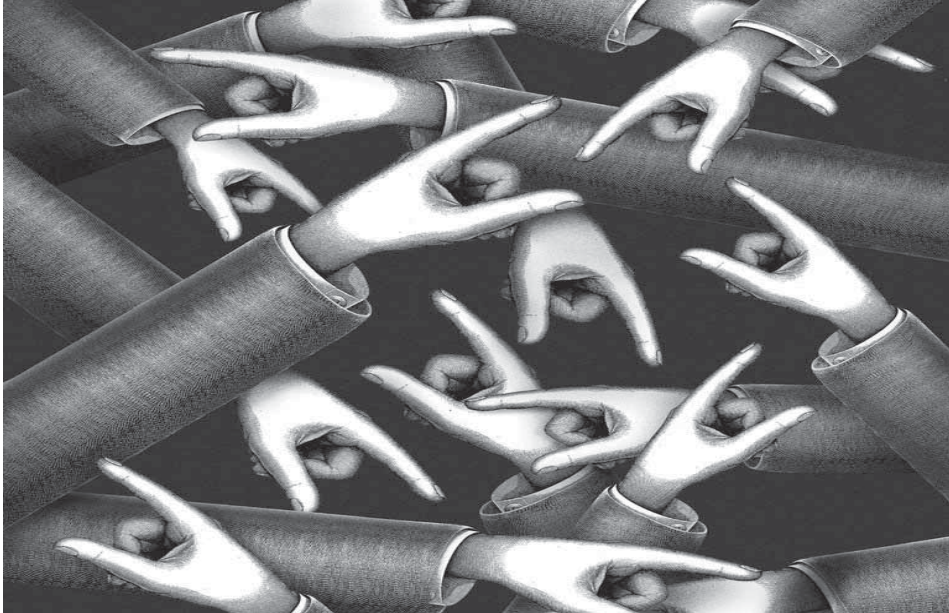
But with Mr. Assad winning and likely to continue to

control parts of Syria for the foreseeable future, Mr. Erdogan is now focused on ensuring that Kurdish groups do not secure too much territory along the border. He is at war with Kurdish separatists in Turkey and is determined to keep those in Syria from gaining a larger foothold, which in turn could strengthen the separatists in Turkey. There are reasons to worry that given a free hand by Russia, Mr. Erdogan would bomb the Syrian Kurds mercilessly, as he has done in Turkey, creating more enemies and instability.

If mutual interests somehow lead to a path to peace in Syria, the United States — indeed the entire world — cannot complain. Still, it is a bit unnerving to see Mr. Erdogan, who has veered sharply from democracy, finding so much common ground with another strongman, Mr. Putin, who would be only too happy to see Turkey leave NATO. As difficult as Mr. Erdogan may be, losing Turkey as an ally would be another unacceptable casualty of the Syrian war.



A Cruel Test for Germany, and Europe *The Climate Refugees of the Arctic*



The populist right has wasted no time waiting for facts to emerge about the identity of the attacker in Berlin or a motive to slam Chancellor Angela Merkel for her humane asylum policy and to push its xenophobic agenda. This dangerous — if predictable — reaction plays directly into the hands of the Islamic State, which would like nothing better than to start a war between Christians and Muslims in Europe.

Shortly after the attack on Monday, Marcus Pretzell, a member of the far-right Alternative for Germany party, viciously tweeted, “These are Merkel’s dead!” On Tuesday, Geert Wilders, the leader of the Netherlands’ Party for Freedom, tweeted an image of Ms. Merkel spattered with blood; Nigel Farage, of Britain’s U.K. Independence Party, tweeted that such events “will be the Merkel legacy”; and Marine Le Pen, the French nationalist, issued a statement on the “Islamist” attack in Berlin and called for reinforcing Europe’s national borders there.

More may soon be known about the person who drove a truck into a Christmas market near Berlin’s Memorial Church, killing 12 people and injuring at least 48. A Pakistani immigrant detained after the attack was freed Tuesday, and the assailant, still unidentified, remains at large.

As the police asked the public to stay vigilant, Ms. Merkel, who said “we must assume” the attack was an act of terrorism, appealed to Germans not to let terrorism steal their way of life: “We do not want to live with the fear of evil paralyzing us.” Still, Christmas markets in Berlin remained closed on Tuesday. London’s Metropolitan Police assured that it had “detailed plans for protecting public events,” and France’s interior minister, Bruno Le Roux, said that after the attack, “security for Christmas markets was immediately reinforced.” Heightened fears across Europe are understandable; the attack resembled one on Bastille Day in Nice, where a truck was used to slaughter more than 80 people.

The Berlin attack risks igniting in Germany an already charged debate on refugees. “It would be particularly difficult for all of us to bear if it is confirmed that this deed was carried out by a person who sought protection and asylum in Germany,” Ms. Merkel said. Running for re-election next year, she is politically vulnerable, with mounting opposition to her government’s asylum policy. Last New Year’s Eve, assaults on women in Cologne by mobs of North African and Arab men set off outrage. In July, a 17-year-old Afghan refugee attacked passengers on a German train and a 27-year-old Syrian asylum seeker blew himself up in southern Germany, wounding 15 others, compounding public fears.

President-elect Donald Trump also jumped in on Monday, lumping the Berlin attack with the assassination on the same day of Russia’s ambassador to Turkey and an attack within hours at an Islamic prayer center in Zurich, tweeting, “The civilized world must change thinking!” That is the wrong response. The motivations for the attacks appear completely different. In Zurich, the assailant, a Swiss citizen of Ghanaian descent, opened fire on worshipers, wounding three, and was later found dead not far away.

Protecting the public and foiling terrorism in Germany and across Europe will require far greater cooperation on intelligence and policing among neighboring nations. That work will become even more urgent as the Islamic State, facing defeat in Syria and Iraq, trains its sights on Europe with new vengeance. But as governments expand counterterrorism efforts, as they should, they must also avoid tarring the vast majority of Muslims in Europe, whether recent asylum seekers or longtime residents, who are law-abiding people as vulnerable to terrorism as anyone else, and are now themselves the target of hate crimes.

With each new attack, whether on a Christmas market or a mosque, the challenge to Europe to defend tolerance, inclusion, equality and reason grows more daunting. If Europe is to survive as a beacon of democratic hope in a world rent by violent divisions, it must not cede those values now.

The polar bear, the largest bear of them all and a fearsome predator, is the poster animal of climate change, and for good reason: While most threatened animals, such as the rhinoceros, are victims of localized threats like poaching or human encroachment, the polar bear is threatened most gravely by global emissions of greenhouse gases.

A polar bear was the star of Al Gore’s celebrated 2006 film on climate change, “An Inconvenient Truth,” and it has its own conservation organization, Polar Bears International, which has designated Feb. 27 as International Polar Bear Day. But celebrity can be a double-edged sword in debates over something as contentious as climate change, as Erica Goode noted in an article in *The Times* on Sunday.

Using the bear as an icon to raise consciousness and funds, she wrote, does more than arouse support from conservationists. It also presents a ready target from climate change deniers who are only too willing to use inevitable uncertainties about the polar bear’s actual numbers to challenge the facts of climate change. Those facts are worth repeating.

The polar bear is basically designed to convert seal fat into insulation and flesh. Weighing up to 1,500 pounds, the animal has survived for millennia by prowling the edges of Arctic sea ice waiting for seals to pop up for air. With the Arctic warming twice as fast as any other part of the earth, and with the ice seemingly in permanent retreat, the bears have been left stranded on land desperately seeking other things to eat.

This year was particularly bad. The freeze came late; the extent of Arctic sea ice was less this November than in any previous November. Some parts of Hudson Bay, whose western stretches were once home to 1,200 polar bears, were still ice-free at the end of November.

Some polar bears that have become “climate refugees” now descend on the Alaskan Arctic settlement of Kaktovik to scavenge the skeletons of whales dumped there by whale hunters. The gathering has helped bring tourists to Kaktovik to get a firsthand glimpse of the bears.

To scientists, these thin and hungry bears are a sign of a species in danger. To climate change deniers, they are evidence that the bears are adapting just fine. Concrete numbers are indeed elusive, given the paucity of information about a species in so remote a region.

But to scientists watching the bears in Kaktovik, there is no question that the bears are not picking whale bones by choice. They are there because their natural habitat is in decline, a fate that awaits untold numbers of other bears.



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Modi's 'Monumental Mismanagement' Now Backed By Numbers

Mani Shankar Aiyar

"Money for day to day transactions became scarce. In rural Bengal, rupees alone had amounted to two-thirds of the currency. (In Modi's India, the banned notes amounted to over 86% - my note). Money became so dear that prices of all other goods slumped; the scarcity of money was accompanied by deflation. Artisans, weavers and workers were thrown out of work due to the slump in demand. The credit market collapsed...without credit and in the absence of traders, equalizing supply and demand became difficult and had a destabilizing effect on the economy."

- Sashi Sivaramkrishna, In Search of Stability: Economics of Money, History of the Rupee

That was in the 18th century. Ever since the midnight of 8/9 November 2016, the economy has suffered so severe a liquidity crunch that, says the CII, the decline in daily trade is of the order of 50-70%. This is just as it was in 1770 - precisely because "the removal of a large fraction of the coinage" (86% in demonetized notes, up from two-thirds in 1770) led to "money for day to day transactions becoming scarce!"

Owing to the prevailing uncertainty, even those with ready resources in 2016 are not entering the market, as they did not in the 18th century. Sales of high-end automobiles - usually paid for by cheque or other banking instruments - are down between 20% (Hyundai) and 38% (Mahindra). Two-wheelers are hit by 35-40%; tractor purchases have collapsed by 63%; in the labour-intensive textiles and garments sector, four lakh workers have been laid off, and 60,000 in leather. These are figures for the last three weeks of November. This is not in consequence of only demonetization but the deleterious collateral damage that demonetization has inflicted on the economy as a whole.

Leaving aside apologists for the Modi regime, most independent economists are agreed that GDP for the next two and possibly three quarters has taken such a hit that GDP growth will decline by at least one percentage point or more, with Ambit Capital estimating that GDP growth will be more than halved to 3.5% for FY 2017.

Transition costs before the restoration of normalcy is brought about have been

estimated by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy to be in the region of Rs. 1.28 lakh crore, borne by ordinary households, commercial and manufacturing enterprises, banks, government and the RBI. Moreover, deposits of demonetized notes have already crossed Rs. 13 lakh crore of the Rs. 15 lakh crore earlier in circulation. Almost all these deposits are lilywhite, representing the hard-earned income and savings of ordinary folk. Black money held in cash has never exceeded 5-6% of the total stock of illegally held wealth. So it was always ridiculous to imagine that the menace of illegal money could be met by demonetizing so-called High Denomination Notes (HDN). The Government gave their game away when they informed to the Supreme Court that they hoped to garner 4 lakh crores through black money hoarders not depositing HND for fear of exposure. The BJP's evident but unstated intention was to use this bonanza to announce populist schemes through the Union Budget on the eve of the Uttar Pradesh and Punjab elections. In the event, I am given to understand by reliable sources

that internal estimates in the RBI show that the sterilized amount on the last day of December is unlikely to exceed Rs. 50,000 crore. Thus, there will be no bonanza for Modi to compensate the aam admi for the rough time he has been put through.

And times have been rough since Modi went on TV that dreadful night of 8/9 November. Just as the kisan and khet mazdoor were recovering from two successive years of drought, cash-dependent sales, transport, marketing and distribution of agricultural produce, especially of perishable fruits and vegetables, have suffered huge losses along the entire supply chain from the farm to the mandi and the rehriwallah. Non-availability of ready money has resulted in a staggering drop in labour employed in farm and farm-related activities. Plantation labour is not getting paid, not because plantation owners and management do not have the money to pay them, but because owners and management are unable to access their own money.

Similar is the situation in construction and real estate, the second-largest employers after

agriculture, accounting for 34-45 million daily-wage jobs in an economy of jobless growth. Contractors are laying them off in droves because the contractors are denied access to their own money to pay their labour. Wage-earnings in construction have thus been slashed by 80%-90%. One prominent news magazine has a cover story portraying Real Estate as descending from "Boom to Doom".

As for manufacturing, millions - literally millions - of small and medium enterprises have closed down. At least 60,000 microfinance companies are badly hit, repayment collections having dropped by 600 cores and disbursements having collapsed in similar measure. (See the parallel to 1770 when, to quote Sivaramkrishna, "Artisans, weavers and workers were thrown out of work due to the slump in demand.") Urban unemployment has shot up from a little over 7% to well over 9%. As one financial analyst succinctly put it: "cash shortages (have) hampered growth of new work, buying activity and production".

(Contd on page 22)

What Rahul Gandhi Has Won - And Risked - By Playing Hardball

Ashok Malik

While it hardly transacted business, the winter session of parliament marked a transition for the Congress and the opposition. As Sonia Gandhi took a backseat, due to health reasons or out of a desire to give her son more room, Rahul Gandhi became the Congress' prime mover and interface with other opposition parties. He attended parliament regularly, participated in protests organised jointly with other opposition parties and discussed tactics with fellow MPs in the opposition benches. As one regional party member told this writer, "This session, we have seen Rahul take the calls on behalf of his party, and not his mother. I find the Congress is relieved and less confused."

For a considerable period, the Congress had been in a dilemma as to who would have the final word on strategy and on the approach to a particular political situation: Sonia or Rahul. It was not as if the mother and son were or are adversaries, but they have

different groups of advisors, different lieutenants, different messengers, and different methods.

Rahul Gandhi, for instance, has been advocating a non-cooperation line since May 2014. To cite an example, he was upset when the party finally gave in to the government's legislative programme and helped pass the Insurance Bill in 2015. He even rebuked a senior party functionary and former minister who had agreed to the "compromise" in the Rajya Sabha. It is expected that this hardball manner will now be maintained.

The opposition is divided into parties that accept the supremacy of the Congress and those who see it as a rival. This has been reflected in the reaction to Rahul Gandhi's ascendancy, especially after his press conference with other opposition MPs earlier this week, when he spoke for the collective group and cast himself as the leader of an opposition alliance. Parties such as the CPI(M) have no problem with Rahul Gandhi's

leadership. The Trinamool Congress, which doesn't want the Congress-CPI(M) alliance in Bengal to be revived, is playing along. The Samajwadi Party is flirting with the Congress in Uttar Pradesh - though there is doubt whether a pre-election partnership will actually fructify. As a result, Mayawati and the BSP are wary of Rahul Gandhi and the Congress. So is the Aam Aadmi Party. Nitish Kumar is in alliance with the Congress but the Bihar Chief Minister sees himself as a contender for the Prime Ministry in 2019 - should the Narendra Modi juggernaut stall - and would not want to be seen as playing second fiddle to Rahul Gandhi. While this is the broad state of play, at the press conference, Rahul Gandhi made an attack on the Prime Minister by saying he had concrete evidence of Modi's personal corruption. He has reiterated this since, stressing Modi is "terrified" of him and that the evidence he (Rahul) has is "bulletproof". Since he was speaking on

behalf of a set of opposition parties, the Trinamool Congress representative sitting next to him and smiling all the time, one must presume he made the charge on behalf of all of them. After all, and despite this writer's initial hunch, the opposition parties present in the room that day have not dissociated themselves from Rahul Gandhi's claim of personal corruption by Modi.

Rahul Gandhi says he wanted to present the evidence of Modi's culpability in parliament. There could be several reasons for this. It is, of course, the temple of democracy, the nation's supreme political debating chamber. It would be the appropriate forum for a serious allegation against the Prime Minister to be made and proved. Speaking in parliament also gives an MP certain privileges and immunity, which he or she would lose if a potentially defamatory accusation were to be made outside the House. It is anybody's guess as to which

of these reasons was motivating Rahul Gandhi. It happens, the parliament session is over. There will be pressure on Rahul Gandhi, from within the Congress and from other opposition parties that were represented at the press conference, to reveal and lay before the public proof of personal corruption that would "explode his (Modi's) balloon". It is incumbent upon the Congress Vice-President to do this at the earliest. Many in the Congress system are nonplussed as to why Rahul Gandhi raised the stakes so much. They are hoping he is right at least this time. It is also recognized that the charge will not simply be forgotten, as so many one-liners and allegations are in politics. Hit-and-run politics and making accusations that are never followed up or validated is what maverick and irresponsible parties do, and what the Aam Aadmi Party has made into an art form. National parties like the Congress and the BJP, with strong internal institutional structures and a broader public appeal, will always be judged by higher standards.

Trump Should Read India's Playbook On Taunting China: Foreign Media

**Jeff M. Smith,
The Washington Post**

Donald Trump's decision to break protocol and become the first president-elect in decades to speak by phone with a Taiwanese president was either a colossal blunder or a shrewd strategic coup, depending on which Beltway insider you ask. At the least, Trump's divisive exchange with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen has sparked a substantive debate about the nature of U.S.-China-Taiwan relations and the sanctity of Beijing's version of the "One-China" policy, which codifies China's inalienable sovereignty over Taiwan and Tibet.

Yet, as Washington braces for potential blowback from Beijing, both critics and supporters of the Trump-Tsai exchange have overlooked one key fact. In an era when global powers are shunning both Taiwanese and Tibetan leaders (like the Dalai Lama) under the weight of Chinese pressure, one country has been openly challenging Beijing's One-China policy for more than six years: India.

Like many of China's neighbors, in the late 2000s India was still adjusting to the

more assertive and nationalistic brand of Chinese foreign policy that emerged in 2008, when Beijing's leaders interpreted the global financial crisis as symbolic of a great power shift from a declining West to an ascendant China. Bilateral ties were repeatedly tested by friction over Chinese incursions into India across their disputed border, Beijing's efforts to block U.N. sanctions on Pakistan-based terrorists, and visits by the Indian prime minister and the Dalai Lama to the state of Arunachal Pradesh, most of which is claimed by China as "South Tibet," among others.

One Chinese provocation cut deeper than the rest. In 2010, Beijing denied a visa to Lt. Gen. B.S. Jaswal on account of his posting as the head of India's military command in Kashmir, the long-disputed territory claimed by China's "all-weather friend" Pakistan. China had been employing consular chicanery with India for years - stapling separate, unique visas to Indian residents of Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh as an informal challenge to Indian sovereignty there - but the denial of a visa to Jaswal struck a nerve.

New Delhi's reaction was uncharacteristically swift and punitive, suspending all forms of bilateral military ties and joint exercises. When Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao visited New Delhi in December 2010, for the first time India refused to acknowledge the One-China policy in a joint statement with China. Beijing, New Delhi signaled, would have to recognize Indian sovereignty over Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh if it wanted India's consent on the One-China policy. "The ball is in their court. There is no doubt about that," explained Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao at the time.

Joint statements in the years to follow continued to omit the One-China policy, a position adopted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he assumed office in 2014. "For India to agree on a one-China policy, China should reaffirm a one-India policy," External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj declared before Chinese President Xi Jinping's first trip to New Delhi in September 2014. "When they raised the issue of Tibet and Taiwan with us, we shared their sensitivities. ... They should understand and

appreciate our sensitivities regarding Arunachal Pradesh." China relented on the visa question two years after Wen's visit, and military ties were restored shortly thereafter. More important, six years after India's change of heart on One-China policy, it has suffered no discernable political or economic backlash that can be tied to the policy shift.

To be sure, India's denial of the One-China policy is less emotionally and politically contentious for China than any shift in American posture toward Taiwan. In the context of China-India relations, the One-China policy mostly relates to Tibet and, to a lesser extent, their long-standing border dispute, in which more than 30,000 square miles of Indian territory is still claimed by Beijing.

In 1947, the Republic of India inherited from the British Raj an unsettled border with China and a series of special trading privileges with Tibet, including the right to station escort troops at specified trading posts. Ever since China "peacefully liberated" Tibet in 1950, it has been critical of Indian intentions on the plateau and sensitive to Indian interference there. That

anxiety was amplified after the Dalai Lama fled a Chinese crackdown in 1959 and sought refuge in India, later establishing a Tibetan government in exile in Dharamsala. After China and India fought a monthlong war across their disputed border in 1962, Chinese leaders argued that the "center of the Sino-Indian conflict" was not the border dispute but a "conflict of interests in Tibet."

It's notable, then, that beyond its broad refusal to endorse the One-China policy, New Delhi has given no indication that it plans to walk back its repeated reaffirmations of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet (much less Taiwan). On the other hand, Prime Minister Modi has adopted several initiatives short of that threshold to signal a more defiant posture on Tibet and the border dispute. Early in his tenure, for instance, Modi fast-tracked military and civilian infrastructure upgrades along the disputed Sino-Indian border, where Beijing has enjoyed a large and widening advantage.

More recently, New Delhi granted the Dalai Lama permission to visit Arunachal Pradesh in early 2017, a move that has drawn Chinese ire in the

Wildlife fatalities rising due to poorly planned infrastructure

Earlier this month, four elephants were killed after they were hit by a speeding train in Assam. The mishap came close on the heels of a similar incident at Walayar, Kerala, where a male wild elephant was hit by a train on November 27. In 2016, 16 elephants have died due to train-hits. The highest number in recent times was in 2010, with 20 elephant deaths.

In India, 150 elephants have been killed by trains between 1987 and 2010. Most of the deaths were reported from Assam (36%) followed by West Bengal (26%), Uttarakhand (14%), Jharkhand (10%), Tamil Nadu (6%) and less than 5% each in Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and Odisha. The report by Elephant Task Force mentioned that 'a general lack of coordination between the railways and the forest department is the reason for lack of any sustained mitigation measure'.

Six years after the publication of the report, which gave 10 recommendations, the situation has not changed much: Trains move at a fast

pace in most of these elephant habitats. A train moving at a fast speed, hitting a herd of elephants and the resulting derailment is not only disastrous for wildlife but equally dangerous for passengers. With incidents of wildlife fatalities due to poorly planned infrastructure development increasing every day, it is time that concrete mitigation measures are put in place. One of the successful examples from the recent past is that of the railway track passing through the Rajaji National Park. Between 1987 and 2002, the railway track saw 20 elephant deaths. Soon after, the Uttarakhand forest department, the Indian Railways and the Wildlife Trust of India worked together to put in place a strategic intervention that has resulted in a near-zero elephant deaths due to train-hits in the park. While long-term measures and strategic interventions are necessary to ensure that such deaths are mitigated at the earliest, strategic short term measures can be put in place immediately. Train speed should be capped at 40km per hour in



the vulnerable stretches and night-time traffic needs to be reduced as much as possible across lines that cut through elephant habitats and movement corridors. This should be done in addition to joint patrolling by the staff of forest department and railways along critical sections of tracks to observe elephant

and other wildlife movement. Focussed awareness programme of railway staff, particularly locomotive drivers need to be undertaken as well. Over the longer term, a protocol and an advanced technology will have to be developed and implemented to notify locomotive drivers and railway signal

operators about elephant crossings. Options for realignment of railway tracks passing through critical wildlife habitats and corridors and construction of elevated railway tracks with elephant passages underneath should also be considered as permanent solutions.

Bad economics can bite

Milton Friedman, the great Chicago economist, argued that the Great Depression happened because of shortage of money. No one had more faith in free markets than Milton, but even he did not believe that a market economy can function when there is an acute shortage of money. Many years later, a group of economists including Ben Bernanke spelt out why a shortage of means of payment can have disastrous effects: put very simply the fact that Ram does not have the money to pay Rahim, means Rahim now does not have the wherewithal to pay Ruth, who in turn cannot pay her banker, and so on till it eventually rebounds on Ram. In other words, Ram now has even less money to pay Rahim. There is a cascading effect on transactions, with the result that the overall GDP shrinks by much more than the original shortfall in liquidity.

What Milton Friedman meant by money included checks and other forms of money that only live on the books for banks. But recall that USA even in 1929 was more financially integrated than India is now, where there is still a huge part of the population that transacts only in cash. If, for example, the middlemen who buy the crops start cutting back because they don't have enough cash in hand, farmers will have less cash as well, forcing them to stop hiring labour and so on, and entire village economies could go into a tailspin.

Of course, all of this depends on how innovative everyone is with finding ways to pay. Everyone has heard of the local pan seller who has Paytm now and the cycle rickshaw puller who is getting one, and Paytm seems to be doing very well indeed. There are also stories of increased informal lending. On the other hand, in a small survey of retailers and wholesalers we carried out a couple of weeks ago in a large Indian city, most said that their sales were down, often 50% or more. We have no way to know how representative that is, but if it is we are talking about negative effects that are much bigger than the 0.5% that is being talked about.

But of course this is meant to be short run pain for long-term gain. So what about the potential gains? There was initially a lot

of talk about fake currency and terrorists, but that seems to have subsided, mostly because there seems to be much less counterfeiting than the original claims. I am still willing to believe that the ISI could be minting rupees to fund its operatives, but find it hard to imagine that terrorism would stop if we could have a better control on the currency, given that these operations cost peanuts compared to Pakistan's defence spending. If it comes to that, the ISI can just buy the rupees on the world market.

Another argument is that it will reduce corruption. I am willing to believe that the corrupt have been stockpiling rupees, and even that some of that ill-gotten wealth will be sacrificed to avoid unpleasant encounters with the law. But presumably what the government really cares about is not the stock of corrupt moneys from the past but the incentive to take fresh bribes. And given that there will now be 2000 rupee notes that can be used to make the necessary

payments, I simply don't see why anything should change, unless we keep doing these surprise demonetisations every few months. But then we are talking about long-term pain.

The third argument is that it will promote financial inclusion. I am sure this is true, though not all the money that has now flowed into the jan dhan accounts will stick—a lot of them will eventually go back to their real owners, who just needed a place to park it. On the other hand it is clear that more people will use Paytm and its competitors. The evidence on MPESA, Kenya's popular answer to Paytm, reported in a recent paper in the journal Science by Billy Jack from Georgetown University and Tavneet Suri from MIT, suggests that it had very substantial welfare effects—pulling 2% of the population out of poverty. My problem with this argument is that there are obviously less costly ways to get to this.

The last argument is that not all the cash will come back (since their owners won't own up



to having it) and therefore the government is in a position to print more bills without creating inflation. This, it is argued, can be a large windfall for the government.

Unfortunately, this argument forgets that a lot of the cash that will not come back was not in circulation to start with—it was more a way for the crooked to hold on to their wealth. Moreover, the recent adoption of other payment technologies means that the demand for cash has fallen. In other words, the transaction demand for cash was always less than the total amount outstanding and it has fallen further. Going back to the pre-November 8 levels of cash would almost surely create inflation.

And yet the reform, at least

at the beginning, was popular. The same mini-survey that I mentioned asked people what they thought of it and the modal answer was that it hurts but it is good for the country. The positive sentiment reflected in part admiration for the chutzpah that the PM had so obviously displayed and perhaps more importantly a delight in the fact that the bad guys who usually get away with everything, were finally getting one in the neck.

For that reason, even if the whole thing is a mistake in pure economic terms, it could be worth it for the PM in terms of political dividends. On the other hand, it may not. Schadenfreude is a powerful sentiment, but bad economics often has a way to bite back.

On social media, facts are less than sacred

The great truth about social media, it used to be said, was that it provided an alternative to mainstream media. Traditional media were almost pathologically biased against the BJP, or so went conventional rightwing lore, and, therefore, social media would right a historical wrong and open up a democratic space with ordinary citizens driving the narrative.

There is much that is wrong with old media. Paid news, where advertisers purchase news space, for instance. But the alternative narrative seldom, if ever, dwells on this. Instead, a vast spin factory that straddles geography, language, gender and, now, even ideology has come together to obscure the meaning of 'truth'.

Just this past one week, a hacker called Legion accessed the social media accounts of two senior journalists. The story now making the rounds is that one of them had emailed an off-record conversation with Apollo management about the possible cause of J. Jayalalithaa's death: Wrongly prescribed diabetes medicine. If true, it has larger implications, as details of the

ailment that led to the Tamil Nadu chief minister's death have never been revealed. Rumour, fact or innuendo? The journalist, news organisation and hospital aren't talking, so it's hard to tell.

The same week, faking news on demonetisation swung wildly from GPS-enabled Rs 2,000 notes to reports of bank lockers allowed to be opened only in the presence of income tax officers with thousands of retired officers being roped in. It doesn't help that the government's own demonetisation narrative keeps shifting from black money, counterfeit notes and terrorism to cashless society, or, well, not exactly cashless but nearly cashless.

In a post-truth world, facts are less-than-sacred. The political narrative is decidedly emotional. In Goa, voice choking with emotion, Modi speaks of how he 'left my home and everything for the country'. In Delhi, Rahul Gandhi promises an 'earthquake' when he reveals the 'truth' about Modi's personal corruption in Parliament.

The abdication of truth to

emotion has, shamefully, crossed into some television news channels where 'national interest' often trumps the first journalistic rule of presenting facts. Taking its cues from social media, many old media channels now assume that it is against the national interest to question human rights in Kashmir, report on demonetisation's pain, allow a Pakistani studio guest to speak without interjection, question a court order on the mandatory singing of the national anthem, probe any army action. Arnab Goswami's new TV venture is reportedly, and unsurprisingly, to be called Republic.

To this mix of social media, traditional media, emotion and politics, add a fifth dimension -- monitoring. Algorithms on Facebook, Google and Twitter track consumer preferences. A great deal has already been written about media 'bubbles' and how we receive and forward views that reinforce the way we think, moving further away from an alternative point of view.

"Social media enable members of such groups to strengthen each other's beliefs, by shutting out contradictory information, and to take collective action," notes The Economist in a September article, Yes I'd Lie to You.

The decline of media credibility -- in large parts justified -- and the rise of social media comes at a time when technology in India is booming with 684 million unique mobile users, 370 million of whom access the internet. Each one is a potential news outlet, each one with the power to disseminate facts, spin or just rant. In a post-truth world, we don't even need words; jokes, cartoons and memes will all do nicely.

As old media struggles to keep up and adopt many of social media's tactics, especially its appeal to emotion, we find that both can spin, both can have agendas. Only traditional media remains (somewhat) accountable. All of us with smartphones are now publishers of our own stories on social media, consuming, sharing, forwarding often to groups that think and feel like us. The truth must be out there, somewhere.

India Overtakes Britain As The World's Sixth Largest Economy



(Agencies) Score one for the post-colonial underdog. India's economy has reportedly overtaken the United Kingdom's for the first time in over 100 years, now standing as the world's sixth largest economy by GDP after the United States, China, Japan, Germany, and France.

The milestone is a symbol of India's rapid economic growth and, conversely, the U.K.'s post-Brexit slump. Economically, it's been a banner year for India. In February, it surpassed China as

the world's fastest growing economy. And in October, the International Monetary Fund predicted India would retain that title for the foreseeable future; its GDP is projected to increase by 7.6 percent through 2017.

"India may have a large population base but this is a big leap," Kiren Rijiju, India's minister of state for home affairs, said of the news earlier this week. India's former colonial ruler, the United Kingdom, is projected to grow by only 1.8 percent in 2016 and 1.1 percent in 2017. Since it voted to leave the European Union in June, which could entail leaving the EU's lucrative common market, Britain's economy and currency has struggled.

India's economy benefited

from a global commodities price slump through large trade gains and lower-than-expected inflation, according to the IMF. And since elected in 2014, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has driven sweeping market reforms to spur economic growth. But with growth spurts come growing pains. Many of the reforms, touching everything from creating unified national taxes to deregulating the agricultural industry's fertilizer pricing, have been incredibly complicated, as a report from the Center for Strategic and International Studies noted. And some controversial reforms have not gone smoothly. Take the most recent currency reform, for example. In an effort to root

out corruption and tax dodging, Modi announced in November that high denomination currency rupee notes (which comprise 86 percent of India's currency in circulation) would be taken out of circulation immediately. It was a drastic measure for a drastic problem in the world's second most populous country; only 2 to 3 percent of Indians pay income tax because so many can hide their earnings with unaccounted-for cash, so-called 'black money.' Modi's move plummeted business transactions, interrupted salary payments, and caused infamously long waiting lines at banks nationwide as people went to withdraw cash. One

RBI Announces That It Will Now Issue New 50 Notes, But Old Ones Will Be Valid



(Agencies) The Reserve Bank today announced that it will issue new currency notes of ₹50 with numerals in ascending size in the number panels and without intaglio printing. The new notes will have letters 'R' and 'L' on them. However, the RBI has also announced that the all the banknotes in the denomination of ₹50 issued by the bank in the past will continue to be legal tender. "The Reserve Bank of

India will shortly issue ₹50 denomination banknotes in the Mahatma Gandhi Series-2005, with inset letter 'R' in both the number panels, bearing signature of Dr. Urjit R. Patel, Governor, Reserve Bank of India, and the year of printing '2016' printed on the reverse of the banknote," said the press note. Another press note said that the notes will have inset letter 'L' in both the number panels. The Reserve Bank today announced

that it will issue new currency notes of ₹50 with numerals in ascending size in the number panels and without intaglio printing. The new notes will have letters 'R' and 'L' on them. However, the RBI has also announced that the all the banknotes in the denomination of ₹50 issued by the bank in the past will continue to be legal tender. "The Reserve Bank of India will shortly issue ₹50 denomination banknotes in the Mahatma Gandhi Series-2005, with inset letter 'R' in both the number panels, bearing signature of Dr. Urjit R. Patel, Governor, Reserve Bank of India, and the year of printing '2016' printed on the reverse of the banknote," said the press note. Another press note said that the notes will have inset letter 'L' in both the number panels.

Raghuram Rajan Takes On Critics, Again, And Shows Chart By Chart Why They're Wrong



(Agencies) Outgoing Reserve Bank of India Governor Raghuram Rajan took on critics again Tuesday and defended the key policies undertaken by the central bank during his tenure, going into extraordinary detail explaining the context of many of the bank's decisions.

Specifically, he addressed concerns about interest rates, which many of his critics say have been too high, hurting credit growth and spending, and the RBI-mandated clean-up of bad loans and balance sheets at banks, which some critics allege has compounded the credit growth slowdown.

"The RBI, of course, stands by its policies," Rajan said addressing the 10th Statistics Day conference at the RBI headquarters. "Nevertheless, this debate is very important because it could shape policy

directions in India over the medium term."

Rajan warned against the dangers of high inflation that mostly affect the weaker sections of society, noting that weaknesses from rising prices usually add up and eventually lead to a crisis. He also expressed worry that there was little anxiety in the public commentary when inflation was moderately high. He also countered criticism that India's success at curbing inflation during his tenure was just "good luck" and the result of the global low energy prices, noting that the process of disinflation, in fact, started in late 2013, long before oil prices collapsed. He also pointed out that "a significant part of the fall in oil prices globally has not been passed on" by the Indian government, which has hiked excise on petrol and diesel.



IF YOU DON'T PICK IT UP THEY WILL.



India Has One Of The World's Worst Gender Gaps in Wages

Women are more educated than ever but are still rare in high-paying jobs.



(Agencies) Women are paid 33% less than men in hourly wages in India, one of the largest such gender gaps in the world, new data from the International Labour Organisation shows.

Among major economies, only South Korea does slightly worse, data from ILO's Global Wage Report 2016 released last week shows. Conventional wisdom has been that women have different educational attainment levels from men and are more likely to have career breaks that lead to lower levels

of accumulated work experience, the ILO says. But as education gaps have narrowed, particularly in developed countries, it has become clear that this is not a full explanation. Women tend to get segregated into occupations associated with "feminine" attributes like caregiving, and consequently these become undervalued professions, the report says.

In India as well, the gap in educational attainments of men and women has narrowed sharply; the growth in women graduates was twice that of male graduates in the last decade, Census data shows.

Women make up 63% of the lowest earning Indians but just 15% of the highest paid ones. This despite the fact that the 2011 Census showed that among

recent graduates in their early 20s, there are now more female doctors and teachers than male, and there are now more female post-graduates in non-technical fields than men. In the Russian Federation, for comparison, women make up over 40% of the highest paid workers.

Wage discrimination is particularly strong in the bottom end of the wage distribution where women are concentrated, but there has been some narrowing of the wage gap here on account of the MGNREGS [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme] and better awareness of the minimum wage, says Xavier Estupinan, wages specialist at the ILO in Delhi. At the higher end the wage gap is lower but there are much fewer women: "Given the higher

probability of dropping out of the labour market (when having children), employers usually discriminate against women because they expect future interruptions; and this is the biggest barrier for even accessing labour market," Estupinan says. Women should be encouraged to access these jobs, however, where education pays higher returns, he adds.

Wage inequality in India goes beyond the gender dimension alone. The lowest-paid half of the country receives 17.1% of all wages paid out, while the top 10% get 42.7% of all wages. Only South Africa is more unequal.

However, things are not getting worse; average wages grew by 60% in India over the last decade (though they more than doubled in China), and wage inequality decreased.

The Indian Army Has Been Deployed To Help With Currency Printing



(Insider Bureau) In a following demonetisation, the measure of the urgency in Indian Army has been deployed meeting the currency shortage to help the Reserve Bank of India

(RBI) print new notes. The sudden surge in manpower requirement in printing and allied operations has forced the government to call in the military-the nation's instrument of "last resort" in all emergency situations. Generally the military is deployed when other arms and agencies of the government are incapable of an adequate response. Multiple officials familiar with the development told HuffPost India that at least 400 soldiers including officers

have been deployed in two security printing presses to help print new currency. The two security presses where the military is helping print notes are in Salboni in West Bengal and Dewas in Madhya Pradesh. The Dewas Security Press is printing new Rs500 currency notes whereas new Rs2,000 and Rs100 notes are being printed in Salboni. Earlier today, finance minister Arun Jaitley assured that RBI have enough cash to last beyond Dec 30. In a further bid to discourage cash transactions, he said the government will offer tax incentives to small businesses who engage in cashless transactions. "There are about 150-200 soldiers and officers in each of these presses," a top official said. The troops were called in about a week ago. "They were deployed shortly after that," the officer said. All the persons who spoke to

HuffPost India asked not to be named due to the sensitivity of the matter. The Ministry of Defence did not comment. The troops deployed are from Indian Army's Eastern and Central command. Another about 100 soldiers of the Indian Air Force are on stand-by. The military is carrying out "administrative duties," of the presses, "protecting the presses" and doing other sundry duties including movement of currency, a top official said. "The presses are working round the clock," he added. Earlier, the government had deployed heavy transport aircraft-C-17 Globemasters and C-130J Hercules of the Indian Air Force--to ferry currency from the printing presses across the country. The IAF continues to make sorties carrying new currency. The Modi government had demonetized Rs 500 and Rs1,000 notes on November 8th and had introduced new Rs2,000 and Rs500 notes.

Gujarat Snack Vendor Has Property Worth 650 Crores, Says Income Tax Department

The controversial tea and snacks vendor had turned into a financier for over a decade.



(Insider Bureau) SURAT -- Income Tax officials searching wealth of Surat-based tea and snacks vendor-turned-financier Kishore Bhajiwala have in all unearthed property worth ₹650 crore. A senior Income Tax official, close to the development, said: "So far information on property in name of Kishore Bhajiwala, his family members and associates worth over ₹650 crore has been unearthed. Over 50 kg of silver, ₹1.39 crore worth of diamonds, over ₹6.5 crore in cash and several kilos of gold have been found stored in

multiple lockers." The department began investigations into his bank accounts, lockers and other property last week, after Bhajiwala deposited over a crore of rupees in his account post-demonetisation. Bhajiwala and his family members were found to be having more than 40 bank accounts. The sources said more unaccounted money held by him and his family members could be expected to be unearthed in the coming days. The controversial tea and snacks vendor, who ran a stall

in Udhna in the suburbs of Surat city in south Gujarat for over three decades, had turned into a financier for over a decade. Meanwhile, several photographs of the vendor with senior Bharatiya Janata Party leaders, including Union Minister Purushottam Rupala, former Chief Minister Anandiben Patel, BJP national Vice President and former in-charge of Gujarat affairs Om Mathur, Vishwa Hindu Parishad President Pravin Togadia and even Gujarat Governor O.P. Kohli surfaced on social media. In several of these pictures, Bhajiwala and his son Jitendra were seen wearing BJP scarves. However, Rupala has issued a statement denying any association with him.



Hong Kong to withdraw visa-free entry for Indians from January

(Insider Bureau) Indian immigration department announced on its website. "Indian nationals must apply for and successfully complete pre-arrival registration online before they can visit or transit the HKSAR visa-free (if seeking to enter the HKSAR during transit). Pre-arrival registration is not required for Indian nationals in direct transit by air and not leaving the airport transit area," the department said. The pre-arrival registration is valid for six months, during which the applicant can visit Hong Kong multiple times. Indian nationals

must furnish an "approval slip" before boarding a plane or ship to the city. The new rules will affect hundreds of thousands of Indians who visit the former British colony every year for tourism and trade. According to the latest figures, 561,625 Indian tourists visited Hong Kong last year, a rise of 22% compared to 2013. In the first 11 months of this year alone, 474,615 Indians visited the city. Immigration department assistant director Ma Chi-ming told the South China Morning Post newspaper that India was chosen as a "testing point" because it is

one of the major sources of asylum-seekers. "We do not rule out extending the scheme to other countries in the future," he said. This is the first time Hong Kong has implemented such a restriction for a country. Among the total of 10,335 pending refugee applications in the city, 80% are from India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Indonesia. The only Indians exempted from pre-arrival registration are holders of diplomatic or official passports or a Hong Kong Travel Pass, and Indian nationals who have



successfully enrolled for the e-Channel service for frequent visitors.

Mallya's private Airbus jet must be sold as scrap: Mumbai airport tells



(Insider Bureau) Former liquor baron Vijay Mallya's Airbus A319, which remains parked at the city airport, "has turned into nothing better than scrap" and it must hence be "sold off in scrap", the Mumbai International Airport Limited (MIAL) told the Bombay high court on Tuesday. The Mumbai airport operator urged the high court not to grant any additional time to the service tax department to look for a new buyer for the aircraft, and said that instead, CJ Leasings, the company that had leased the plane to Mallya, should be asked if it was willing to buy it back as scrap. The court was hearing a plea filed by the department seeking to recall the e-auction of the aircraft, claiming that the proceeds of the auction were low and the highest bid was only for 81.8% of the reserve price.

"Besides," MIAL said, "the Airbus was seized by the department in December 2013. Three attempts by the department to sell it off have failed. It is no longer in a condition to fly. Its engines need to be serviced immediately and to get it into working condition much money will need to be spent..." The department, however, argued that while it was willing to carry out a revaluation, as per its estimates, the aircraft should be valued around \$12 million. The bench has now directed the department to get "a realistic revaluation of the aircraft done by credible experts, and submit

Not our wish but it happened: Chandrababu Naidu does a U-turn on demonetisation



(Insider Bureau) BJP ally and Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu, who had initially supported demonetisation, on Tuesday said the decision was not as per "our wish" and that a "lot of problems" still remain without any solution in sight.

Chandrababu, who significantly heads a 13-member committee appointed by the central government to

look into demonetisation issues, warned that unless remedial measures are taken, people's woes would continue in the long-term. "Demonetisation was not our wish but it happened. More than 40 days after demonetisation, there are still a lot of problems but yet there appears to be no solution," he said addressing a workshop of MPs, MLCs, MLAs and other leaders of his Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Vijaywada. "It still remains a sensitive and complicated problem," said Chandrababu, "I am spending two hours daily to ease the problems caused by demonetisation. I am breaking my head daily but we are unable to find a solution to this problem," the CM said. "We could resolve the 'August crisis'

(an internal party coup dating back to 1984) in 30 days but this (demonetisation) still persists," he said. He said banks were "not prepared" for a transition to digital economy. "They are unable to even register banking correspondents," he added. Chandrababu had initially been a strong proponent of ban on high denomination currency notes of Rs 500 and Rs 1000. In fact, he had written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on October 12 reiterating his demand. On November 9, a day after the Prime Minister came out with the demonetisation announcement, the TDP had even claimed credit saying it was a "victory for Chandrababu" over his fight on corruption.

Indian origin Portuguese PM Antonio Costa to visit India in January

(Insider Bureau) Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa, who traces his roots to Goa, will come on a week-long visit to India next month and will attend the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas as the chief guest, it was announced on Tuesday.

"Prime Minister of Portugal Antonio Costa will be visiting India on a state visit from January 6 to 12, 2017, on an invitation extended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi," the External Affairs Ministry said in a statement.

"The two leaders will hold official talks on January 7 in New Delhi. During the visit PM Costa is also expected to call on the President and the Vice President."

Costa, born in 1961 in Lisbon, is the son of writer Orlando da Costa, who was of Goan, Portuguese, and French descent. His mother was Maria Antonia Palla, a Portuguese journalist.

Costa took charge as Prime Minister in November last year creating media headlines in India.

"Several MoUs (memorandums of understanding) are expected to be signed during the visit that would set the agenda for India-Portugal relations



going forward," the ministry statement said, adding that Costa is likely to be accompanied by several Ministers.

"Prime Minister Costa will attend the Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas, the foremost conclave of the Indian diaspora, as the chief guest in Bengaluru on January 8-9, 2017, and would also participate in few business events."

Costa, according to the statement,

will also attend the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit on 10 January 2017 at Gandhinagar.

"In the last leg of his visit to India, PM Costa will be in Goa on January 11-12, 2017," the statement said. "In Goa, he would be meeting the Governor and Chief Minister. PM Costa who traces his roots to Goa, will also spend some time at his ancestral place."

India, Kyrgyzstan ink six pacts, finalise investment treaty



(News Agencies) India and Kyrgyzstan finalised broad contours of a bilateral investment treaty and inked six other pacts covering a range of areas besides resolving to work closely to combat challenge of terrorism, extremism and radicalism.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev held comprehensive talks and agreed to step up engagement in key areas of defence, security and trade with specific focus on mining, IT, agriculture and energy.

“We discussed how we could work together to secure our youth and society against common challenges of terrorism, extremism, and radicalism. We agreed on the need to coordinate and work closely in addressing and overcoming these challenges for our common benefit,” Modi said in a media statement.

The Central Asian nation bordering China is strategically important for India and both countries have been steadily ramping up defence collaboration.

Modi had visited Kyrgyzstan in July last year during which a pact for boosting defence cooperation was inked.

A joint statement issued after the talks said the two leaders

noted the challenges posed by terrorism and extremism globally as well as in the Asian continent, and emphasised the importance of ensuring a stable and secure environment for peaceful economic development.

“In this context, they also called for the adoption by the United Nations of the draft Comprehensive Convention on Combating International Terrorism,” it said.

Aiming to broaden economic engagement, the two countries initialled a bilateral investment treaty which will provide protection to investors in each other’s country apart from creating enabling environment

for trade to grow.

The six MoUs will provide for deeper cooperation in areas of agriculture, tourism, culture, broadcasting and youth affairs.

In his comments, Atambayev said he was not happy over the current volume of bilateral trade as there was huge untapped potential for its expansion and called for removing bottlenecks in transportation of goods between the two countries through Iran.

Denouncing terrorism and extremism, he said both countries were bound by historical links and fundamental values such as freedom,

democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. He also mentioned about popularity of Bollywood legend Raj Kapoor in his country.

To ramp up economic engagement, both sides, during the talks, directed the ministries concerned to develop a comprehensive road-map for a five-year timeframe.

The two leaders also reviewed the “cooperative engagement” in defence with Modi calling the Kyrgyz-India Mountain Bio-Medical Research Center as an excellent example of successful collaboration.

Both the countries are also involved in Mountain Bio-Medical Research and Medi called it an

Centre to extend ban on mining in Aravallis across NCR

(News Agencies) The Centre on Tuesday asked Delhi and its neighbouring states to ban mining and construction of farmhouses across the Aravalli range in the national capital region (NCR), declare rivers and tributaries flowing through it as national conservation zones, and increase the green cover by six times.

At a meeting of the NCR Planning Board, the central government extended the 1992 notification of the environment ministry’s ban on mining and other non-forest activities to 13 districts of Haryana, seven of Uttar Pradesh, and two of Rajasthan. Till now, it was applicable only to certain pockets of Gurgaon and Alwar district in Rajasthan.

“The notification issued by the ministry of environment & forests in 1992 clearly specifies that Gurgaon district in Haryana and Alwar district in Rajasthan should regulate certain processes and operations in specified areas of the Aravalli range.

This notification will now guide identification and delineation of the Aravalli in the entire national capital region,” a statement issued by the board read. However, environmentalist Amina Shervani questioned the feasibility of the move when the Gair Mumkin Pahar in Gurgaon — an area figuring in the 1992 notification — was yet to be included in the Aravallis because the state government was still conducting a survey. “Now the government will have to conduct the study again because 13 additional districts have been included through the board’s decision,”

she added. On paper, the development should put an end to mining and developmental activities on the Aravalli hills extending across the four states unless prior approval is acquired from the

environment ministry. However, this can happen only after the state governments notify forested areas under their jurisdictions as national conservation zones (NCZs). For that, they would have



to conduct ground-truthing surveys, the statement said. NCZs are defined as areas where construction beyond a limit of 0.5% is not permitted, in accordance with the National Capital Regional Plan-2021.



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Airlines to pay Rs 50,000 for emptying toilet midair

(News Agencies) New Delhi : The National Green Tribunal (NGT) passed a slew of directions on Tuesday to deter airlines from emptying their toilet tanks midair, slapping a fine of Rs 50,000 on any airline found to be violating the directions.

The tribunal has directed aviation regulator DGCA to issue circulars to all airlines to ensure they do not release waste from waste tanks while landing or mid-flight, with Rs 50,000 to be paid as environmental compensation by the violators. "DGCA shall also issue

directions that aircraft on landing shall be subjected to surprise inspection to see that human waste tanks are not empty," a bench led by NGT head Swatanter Kumar said. If any aircraft is found to be violating such circular or (their) tanks are found empty on landing, they shall be subjected to environment compensation of Rs 50,000 per default," a bench headed by NGT chairperson Swatanter Kumar said.

The directions come after the NGT was listening to a plea of retired army officer Lt Gen Satwant Singh Dahiya

alleging dumping of human excreta by airlines over residential areas near IGI airport. NGT termed the act a violation of 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' and said hefty fines were required to deter airlines. Normally, human waste in the tanks is disposed of by ground handling personnel once the plane lands, but there have been cases of lavatory leaks. The tribunal said that on analysing the samples from the petitioner's house, it could be ascertained that it was excreta but its source could not be known. "We

are surprised to note the stand of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to the extent of coliform and the kind of splashes created on the houses of the petitioner as well as others clearly demonstrate that it was human excreta," the bench said.

It said the amount collected will be deposited with CPCB to be used for environment protection and directed DGCA to submit a quarterly report to the CPCB. DGCA was also asked to set up a helpline for such complaints.

Govt to use income tax info to stop the affluent from claiming LPG subsidies



(News Agencies) The Income Tax department will soon begin sharing personal data--like PAN, residential address and mobile number--of a taxpayer earning over Rs 10 lakh per annum with the oil ministry as part of government's initiative to effectively block subsidised cooking gas to higher income groups. As part of the official deal between the two government departments, the taxman will also share the date of birth, gender, email id, residential phone number and all available addresses of the taxpayer in its database so that the Petroleum and Oil Ministry could zero down on each LPG subscriber who is availing the subsidy beyond the stipulated rules and has not voluntarily given it up.

The I-T department will soon sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Oil Ministry in order to begin this transfer of personal taxpayer data, in a "confidential and safe" manner.

The department, till now, used to share such proprietary data with Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA) like police, CBI, ED and others with a rider that they should not share this information with anyone else and use it for their investigation purposes only.

The latest move has also been approved by the policy-making body of the department, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), in the backdrop of government's decision which had said that tax payers with annual income of more than Rs 10 lakh will not get subsidised cooking gas (LPG)

Those posting obscene content online will be tried under IT Act, not IPC: SC

(News Agencies) Posting and circulating obscene material online would make a person liable to be prosecuted under the Information Technology Act and not the general criminal law that is the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Supreme Court has ruled.

"Once the special provisions having the overriding effect do cover a criminal act and the offender, he gets out of the net of the IPC," said a bench headed by justice Dipak Misra while quashing a criminal case against a senior executive of a popular e-commerce company.

The Delhi Police had registered a case under the IPC as well as the IT Act against the executive after a video clip of two school students in a sexual

act was uploaded for sale on the website in 2004. The IPC section invoked against him pertained to selling of obscene material. On a challenge, the Delhi high court quashed the case registered under IT Act, but ordered continuation of IPC proceedings.

Noting the settled legal position, the top court said the IT Act was a special law and prevailed over the general and prior laws. The provision under the IT law covers the offence described in IPC, the bench said.

"We have already referred to the scheme of the IT Act and how obscenity pertaining to electronic record falls under the scheme of the Act," the bench said, accepting the arguments of senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi that his client should not have

faced trial under IPC after having being discharged under the IT law.

During the hearing the Centre and Delhi government took opposite stands on the controversy. The Centre, represented by attorney general Mukul Rohatgi, told the bench there was a distinction between the offences referable to the internet and the print medium and the IT Act would override the IPC, he submitted. But according to Delhi government, the IPC section was broader and included offences committed in the electronic medium also. "We are inclined to think so as it is a special provision for a specific purpose and the Act has to be given effect to so as to make the protection effective and true to the legislative intent," the bench said, underlining the mandate behind the IT Act.

Railway fare hike on the anvil as Jaitley hints at paying more for services

(News Agencies) The government might hike rail passenger fares and freight rates after the budget to stave off mounting losses, a top official said on Tuesday, as finance minister Arun Jaitley said passengers should pay for services they receive.

Speaking weeks before he presents India's first combined railway and Union budget in February, Jaitley made a strong pitch for the railways to outsource non-core activities such as hospitality.

"Railways got caught in a battle where populism prevailed over performance... the basic principle on which any commercial establishment is to be run is that consumers must pay for the services they receive," Jaitley told reporters.

The railway ministry official said the public-sector behemoth suffered an annual loss of Rs 33,000 crore on account of passenger fare subsidy but any hike announcement might come after the budget as it wants to assess budgetary support.

"We want the government to help

railways bear the cost of the losses but so far, the finance ministry has refused any assistance," said an official who did not wish to be quoted.

The ministry is also likely to move the cabinet soon, seeking approval for setting up a committee to recommend

employer runs many trains at rock-bottom fares and struggles to balance its books.

For example, for every Rs 100 spent on a rail passenger, the railways recovers just Rs 57 while the other Rs 43 is government subsidy. The poor financial health has taken a toll on rail infrastructure and accidents are common.

A number of state elections are scheduled for February-March, including the politically crucial Uttar Pradesh and Punjab.

The finance minister said to remain competitive against highways and airlines, railways would have to strengthen its performance

and internal management system. "The core competence of railways is to drive trains. Hospitality may not be the core competence of the railways and what is not within its core competence, the principle of outsourcing -- accepted the world over -- can be a logical addition," Jaitley said. He also dismissed Opposition criticism of the government's recall of Rs 1,000 and Rs 500 notes and said the Reserve Bank of India had enough currency for circulation.



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India third-largest importer of illegally logged wood: Study

(Agencies) India is the third largest importer of the illegally logged timber in the world, shows a study by the International Union of Forest Research Organisations, a world-wide collaboration of scientists and research institutions working on forestry sciences.

With an annual import value of over Rs 40 billion, the country accounts for close to 10% of the global illegal wood trade.

The study, 'Illegal Logging and Related Timber Trade', released at the ongoing global meeting of United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Cancun, Mexico, says almost one-third of tropical timber traded worldwide might be coming from illegal forest land

conversion. 167 countries are discussing global mechanisms to protect biodiversity of the planet in the meeting.

According to the report, 42% of the total roundwood and sawnwood traded globally, with an annual value of Rs 427 billion, is harvested illegally. The top producers of illegal timber are the countries in South East Asia and Amazon such as Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Brazil followed by the Russian Federation and Papua New Guinea. The largest consumer of illegally harvested wood is China with an import worth Rs 223 billion per year followed by Vietnam that imports illegally harvested wood worth Rs 52 billion.

Illegal logging is one of the key drivers of

deforestation across the world, harming the environment and causing loss to the government exchequers. It also endangers biological diversity and aggravates climate change. According to the study, in some parts of the world organized forest crime is extremely violent and has also been associated with the financing of wars and conflicts.

Due to required timber legality verification in other developed countries, timber trade has shifted to markets such as China and India, where less stringent regulation is in place, says the report. The economic growth in these two countries is also driving the demand for illegally harvested timber.

From 2006 to 2013, the

TOP 10 IMPORTERS OF ILLEGALLY LOGGED WOOD		TOP REGIONS AS EXPORTERS OF ILLEGALLY LOGGED WOOD	
Country	Annual Import (USD)	Region	Annual Import (USD)
China	3295.7	South East Asia	3471.4
Vietnam	767.3	Russian Federation	1265.6
India	596.5	Oceania	685.2
EU	453.9	Congo Basin	521.4
Thailand	101.4	South America	387.1
USA	88.2		
South Korea	22.4		
Japan	15.1		
Malaysia	12.1		
Australia	1.1		



import volume of illegal wood products by China, India and Vietnam increased by more than 50 percent whereas the illegal import volume slashed by one-third for the US and one half for the EU, respectively, which have put in place stringent verification process for legality of timber in the past few

years. "Forestry crime including corporate crimes and illegal logging account for up to \$152 billion every year, more than all official development aid combined", said Erik Solheim, Head of UN Environment.

China imports illegal timber from all tropical forest regions and Russia

while the major source of illegal timber for India is Southeast Asia. "Given their huge domestic markets and China's large capacity to process wood products for exports, it is extremely difficult to substantially reduce illegal logging and related timber trade at the global level without engaging these two countries," says the study.

BJP gets lion's share of donations above Rs 20,000



(Agencies) New Delhi : India's seven national political parties received Rs 102 crore as donations above Rs 20,000 — the limit for receiving anonymous donations+ — from 1,744 donations in 2015-2016, with BJP receiving the maximum of Rs 76 crore from 613 donors.

The donations declared by BJP add up to thrice the aggregate declared by Congress, NCP, CPI, CPM and Trinamool Congress for the same period. The parties are required to identify donations and donors above the Rs 20,000 limit. Congress received the second-highest amount — Rs 20

crore — from 918 donations, according to an analysis of donation details by the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR). The funding details have been submitted by political parties to the Election Commission. In a separate analysis, ADR found political party funding consisted predominantly of cash which constituted 63% of the funds in the 11-year period+ from 2004 to 2015.

However, the relatively smaller amounts received above Rs 20,000 disclosed by political parties indicate that most funding is through unknown sources. The amount of

funding received by political parties below Rs

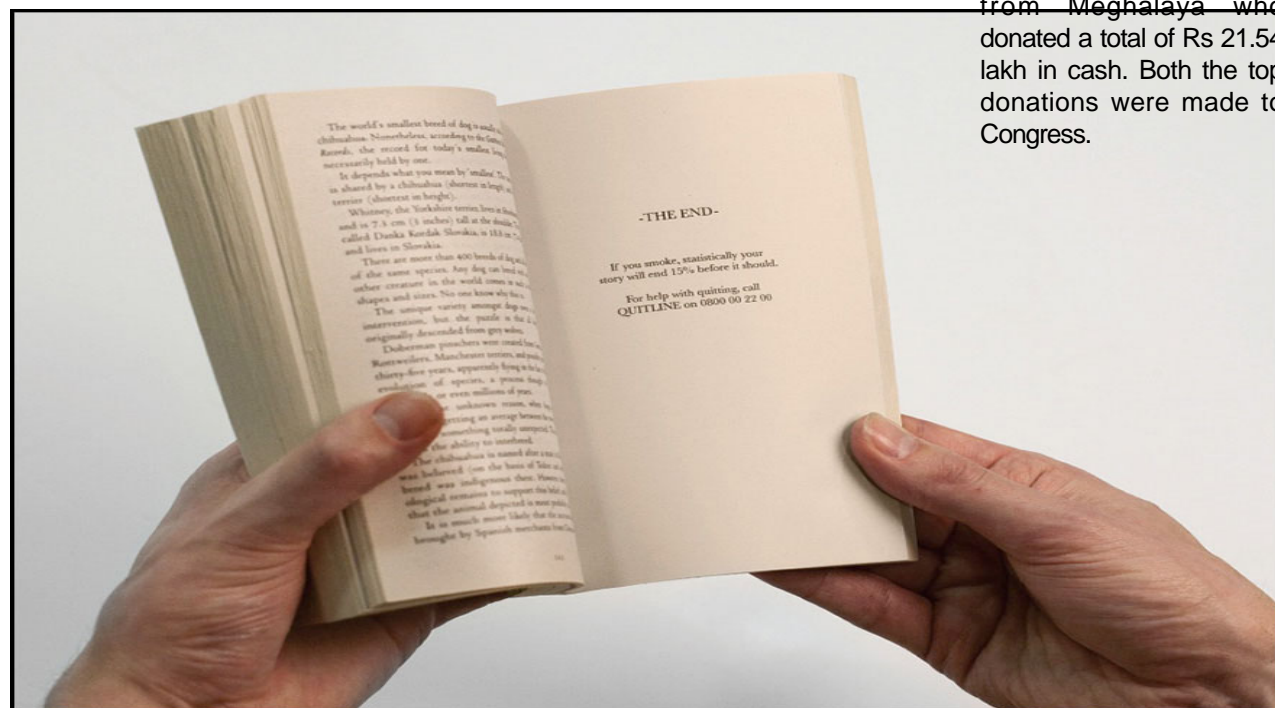
20,000 is not yet known as Congress and BJP have still not submitted their income tax returns to the EC. BSP declared the party did not receive any donations above Rs 20,000+ during 2015-16 consistent with its declarations for the past 10 years . Interestingly, total donations of national parties decreased by Rs 528 crore this year, a sharp decrease of 84%, from the previous financial year 2014-15.+

NCP declared the steepest decrease of 98%, from Rs 38 crore in 2014-15 to Rs 71 lakh

in 2015-16 while donations to BJP decreased from Rs 437 crore during 2014-15 to Rs 76 crore during 2015-16, an 82% decrease. BJP's donations had increased by 156% between 2013-14 and 2014-15 while that of Congress had increased by 137% during the same period. As far as cash donations are concerned, parties during 2014-15 declared receiving only Rs 89 lakh in cash which formed 0.14% of the total donations above Rs 20,000. This increased

to Rs 1.45 crore from 112 donations of the total Rs 102.02 crore during 2015-16. This formed 1.42% of the total donations of the parties. Maximum donations in cash were declared by Congress+ , which collected a total of Rs 1.17 crore from 10 states and Union Territories followed by CPI with Rs 22.22 lakh from 12 states and UTs and BJP with Rs 51,000 from only Bihar.

Among all the states, donors from Karnataka made the highest donations of Rs 80 lakh in cash followed by donors from Meghalaya who donated a total of Rs 21.54 lakh in cash. Both the top donations were made to Congress.



A passion for survival

How reproducing sexually makes us much more resistant to infections

(Agencies) Birds do it, bees do it, and of course, humans. But exactly why we all have sex has been one of the mysteries of science. Now researchers believe they have found the answer. Reproducing sexually makes us much more resistant to infection as we are better able to adapt to the threat of a changing environment.

On the face of it the advantages of reproducing by cloning oneself, as practiced by some animals species such as

komodo dragons and starfish, are many and varied. While it may be less fun, from a human perspective, it removes the need for finding a partner, as well as the potentially awkward business of courtship, wooing and falling in love.

And among humans or animals, sexual displays designed to entice a partner can be elaborate. In humans they may involve driving flashy cars or wearing revealing clothing. In the animal world, flamboyant

feathers or violent clashes of antlers may spring to mind. It is already known that sex allows genes to mix, allowing populations to quickly evolve and adapt to changing environment. However, for sex to beat cloning as a reproduction strategy, there must be 'large-scale benefits' that make a difference to the next generation. But the theory has been difficult to test as most organisms are either wholly sexual or clonal so cannot be compared easily.

To settle the question, researchers from the University of Stirling studied the waterflea, an organism that can produce offspring both sexually, and through cloning. They found that the waterfleas born from sexual reproduction were twice as resistant to infections as those that were born clonally. While some animal and plant species can reproduce without sex, such as starfish and bananas, sex is still the dominant mode of reproduction in the natural world. The researchers studied more than 6,000 waterfleas that had been collected from the wild in



the Scottish Borders. In the laboratory, sexual and clonally produced offspring were harvested from the wild waterfleas and exposed to a bacterial infection that afflicts waterfleas under controlled laboratory conditions.

The sexually produced offspring were more than twice as resistant to the infection as their cloned offspring. Dr Stuart Auld of the university's Faculty of Natural Sciences, said: 'One of the oldest questions in evolutionary biology is, why does sex exist when it uses up so much time and energy? Sex explains the presence of the peacock's tail, the stag's antlers and the male bird of paradise's elaborate dance. 'But if a female of any of these species produced offspring on her own, without sex, her offspring should come to dominate, because cloning can double a population with every new generation

whereas with mating, females have to go out and find a male, who themselves have to invest in traits such as fighting and dancing. 'So, why are we not surrounded by clonal organisms? 'By comparing clonal and sexual daughters from the same mothers, we found sexually produced offspring get less sick than offspring that were produced from cloning.

'The ever-present need to evade disease can explain why sex persists in the natural world in spite of the costs. Cloned organisms are genetically identical to their mothers which means any parasite, or bacterial infection, that can infect the mother can infect the offspring. 'The best explanation we have for why sex evolved is it allows resistance to disease. It evolved to help future generations fight infection. The paper 'Sex as a strategy against rapidly evolving parasites' is



'He took four or five bites at a time BEFORE chewing'

(Agencies) Sometimes it's the simplest of things that ruin what was an otherwise enjoyable first date.

Whether it's irritating eating habits, drunken confessions or unexpected differences in opinion, it doesn't take much to completely destroy a first impression.

Now, a number of singles have taken to social media to share their own experiences and the simple yet memorable things their dates did to ruin the evening.

Poor eating habits were one of the most common issues, with one woman saying her date's restaurant manner was a complete deal breaker.

'Date was going great, nice guy, really sweet, very smart,' she wrote on Reddit, before detailing the moment the date spiralled out of control.

'When he ate he took like 4 or 5 bites at a time before chewing. He filled his face as full as legally possible. His cheeks would bulge out and he could barely keep his lips shut.

'You could see all the food mashed up and grinding around through his little mouth hole. I knew in that moment that I hated him.'

Another woman described her horror when she realised her 30-year-old date had no cups at home.

'He invited me over to his place for dinner. He filled us each a plastic cup with of some kind of grape wine. I asked for a glass of water, and he

grabs a large Styrofoam Smoothie King cup, fills it with water, and hands it to me,' she wrote.

'This cup had obviously been around the block a few times, because it had those teeth indentions [sic] everywhere on the brim of the cup.

'I ask, "Do you not have cups?". His response, "...that is a cup." He also only owned one knife, did not have any tables or chairs to sit at, and did not own any plates. He ate out of the skillet, I ate my food on the box it came on.'

In some cases, the date was only ruined when it came time to pay.

'He made reservations at one of the most expensive restaurants in our city. When I sheepishly offered to split it, he says, "oh, you didn't think I was going to pick this all up right? I don't have that kind of money",' a woman wrote.

'I don't care about how much money you have bro, but if we're splitting it, I get to have a say in where we are going. I was in college and could barely afford my half. I never answered him again after that.'

Other stories involved dates passing out drunk, declaring their love, being too forward, constantly interrupting and texting the entire way through dinner.

Men also shared some of the things

women did to ruin their first dates.

'I took a gal I knew from high school out on a date when I happened to be in her neck of the woods at one point,' one man wrote.

'When it was finally time to order, she tells me she had already ordered for herself so I ordered a chicken sandwich.

'When the food arrives I discover she had ordered 80 wings - and she proceeded to eat JUST THE SKIN off the wings, leaving the meat behind, and

downed 5 beers in the process.'





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Putin's Revenge

In his underpants. Looking for a pizza. It was September 1994, and Boris Yeltsin was in Washington for a state visit with his new friend, President Bill Clinton. The Soviet Union had collapsed just three years earlier, and a relationship was blossoming between the U.S. and Russia, one that held the promise of burying decades of hostility. Russia's abrupt transition from communist dictatorship was chaotic, but a fragile democratic process and nascent capitalism were taking hold. U.S. officials entertained visions of a Western-friendly Russia as a partner in a stable and secure Europe. To that end, Clinton and Yeltsin had built an alliance on the shared goal of preventing a revanchist security state from taking power in Moscow and returning the U.S. and Russia to a Cold War state of hostility. During one early visit to Moscow, Clinton told a young audience to "choose hope over fear" and "find a new definition of Russia's greatness." Rarely had an American and a Russian leader been so chummy. Clinton and Yeltsin were buddies, two lovable rascals with big appetites. But something else was different as well: For the first time in decades, Russia was the obvious number two in the relationship. Stripped of its Iron Curtain puppet states, its economy in tatters and its military breaking down, Russia was a shrinking, messy place. And its president was becoming an embarrassment. A presumed alcoholic, Yeltsin would often lose his balance in public, sending aides scurrying to prop him back up. In one slurred telephone conversation with Clinton, the Russian proposed that the men hold a secret meeting on a submarine. But nothing could top that fall night in 1994. While staying at Blair House—the guest residence for visiting foreign dignitaries across Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House—Yeltsin slipped past his security, stumbled down the stairs and stepped onto the street. "Pizza! Pizza!" he blurted at the Secret Service agents who intercepted him. (There are two versions of the story: In one that Clinton himself told to a biographer, Yeltsin is on the street; in another, he's stopped before he makes it out the door.)

The next day, Clinton and Yeltsin had a long and friendly meeting. Their fates were connected: Clinton wanted a friendly and stable Russia as a foreign policy success story. Yeltsin needed American money

to avoid a total economic collapse. When Clinton raised plans to expand the NATO alliance into eastern Europe, Yeltsin didn't object. The men even agreed that Russia itself might one day join NATO—a concept that seems downright ludicrous today, as Putin threatens the alliance with nuclear exercises. At a press conference afterwards, the two men clowned around. Yeltsin was in an antic state that one White House aide dubbed "high jabberwocky," while Clinton himself doubled over with laughter at his Russian friend's playfulness.

Looking back today, the scene is infused with almost unbelievable optimism: the idea that the U.S. and Russia could be military allies, with one helping the other to grow an open and truly democratic society.

But for one man in Russia, it symbolized a profound humiliation. Vladimir Putin was then a minor public official, serving as a deputy city functionary in St. Petersburg after ending his career as a KGB agent, withdrawn from East Germany after its communist government fell. The notion that the Soviet state in which he'd been raised and trained, whose demise he once called "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century," had become a client state with a leader who was a source of Western amusement was stinging. It was a sting he never forgot, and when Putin met with Russian troops shortly after he took power on the first day of the new millennium,

Jharkhand: 4-year-old girl raped, eyes gouged out, hands chopped off

Police didn't rule out the involvement of family members or people known to the girl. They said organ trafficking gangs could be involved too, but the girl's autopsy must confirm if any of her kidneys is missing. Also, stray dogs could have scraped out the eyes. This is the second such crime in Jharkhand in a week after a 19-year-old girl was raped and burnt to death in Booty Basti under Ranchi Sadar police station on December 16 — on the fourth anniversary of the brutal gang rape and murder of a paramedical student in New Delhi. Police have yet to track the Ranchi suspect. JMM parliamentarian Sanjeev Kumar and legislator Amit Mahato met

January 1, 2000, he told them their mission included "restoring Russia's honor and dignity."

"He sees the 1990's as one long period of humiliation—domestically and internationally," says James Goldgeier, dean of the School of International Service at American University and a former top Russia official on Clinton's national security staff. "From Putin's standpoint, the 'Bill and Boris show' was basically Boris saying yes to everything Bill wanted—and that was the U.S. basically defining the order of the world and what Russia's place in it could be, and that Russia was too weak to do anything but go along."

Yeltsin's drunkenness symbolized the self-loathing shambles to which the former superpower had been reduced. Russia was a defeated nation. It had lost the Cold War, and along with it millions of square miles of territory, as imperial possessions dating to the czarist era declared their independence. The country's economy collapsed, impoverishing most everyone except the insiders who looted public assets. Alcoholism and prostitution boomed. Life expectancy shrank.

Meanwhile, America's influence only grew. Bill Clinton began an eastward expansion of NATO and bombed the former Yugoslavia. American economic experts flew to Moscow to provide advice on democracy and economics, pressing for "shock therapy" in the Russian economy that delivered painful jolts but little gain. Clinton even did his best to influence Russian politics, throwing his support to a deeply unpopular Yeltsin, who used his ties to the U.S.—and its economic aid—to narrowly

escape political defeat in 1996.

Today, as the U.S. grapples with a Russia with resurgent global ambitions, with a Kremlin that hacks our emails, manipulates our news—and, according to the CIA, actively worked to elect Donald Trump—it's important to realize that for Putin, it's not just a constant move for advantage. Yes, Putin is pressing Russia's current interests. But in scheming to defeat Hillary Clinton, and by subjecting American democracy itself to Russian influence, he is also closing a loop opened in part by the Clintons 20 years ago. Putin can't undo Russia's Cold War defeat by America. But he can avenge it. And in Donald Trump—the man who defeated Hillary Clinton and seems ready to deal with Putin on terms that few other American politicians would countenance—he hopes he has found a willing partner.

Says Strobe Talbott, a Russia specialist who served as deputy secretary of state under Bill Clinton: "He basically wants to make Russia great again." Yeltsin's ramshackle rule lasted until the end of the 1990s—a period in which Russia both endured a massive financial crisis and saw the rise of a dominant new class of oligarchs who had plundered the nation's assets. (They included many of Putin's friends, and, some allege, the future president himself.) America's experience stood in acute contrast. During the '90s the U.S. enjoyed an economic boom, while emerging as the world's lone superpower after two successful NATO interventions in the Balkans, which left Washington enchanted with its own military might.

On New Year's Eve

involved they would not have dumped the body in the village. But we are probing every lead and not ruling out any angle," Shailendra Barnwal, the Jamshedpur rural superintendent of police, said on Friday. The girl's father, who is a farmer and a daily wage worker, has not named any suspect in his complaint. But several women in the village told police that a sorcerer from a nearby village, who was spotted on an adjacent hillock for the past six months, could be involved. Villagers are also talking about two young men on a motorcycle, alleging that they drugged the girl when she was playing outside her house on December 15 and committed the crime.

1999, Yeltsin—battered by booze, multiple heart attacks and semi-open rebellion by a Russian military furious over NATO's muscle-flexing—abruptly resigned. He appointed Putin, who had served until the previous August as head of the KGB's successor organization, to succeed him as president. Bolstered by his lead role in a popular crackdown on alleged terrorists in the Russian republic of Chechnya, Putin was narrowly elected the following March.

Putin didn't challenge the U.S. right away. In 2000 Russia was too weak for a return to confrontation, its military still a hollow shell, and distracted by the brutal Chechnya campaign. In fact he and George W. Bush got off to a chummy start, with the president famously declaring after their first meeting in June 2001 that he looked into Putin's eyes and was "able to get a sense of his soul." After the September 11, 2001, attacks, Putin was the first world leader to call George W. Bush, with whom he hoped to partner against Islamic terrorism—Putin's label for what others called a Chechen independence movement.

The Bush-Putin relationship deteriorated for many reasons. But one of them, ironically, was a charge of election interference. Putin was furious when Washington backed a popular, pro-Western movement challenging the outcome of Ukraine's 2004 presidential election. He lashed out at what he called U.S.

Pension manager accused of accepting hookers, cocaine, and a \$17,000 watch in \$2 Billion Scam

Ten years ago, New York State comptroller Alan Hevesi pleaded guilty to accepting over \$1 million in "benefits for his family, friends, and political allies in exchange for improperly approving a \$250 million investment in Markstone Capital Partners." Some of those benefits included \$75,000 in travel expenses for the Hevesi family, and over \$500,000 in campaign contributions." In Kang's case, the gifts allegedly involved. In addition to charges from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, the trio was also sued by the Securities and Exchange Commission. It may be an unexpectedly rough holiday season for Kelley, Schonhorn, and Kang.

Modi's 'Monumental Mismanagement' Now Backed By Numbers

(That is what Stevenson meant when he said of the shortage of money that aggravated the causes of the Bengal famine of 1770, that this "destroyed the mechanism of the exchange of goods"). As for the informal sector of the economy that employs 90% of the workforce, the renowned economist, Pronob Sen of the International Growth Centre, has bluntly stated that demonetization has "penalized" the entire informal sector and damaged it "permanently".

It is against this background that one must evaluate Dr. Manmohan Singh's speech in the Rajya Sabha and his article in The Hindu that S Gurumurthy of the RSS has sought to rebut in his recent piece for the same journal.

While subscribing to the goals of ending the evil of black money and fighting the menace of counterfeit notes used by terrorists, Dr. Singh said in the Rajya Sabha that the process of demonetization initiated by the Modi regime had been marred by "monumental mismanagement". He underlined that agricultural growth, small industry and the informal sector employing some 300 million workers, will all slow down. Therefore, "GDP can decline by about 2%", adding that "this is an underestimate, not an overestimate". The earlier paragraphs of this column have shown in some statistical detail how badly these sectors have been affected since Disaster struck at Midnight.

Gurumurthy does not dispute any of this, but claims that to get out of the mess allegedly left him by his predecessor, it was Modi's express intention to "force temporary decline in growth" that "will cause hardship and hit growth." Oh, really? Then why did Modi himself not say so? Why did he promise that all would be well within a few days - later amended, with much shedding of tears, to "give me 50 days more". Those 50 days are coming to an end and the "hardship" that Gurumurthy admits has been "forced" on the country will last for at least 500 days. And as Dr. Singh said in Parliament, "50 days torture can bring about disastrous effects."

Dr. Singh added in The Hindu that the "vast majority" of Indians "earn in cash, transact in cash, and save in cash". They cannot move instantly, without preparation, to a "cashless economy" because "600 million Indians live where there is no bank". So, "cash is the bedrock of the lives of these people". The

undeniable facts are that banking penetration is no more than 46%; internet connectivity is limited to 22% of the population; 19% are without even electricity; and only a little over one million of over 14 million merchants possess a Point-of-Sale device. Surely, Modi (and Gurumurthy) should have put in place the required infrastructure before going off on a wild goose chase for their chimera of a "cashless digital economy".

Dr. Singh was also absolutely on the ball when he challenged Modi's (and Gurumurthy's) "wrong assumption that all cash is black money and all black money is in cash." He went on to say, "To tarnish these as 'black money' and throw the lives of these hundreds of millions of poor people into disarray is a mammoth tragedy." In fact, most black money is not held in rupees at all but sent abroad to be re-routed to India from Mauritius through anonymous Participatory Notes, as Gurumurthy himself admits in his "rebuttal" of Dr. Singh, ruling that PNs had reached Rs. 3.81 lakh crores in 2007. Then why during the renegotiation of the Double Taxation Treaty with Mauritius did Modi not insist on PNs being banned - if he were indeed serious about blocking channels that turn black into white? For one reason only, Gurumurthy

avargale - that Modi is not serious about ending black money. That's just another jumla. Moreover, he knows that HDNs have little to do with Terrorism - it is now well-established that only 250 notes in every one million are counterfeit. And those who were churning out bogus 1,000-rupee notes can now churn out double the value in forged 2,000-rupee notes!

The atmosphere is pervaded by increased uncertainty, consequent risk-aversion on the part of potential investors, Indian and foreign, and strains on corporate balance sheets. As Dr. Singh wrote, "the faith and confidence of Indians that the Government of India would protect them and their money was destroyed". The new 2,000-rupee note, he gravely asserted, would facilitate the hoarding of illegitimate money. Demonetization had neither tackled "the stock of black money" nor "stemmed its flow". And along comes Gurumurthy to say, Why only one thousand rupee notes? Modi could even - and probably will - next demonetize the new 2000 rupees note! Who can possibly trust such a government - or such a chartered accountant confidant of the government?

Dr. Singh concluded his speech with the dire warning that demonetization had been "a

monumental management failure" amounting to "organized loot, legalized plunder". And his Hindu article concluded bemoaning the "one hasty decision" that has caused so much "suffering". His final words were, "The scars of an overnight depletion of the honest wealth of a vast majority of Indians, combined with their ordeal of rationed access to new currency, will be too deep to heal quickly".

Instead of responding to these real concerns, Gurumurthy has resorted to voodoo economics. First, he has gone off on a fishing expedition about the condition of the economy under NDA compared to UPA I & II. Unable to alter the reality that real GDP under Manmohan grew at the unprecedented rate of 8.4% annually, Gurumurthy compares inflation under Vajpayee at 4.6% with inflation under Manmohan at 6.5%, and attributes UPA growth to "price inflation" being "passed off as high growth". This is patent nonsense. Nominal GDP is boosted by inflation; real GDP is determined by nominal minus inflation. The GDP figures he has cited are of "real" not "nominal" growth. Indeed, the only reason Modi's growth rate has exceeded 7% is that for the first time in Indian history, deflation has resulted in nominal

growth being lower than real GDP; so, by adding, instead of subtracting, the price rise, Modi and Jaitley have been able to project a totally misleading narrative of real growth in our economy. (Compare this to Sivaramkrishna on 1770: "Money became so dear that prices of all other goods slumped; the scarcity of money was accompanied by deflation.")

Of course, high real growth will need higher money supply. Hence, Gurumurthy's figure of cash with the public rising from 9.4% of GDP under NDA I to 12% under UPA is indeed correct. But there is nothing mysterious about that. High growth needs the injection of larger money supply. And, of course, HDNs would be in much higher proportion - although the very term "HDN" is misleading. How can 500 be called HDN when it represents less than two days wages for a daily-wage construction worker? Indeed, why call even Rs. 1,000 HDN when a construction worker earns much more than that in just a week and remits most of it to his family in the village? Is banning such notes the way to "reinstate real growth and jobs" as Gurumurthy claims? Indeed, if HDN is to be defined, a good starting point would be the new 2,000-rupee note. So, if HDN is such an

Trump Should Read India's Playbook On Taunting China: Foreign Media

Perhaps most surprising, this past October New Delhi granted U.S. Ambassador to India Richard Verma access to the sensitive, Chinese-claimed town of Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, another first. And just last week Indian President Pranab Mukherjee hosted the Dalai Lama at India's Presidential Palace, blithely dismissing Beijing's protesting diplomatic note. In a rare move, it even offered to help Mongolia weather trade sanctions recently imposed by Beijing as punishment for Mongolia's hosting of the Dalai Lama in November. None of this has resulted in any direct punitive response from Beijing.

It's not just Tibet, either. Since the visa denial incident in 2010, India has witnessed a marked acceleration in its outreach to Taiwan, including hosting several Taiwanese government ministers in 2011; signing new agreements on double taxation avoidance, cultural cooperation, and mutual degree recognition; permitting a former Taiwanese president and vice president transit layovers in 2012 and 2014, respectively; and inviting a former Taiwanese official to address two high-profile international conferences this year. These moves have yet to draw any sharp response from the mainland.

What does India's approach to the One-China policy tell us about the Trump-Tsai

phone call? Namely, that questioning the sanctity of the One-China policy is not necessarily a "death sentence" with Beijing, especially when the challenges are indirect and inexplicit. To date, China's muted response to the phone call supports that assessment.

To Beijing's mandarins, Modi represents an unfamiliar commodity: a confident, assertive, nationalist Indian leader with a surplus of political capital. The same is even truer for Trump, who, for China, remains shrouded in a cloak of uncertainty and unpredictability. China's leadership isn't nearly as confident that it can predict Trump's response to each move on the regional chessboard, compared with Barack Obama's more calculable style, and is naturally inclined to proceed cautiously. After years of testing the "red lines" of its neighbors and Washington as well, Beijing is not nearly as comfortable being on the receiving end.

If the Trump-Tsai exchange was part of a nuanced, calibrated strategy designed to diminish China's near-monopoly on strategic ambiguity and the initiative it seized during the Obama administration, it could eventually produce a more balanced trilateral relationship between the United States, China, and Taiwan. If, on the other hand, the Trump-Tsai exchange precedes a more indiscriminately vindictive posture

toward China, it could be a pressure point, Trump's team should be prepared for a wide range of potentially volatile, dangerous, and unpredictable Chinese responses. As a party to more than a dozen meetings in Beijing and Washington with China's current Taiwan affairs minister, Zhang Zhijun, and to numerous exchanges on Taiwan with some of China's senior-most diplomats, I find it difficult to overstate the intensity and seriousness Beijing devotes to Taiwan and its status. It is far more sensitive to changes in America's posture on One-China policy than India, partly because China has never felt particularly threatened by Indian power, and partly because its leadership has more directly linked its legitimacy to the reunification of Taiwan than to any issue related to Tibet. That doesn't mean Washington should compromise its values under threat of Chinese coercion: I believe the U.S. president should reserve the right to speak to whomever he likes and at the time of his choosing, whether that's Taiwan's president or the Dalai Lama. Trump and his team appear to have reclaimed that right and, thus far, to have moved the needle on Taiwan without destabilizing ties with China. But for this to be remembered as a shrewd strategic coup, they will have to walk a fine line in creating a new balance in trilateral relations not only more favorable to U.S. and Taiwanese interests but stable enough to prevent an unnecessary war with China in the Western Pacific.

But it's frightening to think one of the reasons why angioplasties are prescribed so routinely could be because there's a lot of money flowing through that small metal or plastic tube that's placed in the patient's arteries. Without an MRP, says Birender Sanghwan, advocate, consumer activist and the petitioner in the case, patients are charged anywhere between 300-700 per cent of the price at which the hospital would have bought it.

December 22 is the date for fixing prices given by the twin bench of Justices Sangeeta Dhingra and G. Rohini. But Sanghwan, whose third petition since 2014 finally bore fruit, is bracing for a longer battle—he's almost sure the manufacturers' and suppliers' lobby may well contest it. Cardiac stents, mostly manufactured by multinational companies, are usually supplied directly to hospitals; often without an MRP, making it easy for hospitals as well as doctors to make a hefty profit.

In June, stents were brought under the national list of essential medicines by the DoP (which is under the ministry for chemicals and fertilisers, and not health). No steps have been taken, though, to cap their prices so far. Sanghwan alleges the delay is due to a nexus of stent manufacturing companies and doctors, who benefit from bribes and cuts. In the interim, thousands of patients and their kin remain vulnerable to exploitation.

When legal researcher Shirin Syed's father suffered a cardiac episode, she rushed him to a leading private hospital in Aurangabad. After a quick examination, without an angiography, the doctors "diagnosed" three blockages, and prescribed angioplasty. When Shirin enquired about the price of the stents, the head cardiologist shrugged it off, saying it was an emergency case. After the surgery, when Shirin went to collect the medical reports and pay the bill, she was shocked to find that while only one stent had been placed, the bill mentioned two.

The doctor in charge tried to explain it away by saying they had not been able to place the second stent, but the family would have to pay for it as it had been deployed, but did not work. Aware that she was being cheated, Shirin asked the doctors to give her the other stent to take home. Only then did the doctor agree to reduce a small amount, allegedly the cost of the second stent, in the bill. The final bill of Rs 2,69,279, however, did not mention either the brand or the per unit cost of the two stents, which had been

Heart for Mart sake

listed as 'consumables' costing Rs 1,17,670.

The use of cardiac stents in India has been growing rapidly at 25 per cent annually, adding to the concern whether it is at all warranted in many cases (see interview of Dr M.S. Valiathan). Many consumer activists have alleged that doctors and hospitals make a killing through indiscriminate use of stents for which they receive a cut either through a huge mark-up in the price or as bribe. In 2015, as many as 4,20,000 angioplasties were performed in the country, according to the Cardiology Society of India.

The need for an angioplasty, according to DraftCraft founder and solicitor Gajanan Khergamker, arises only under certain circumstances—and it should rightfully be the patient's call. "Whether or not an angioplasty is required is to be decided by the patient after being provided full and complete information, as far as possible, by the medical practitioner," he says. "A patient's consent to angioplasty or any procedure obtained by 'coercion', 'force' and 'undue influence' qualifies as 'forced consent' and is not 'free consent' as laid down in Section 14 of the Indian Contract Act, 1872." Yet, informed consent is mostly an abstract ideal in India—the norm, it seems, is what would qualify as a form of coercion. Multinational firms dominate the cardiac stent market in India, with over 80 per cent marketshare. Their huge resource base enables them to woo doctors with bribes for every stent deployed in order to increase sales and, in turn,

profits. The cost of procuring one stent is in the range of Rs 20,000-25,000, according to legal researcher K.M. Gopakumar of the Third World Network, which specialises in pharmaceutical research. Yet patients have to pay anywhere between Rs 50,000 to Rs 1.5 lakh for drug-eluting stents—the most common kind used in angioplasty operations.

In a complaint filed with the health ministry and the DoP, Gopakumar has accused a leading hospital in Kerala of overcharging on stents. In 2014, Gopakumar's father was advised angioplasty as he needed three stents. The super-speciality facility quoted a price of Rs 95,000 for each stent. In a bid to lower his costs, Gopakumar decided to contact Abbot Laboratories Ltd in Delhi, which was supplying stents to the hospital. He was shocked to learn that the distributor's price was only Rs 27,000.

When Gopakumar approached the cardiac specialist handling his father's case, he insisted the stent cost would not be lowered and it would have to be procured from the hospital if the procedure was done there. So far, no action has been taken on his complaint against the hospital either by the Kerala medical department or central authorities. According to Gopakumar, the huge profit (in this case Rs 57,000 per stent) is shared by the hospital and the cardiologist as premium over and above the procedure's cost. "The whole transaction works on a well-woven system of inter-dependence and quid pro quo."

The hospital, on its part, denied the allegation, and even said it gave the patient one of the three stents for free. The "average cost" per stent works out to Rs 58,133, it said in its response to the complainant; "hence the margin towards handling charges is practically nil." Not allowing direct purchase of medical equipment by patients from outside sources is part of its policy, it added.

Sanghwan contends that the system of bribes is enabled through the presence of medical representatives and distributors in every hospital. "Hospitals where well-known cardiologists practise are generally swarming with medical representatives who work to ensure that doctors use their companies' stents. This practice of allowing medical reps within hospitals is illegal under the medical code of conduct, yet it takes place rampantly," he says.

Outlook got in touch with one distributor of foreign stents, who confirmed that such practices involved almost every hospital and the best-known cardiologists. "The cardiac stent industry is a comparatively small one resulting in smaller channels. The only middlemen are distributors who are responsible for paying doctors and big hospitals to push the costlier stents over the cheaper options available," he claims. Multinational brands supply the stents to distributors, who in turn supply them directly to hospitals. The onus of pushing sales and using bribes to achieve targets lies with the distributors, who approach doctors as well as hospitals to make them choose

one brand of stent over competing brands. The usual cut for doctors, according to Sanghwan, is anywhere between 20-25 per cent of the cost at which the stent is supplied to the patient. The cuts, according to industry insiders, are paid out in the form of cash, material benefits such as foreign trips or gifts such as cars and EMIs on property bought by doctors.

The distributor Outlook spoke says he has witnessed several medical representatives of multinationals firms deploying exorbitant forms of bait to lure doctors: gifts as well as foreign trips under the guise of medical conferences. With such incentives involved, a lot of doctors tend to opt for costly stents, despite cheaper versions with the same benefits being available in the market. "So far, no independent study has been done to prove the superiority of one stent over the other," says Gopakumar. "Yet hospitals and doctors charge higher amounts for new stents that have entered the market listing greater health benefits, which the patient has no means to vet."

The bribes are usually adjusted into the hospitals' expense accounts to cover tracks or paid directly to doctors in cash. Amitava Guha of the Federation of Medical and Sales Representatives of India recalls being told of clandestine cash exchanges between distributors and doctors of a leading hospital chain. An agent working for one of the biggest distributors in the country informed Outlook that, in his entire career, only 10 per cent of the doctors he approached with bribes declined it. "Sadly, this small number figures is no well-known private practitioner," he claims.

Demonetisation is immoral, theft of people's property: Steve Forbes

for long hours in queues at banks and ATMs to withdraw money. "Without any warning India abruptly scrapped 85 per cent of its currency. That's right: Most of the country's cash ceased to be legal tender. Shocked citizens were given only a few weeks' notice to take their cash and turn it in at a bank for new bills," the magazine said. Forbes pointed out that governments do not create resources, people do.

"What India has done is commit a massive theft of people's property without even the pretence of due process -- a shocking move for a democratically elected government. "Not surprisingly, the government is downplaying the fact that this move will give India a onetime windfall of perhaps tens of billions of dollars."

Forbes compared the demonetisation with the forced-sterilization drive undertaken by the then Indira Gandhi government during her Emergency regime of 1975-77. "Not since India's short-lived forced-sterilization programme in the 1970s -- this bout of Nazi-like eugenics was instituted to deal with the

country's 'overpopulation' -- has the government engaged in something so immoral. "It claims the move will fight corruption and tax evasion by allegedly flushing out illegal cash, crippling criminal enterprises and terrorists and force-marching India into a digitized credit system. "India is the most extreme and destructive example of the anti-cash fad currently sweeping governments and the economics profession. "Countries are moving to ban high-denomination bills, citing the rationales trotted out by New Delhi. But there's no misunderstanding what this is truly about: attacking your privacy and inflicting more government control over your life. "By stealing property, further impoverishing the least fortunate among its population and undermining social trust, thereby poisoning politics and hurting future investment, India has immorally and unnecessarily harmed its people, while setting a dreadful example for the rest of the world." The magazine said the economic turmoil in India had been compounded by the fact that the government "didn't print a sufficient amount

of the new bills, lest word leak out as to what was about to take place. "The new bills are also a different size than the old ones, creating a huge problem with ATMs. Even though India is a high-tech powerhouse, hundreds of millions of its people live in dire poverty."

Saying India's economy was based mostly on cash, Forbes condemned the stringent rules and taxation policies of India. "Moreover, much of it operates informally because of excessive rules and taxes. The government bureaucracy is notorious for its red tape, lethargy and corruption, forcing people to get by on their wits." Coming down heavily on the reasons cited by the Modi government for the note ban, the magazine said: "Human nature hasn't changed since we began roaming this planet. "People will always find ways to engage in wrongdoing. Terrorists aren't about to quit their evil acts because of a currency change. "As for the digitization of money, it will happen in its own good time if free markets are permitted.



A new twist in the debate over pornography's role in romantic relationships.

It's strange timing for a pivot into prudery, but the GOP—now led by our pussy-grabbing, naked-interview-giving, sex-tape-watching, Playboy-video-starring president-elect—is poised to launch a crackdown on pornography. If the last few months are any guide, the new attack on naked pictures will have less to do with morals than with mental health. Last summer, the party wrote a plank into its platform calling online smut a “public health crisis”—a phrase that hints at underlying epidemiology. The same phrase had turned up back in April, when the heavily Republican government of Utah passed a resolution by unanimous vote citing “recent research” to declare pornography a “public health crisis” and “hazard leading to a broad spectrum of individual and public health impact and societal harms.”

Writing in the Washington Post, sociologist Gail Dines supported this idea, endorsing Utah's declaration on scientific grounds. “The science is there,” she wrote. Forty years of peer-reviewed publications have shown the many ways that porn can hurt us: It makes men more aggressive and more inclined to sexual violence; it reduces women's self-esteem; it weakens our relationships. “By taking a health-focused view of porn and recognizing its radiating impact not only on consumers but also on society at large,” said Dines, “Utah's resolution simply reflects the latest research.”

Yet the very latest research on pornography suggests that earlier work may be off the mark. Psychologists in Canada just put out their attempt to replicate one of the field's most famous studies of pornography's harmful effects, a textbook finding dating from the porn-war years of the 1980s, made by the prominent evolutionary psychologist Douglas Kenrick. According to that work, viewing naked pictures from Playboy makes heterosexual men less attracted to their wives or girlfriends, even

less in love with them. The mere sight of such beautiful and apparently licentious women seems to distort the way that men relate to their partners, Kenrick concluded. But according to the new results, this may not be true at all. If that's the case then the theory that there is a “public health crisis” of pornography will have



run afoul of the replication crisis in psychology.

The Kenrick study does not show up in every disquisition on the dangers of pornography, but its central message—that porn addles the male brain and causes men to lose interest in their partners—has been passed along quite freely. “The more they watch, the more they want porn sex because they become habituated to that kind of industrial-strength sex,” said Dines, who started the group Stop Porn Culture. “What I find is that some men lose interest in their partners altogether and use more pornography.” Kenrick, for his part, had not set out to show the social cost of viewing naked pictures. “I wasn't really interested in the pornography end of it,” he said last week. Rather, he was studying a perceptual phenomenon called the “contrast effect” and extending it to social situations.

When you stick your hand in a bucket of cold water, he told me, the next thing you

touch will feel somewhat warmer than it really is. So Kenrick thought: What if the same principle applied to judgments of attractiveness—when you stare at someone beautiful, will the next person you see seem plainer in comparison? For a 1977 study on what could be called the scientific version of the “ugly friend effect,” he had

asked a bunch of male students at Montana State University to rate the beauty of an average-looking woman in a photograph after having watched an episode of Charlie's Angels. The guys said the woman was less attractive, on average, than a control group who had not been watching television. The Charlie's Angels viewers, wrote Kenrick, may have been more negative on account of “the immediate influence of the beautiful media stimuli.” His original Playboy centerfold study from 1989—the subject of the recent replication—aimed to test the same idea with naked pictures. Kenrick told a group of heterosexual participants he was studying judgments of controversial art, then asked them to give opinions of either abstract paintings (by Jackson Pollock, Josef Albers, and the like) or nude centerfolds (drawn from Playboy for the men and Playgirl for the women). Finally he had them answer a bunch of questions about the desirability and sexual

attractiveness of their romantic partners and the degree to which they felt devoted to that person.

The men seemed to end up less attracted and devoted to their partners after looking at the centerfolds. No effect was recorded in the women. Kenrick offered up an evolutionary explanation: By looking at these

beautiful women, the men might have been led to believe they had more and better options for mating. “When I see all of these beautiful women in Playboy, it changes my assumption about the universe of possibilities,” he explained. In light of their new, porn-distorted understanding of the world, the men were less inclined to stay committed to their wives or girlfriends. Women,

he theorized, are less susceptible to this effect because they've evolved to be less attuned to physical attractiveness. “The lesson I took out of my own research is that I stopped looking at Playboy,” Kenrick said, “and I didn't really miss it.” In the years that followed, other researchers tried to figure out if looking at pornography does lasting harm to couples. Survey studies—many citing Kenrick's work—found a somewhat consistent negative correlation between porn viewership and various measures of relationship satisfaction. On average, the men in these surveys who said they looked at pornography were less likely to report being happy, stable, communicative, or sexually satisfied with their partners. One recent study, for example, from a pair of researchers at religious universities (Notre Dame and Brigham Young), used data from 20,000 adult participants in the General Social Survey. In every year since 1973, that

survey has asked people about their marital stability and happiness, as well as whether they had watched an “X-rated movie” at some point in the past 12 months. (In 2000 they added a more up-to-date question about “visiting pornographic websites.”) Overall, 26 percent of the men said they had watched a pornographic film in the last year, versus 17 percent of the women. When the researchers compared the porn-watching men with porn abstainers, they turned out to be 60 percent more likely to be divorced, 80 percent more likely to have had an extramarital affair, and 15 percent less likely to describe their marriage as “very happy.”

But it still wasn't clear if the association between porn use and relationship quality would be the same for everyone or if it would apply to every kind of porn. A few studies hinted, for example, that if porn caused harm, it would be more damaging to men than women. The context for viewing pornography could also make a difference in how it affected relationships. A recent mail-in survey of 1,291 unmarried people found that people who reported no viewing of sexually explicit material also said they were a bit more dedicated to their partners, more sexually satisfied, and better able to communicate than the porn users. But the researchers found that these small differences mostly disappeared among those who said they looked at pornography with their partners, as opposed to by themselves.

It could be that pornography leads relationships to falter, but what if the surveys had it backwards? A solitary porn habit, for example, could be taken as a symptom of a pre-existing problem in a relationship. As a rule, these studies can't tell us whether using porn really messes up a marriage, or if people in busted relationships are more likely to start using porn (or admit to using porn when asked).



Covering Politics in a 'Post-Truth'

Journalism has never been better, thanks to these last few decades of disruption. So why does it seem to matter so little?

“The media scandal of 2016 isn’t so much about what reporters failed to tell the American public; it’s about what they did report on, and the fact that it didn’t seem to matter.”

For the last two decades, the rules of political reporting have been blown up. And I’ve cheered at every step along the way. Not for me the mourning over the dismantling of the old order, all those lamentations about the lost golden era of print newspapers thudding on doorsteps and the sage evening news anchors reporting back to the nation on their White House briefings. Because, let’s face it: too much of Washington journalism in the celebrated good old days was an old boys’ club, and so was politics—they were smug, insular, often narrow-minded, and invariably convinced of their own rightness.

The truth is that coverage of American politics, and the capital that revolves around it, is in many ways much better now than ever before—faster, sharper, and far more sophisticated. There are great new digital news organizations for politics and policy obsessives, political science wonks, and national security geeks. Today’s beat reporters on Capitol Hill are as a rule doing a far better job than I did when I was a rookie there two decades ago, and we get more reporting and insight live from the campaign trail in a day than we used to get in a month, thanks

to Google and Facebook, livestreaming and Big Data, and all the rest. Access to information—by, for, and about the government and those who aspire to run it—is dazzling and on a scale wholly unimaginable when Donald Trump was hawking his Art of the Deal in 1987. And we have millions of readers for our work now, not merely a hyper-elite few thousand.

But this is 2016, and Trump has just been elected president of the United States after a campaign that tested pretty much all of our assumptions about the power of the press. Yes, we are now being accused—and accusing ourselves—of exactly the sort of smug, inside-the-Beltway myopia we thought we were getting rid of with the advent of all these new platforms. I’m as angry as everybody else at the catastrophic failure of those fancy election-forecasting models that had us expecting an 85 percent or even a ridiculous 98 percent—thanks Huffington Post!—chance of a Hillary Clinton victory. All that breathless cable coverage of Trump’s Twitter wars and the live shots of his plane landing on the tarmac didn’t help either. And Facebook and the other social media sites should rightfully be doing a lot of soul-searching about their role as the most efficient distribution network for conspiracy theories, hatred, and outright falsehoods ever invented. As editor of Politico throughout this never-to-be-forgotten campaign, I’ve been obsessively looking back over our coverage, too, trying to figure out what we missed along the way to the upset of the century and what we could have done differently. (An early conclusion: while we were late to understand how angry white voters were, a perhaps even more serious lapse was in failing

to recognize how many disaffected Democrats there were who would stay home rather than support their party’s flawed candidate.) But journalistic handwringing aside, I still think reporting about American politics is better in many respects than it’s ever been.

I have a different and more existential fear today about the future of independent journalism and its role in our democracy. And you should too. Because the media scandal of 2016 isn’t so much about what reporters failed to tell the American public; it’s about what they did report on, and the fact that it didn’t seem to matter. Stories that would have killed any other politician—truly worrisome revelations about everything from the federal taxes Trump dodged to the charitable donations he lied about, the women he insulted and allegedly assaulted, and the mob ties that have long dogged him—did not stop Trump from thriving in this election year. Even fact-checking perhaps the most untruthful candidate of our lifetime didn’t work; the more news outlets did it, the less the facts resonated. Tellingly, a few days after the election, the Oxford Dictionaries announced that “post-truth” had been chosen as the 2016 word of the year, defining it as a condition “in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”

Meantime, Trump personally blacklisted news organizations like Politico and The Washington Post when they published articles he didn’t like during the campaign, has openly mused about rolling back press freedoms enshrined by the U.S. Supreme Court, and has now named Stephen Bannon, until recently the executive chairman of Breitbart—a right-wing fringe website with a penchant for

conspiracy theories and anti-Semitic tropes—to serve as one of his top White House advisers. Needless to say, none of this has any modern precedent. And what makes it unique has nothing to do with the outcome of the election. This time, the victor was a right-wing demagogue; next time, it may be a left-wing populist who learns the lessons of Trump’s win.

Of course, there’s always been a fair measure of cynicism—and more than a bit of demagoguery—in American politics and among those who cover it, too. But I’ve come to believe that 2016 is not just another skirmish in the eternal politicians versus the press tug of war. Richard Nixon may have had his “enemies list” among the media, but the difference is that today Trump as well as his Democratic adversaries have the same tools to create, produce, distribute, amplify, or distort news as the news industry figuring out how to use them. The bully pulpits, those of the press and the pols, have proliferated, and it’s hard not to feel as though we’re witnessing a sort of revolutionary chaos: the old centers of power have been torn down, but the new ones have neither the authority nor the legitimacy of those they’ve superseded. This is no mere academic argument. The election of 2016 showed us that Americans are increasingly choosing to live in a cloud of like-minded spin, surrounded by the partisan political hackery and fake news that poisons their Facebook feeds. Nature, not to mention Donald Trump, abhors a vacuum.

I first came to work in Washington at the back end of the 1980s, during the second-term funk of the Reagan Revolution, as the city obsessed over the Iran-Contra scandal and the rise of rabble-rousing

conservatives on Capitol Hill led by a funny-haired guy named Newt Gingrich. Within a few years, Gingrich and Co. would launch an ethics investigation to take out a powerful Speaker of the House, Texan Jim Wright, who left town warning of the new age of “mindless cannibalism” they had unleashed. It was the twilight of the Cold War, even if we didn’t realize it at the time. One November afternoon during my junior year in college I took a nap and when I went downstairs a short while later, I found the security guard in the dorm lobby staring incredulously at a tiny portable TV that had suddenly materialized on his desk. The Berlin Wall had come down while I was sleeping, and it didn’t take an international relations scholar to figure out that pretty much everything, including our politics here at home, was about to change. To help us understand it all, there were choices, but not that many: three TV networks that mattered, ABC, CBS, and NBC; two papers for serious journalism, The New York Times and The Washington Post; and two giant-circulation weekly newsmagazines, Time and Newsweek. That, plus whatever was your local daily newspaper, pretty much constituted the news. Whether it was Walter Cronkite or The New York Times, they preached journalistic “objectivity” and spoke with authority when they pronounced on the day’s developments—but not always with the depth and expertise that real competition or deep specialization might have provided. They were great—but they were generalists. And because it was such a small in-crowd, they were readily subject to manipulation; the big media crisis of the Reagan era was all about the ease with which the journalists could be spun or otherwise coopted into the Hollywood-produced story line coming out of Reagan’s media savvy White House, which



The fake news hit Trent, Italy, on Easter Sunday, 1475. A 2 1/2-year-old child named Simonino had gone missing, and a Franciscan preacher, Bernardino da Feltre, gave a series of sermons claiming that the Jewish community had murdered the child, drained his blood and drunk it to celebrate Passover. The rumors spread fast. Before long da Feltre was claiming that the boy's body had been found in the basement of a Jewish house. In response, the Prince-Bishop of Trent Johannes IV Hinderbach immediately ordered the city's entire Jewish community arrested and tortured. Fifteen of them were found guilty and burned at the stake. The story inspired surrounding communities to commit similar atrocities.

Recognizing a false story, the papacy intervened and attempted to stop both the story and the murders. But Hinderbach refused to meet the papal legate, and feeling threatened, simply spread more fake news stories about Jews drinking the blood of Christian children. In the end, the popular fervor supporting these anti-semitic "blood libel" stories made it impossible for the papacy to interfere with Hinderbach, who had Simonino canonized—Saint Simon—and attributed to him a hundred miracles. Today, historians have catalogued the fake stories of child-murdering, blood-drinking Jews, which have existed since the 12th century as part of the foundation of anti-Semitism. And yet, one anti-Semitic website still claims the story is true and Simon is still a martyred saint. Some fake news never dies.

Over the past few months, "fake news" has been on the loose once again. From bogus stories about Hillary Clinton's imminent indictment to myths

about a postal worker in Ohio destroying absentee ballots cast for Donald Trump, colorful and damaging tales have begun to circulate rapidly and widely on Twitter and Facebook. In some cases they have had violent results: Earlier this month a man armed with an AR-15 fired a shot inside a Washington, D.C., restaurant, claiming to be investigating (fake) reports that Clinton aide John Podesta was heading up a child abuse ring there.

But amid all the media handwringing about fake news and how to deal with it, one fact seems to have gotten lost: Fake news is not a new phenomenon. It has been around since news became a concept 500 years ago with the invention of print—a lot longer, in fact, than verified, "objective" news, which emerged in force a little more than a century ago. From the start, fake news has tended to be sensationalist and extreme, designed to inflame passions and prejudices. And it has often provoked violence. The Nazi propaganda machine relied on the same sorts of fake stories about ritual Jewish drinking of children's blood that inspired Prince-Bishop Hinderbach in the 15th century. Perhaps most dangerous is how terrifyingly persistent and powerful fake news has proved to be. As Pope Sixtus IV found out, wild fake stories with roots in popular prejudice often prove too much for responsible authorities to handle. With the decline of trusted news establishments around the country, who's to stop them today?

Fake news took off at the same time that news began to circulate widely, after Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1439. "Real" news was hard to verify in that era. There were plenty of news sources—from official publications by

political and religious authorities, to eyewitness accounts from sailors and merchants—but no concept of journalistic ethics or objectivity. Readers in search of fact had to pay close attention. In the 16th century, those who wanted real news believed that leaked secret government reports were reliable sources, such as Venetian government correspondence, known as relazioni. But it wasn't long before leaked original documents were soon followed by fake relazioni leaks. By the 17th century, historians began to play a role in verifying the news by publishing their sources as verifiable footnotes. The trial over Galileo's findings in 1610 also created a desire for scientifically verifiable news and helped create influential scholarly news sources.

But as printing expanded, so flowed fake news, from spectacular stories of sea monsters and witches to claims that sinners were responsible for natural disasters. The Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 was one of the more complex news stories of all time, with the church and many European authorities blaming the natural disaster on divine retribution against sinners. An entire genre of fake news pamphlets (relações de sucessos) emerged in Portugal, claiming that some survivors owed their lives to an apparition of the Virgin Mary. These religiously inspired accounts of the earthquake sparked the famed Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire to attack religious explanations of natural events, and also made Voltaire into an activist against fake religious news.

There was a lot of it in that era. When, in 1761, Marc-Antoine Calas, the 22-year-old son of a respected Protestant merchant in Toulouse, apparently committed suicide,

Catholic activists spread news stories that Calas' father, Jean, had killed him because he wanted to convert to Catholicism. The local judicial authorities posted signs calling for legal witnesses to corroborate the account, successfully turning rumors into official facts, and, in turn, official news.

Jean Calas was convicted on the rumor-fueled testimony and was publicly and gruesomely tortured before being executed. Horrified at the atrocity, Voltaire wrote his own counterattacks dissecting the absurdity that young Calas would have a full understanding of the meaning of conversion and that his peaceable father would hang him for it. The Calas story eventually sparked outrage against such fake legal stories, torture and even execution. It became a touchstone for the Enlightenment itself.

Yet even the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment could not stop the flow of fake news. For example, in the years preceding the French Revolution, a cascade of pamphlets appeared in Paris exposing for the first time the details of the near-bankrupt government's spectacular budget deficit. Each came from a separate political camp, and each contradicted the other with different numbers, blaming the deficit on different finance ministers. Eventually, through government leaks and more and more verifiable accounts, enough information was made public for readers to glean a general sense of state finance; but, like today, readers had to be both skeptical and skilled to figure out the truth.

Even our glorified Founders were perpetrators of fake news for political means. To whip up revolutionary fervor, Ben Franklin himself concocted propaganda stories about murderous "scalping" Indians working in league with the British King George III. Other revolutionary leaders published fake propaganda stories that King George was sending thousands of foreign soldiers to slaughter the American patriots and turn the tide of the War of Independence to get people to enlist and support the revolutionary cause.

By the 1800s, fake news was back again, swirling around questions of race. Like Jewish blood libel, American racial sentiments and fears were

powerful in producing false stories. One persistent "cottage industry" of fake news in antebellum America was stories of African-Americans spontaneously turning white. In other instances, fake news reports of slave uprisings or of crimes by slaves, led to terrible violence against African-Americans.

Sensationalism always sold well. By the early 19th century, modern newspapers came on the scene, touting scoops and exposés, but also fake stories to increase circulation. The New York Sun's "Great Moon Hoax" of 1835 claimed that there was an alien civilization on the moon, and established the Sun as a leading, profitable newspaper. In 1844, anti-Catholic newspapers in Philadelphia falsely claimed that Irishmen were stealing bibles from public schools, leading to violent riots and attacks on Catholic churches. During the Gilded Age, yellow journalism flourished, using fake interviews, false experts and bogus stories to spark sympathy and rage as desired. Joseph Pulitzer's New York World published exaggerated crime dramas to sell papers. In the 1890s, plutocrats like William Randolph Hearst and his Morning Journal used exaggeration to help spark the Spanish-American War. When Hearst's correspondent in Havana wired that there would be no war, Hearst—the inspiration for Orson Welles' Citizen Kane—famously responded: "You furnish the pictures, I'll furnish the war." Hearst published fake drawings of Cuban officials strip-searching American women—and he got his war. One silver lining in this long and alarming history of fake news is yellow journalism and its results—from civil violence to war—caused a backlash, and sent the public in search of more objective news. It was this flourishing market that sparked the rise of relatively objective journalism as an industry in turn-of-the century America. For the first time, American papers hired reporters to cover local beats and statehouses, building a chain of trust between local, state and national reporters and the public. While partisan reporting and sensationalism never went away (just check out supermarket newsstands), objective journalism did become a successful business model—and also, until recently, the dominant one. In 1896, Adolph Ochs purchased the New York

The Arrival Of Cyclone Chinna Amma

Sasikala, a Jayalalitha or a Janaki redux? That's a -million-dollar question for the post-Amma party.



Jayalalitha wouldn't deign to discuss with her party colleagues. Sasikala would do it for her," recalls Pazha Karuppaiah, a senior politician and former MLA who quit the AIADMK rebelling against its leadership a few months ago. "Party leaders had to go through Sasikala to meet Jayalalitha, never bypass her. It is like how you would pay obeisance to Ganesha before you proceed to worship Shiva. Party leaders would often fall out of Amma's favour and sometimes some of them would be rehabilitated and some would not. But Sasikala was a constant. Jayalalitha couldn't just do away with her. It is not new for party leaders to take orders from Sasikala. They have been doing it for 25 years now. I am not surprised they still want to do it".

For many party leaders, Sasikala is representative of the unifying force that would keep the AIADMK from falling apart. "The party would be caught in the web of groupism if any other leader is elected. With four and a half years in power to go, not a single MLA would want the party to disintegrate," says Karuppaiah. According to Karuna, "In all, 75 per cent of those who enjoy power today both at the party and at the government were chosen by Sasikala. That is why she did not face the kind of opposition Jayalalitha had faced soon after

MGR died." Those who have seen Sasikala -up close don't hesitate to claim she has taken on Jayalalitha's characteristics over the years. "She has spent over 30 years with Amma," says a senior AIADMK leader.

"If Amma was not around, she spoke and behaved just like her. She tells us to do things the way Amma did. Of course, it was different if Amma was

accepted Jayalalitha could be tougher. For one, Sasikala lacks Jayalalitha's charisma. Also, the suddenness of Jayalalitha's death after showing some progress at Apollo hospitals has sown seeds of scepticism among the general public, with actors like Gautami almost echoing it.

The biggest stumbling block, no doubt, would be Sasikala's family that Jayalalitha had kept at bay. Having faced everything from sidelining of posts to raids



around. Sasikala would be very resigned in front of Amma. But to party leaders and cadres, Sasikala is definitely Chinna Amma because even Jayalalitha tacitly approved of it. Whe-never Amma was not around, Sasikala -always donned her role with us. And that's what we expect her to do now."

Sasikala might easily become the AIADMK's general secretary, but to make the masses accept her as they had

and arrests when Jayalalitha was around, the entire family was seen taking control of affairs soon after her death. If Sasikala chooses to keep her family in the limelight, it would spell the biggest disaster for the party. But Sasikala might do a bit of man-oeuvring to keep the party going, maybe, as Karuppaiah says, toe the BJP's line to begin with. Whether she would continue to do it in the long run or do a

lavalalitha is a question that looms large over the political future of Tamil Nadu.

A day before Cyclone Vardha left Chennai devastated, Tamil -Nadu's political climate had been stupefied by an interesting development—the stunning immediacy with which frontline leaders of the AIADMK flamboyantly queued up at Poes Garden, requesting V.K. Sasikala to take over the party's mantle. Perhaps it was not all that unexpected, given how the new cabinet took over within two hours of J. Jayalalitha's death. Sasikala and her family are said to be behind the smooth transition of power. It had taken 48 hours for a new cabinet to be ushered in when Jayalalitha was convicted by a Bangalore special court in the -Disproportionate Assets case in 2014. Interestingly, if the ministers had flaunted Jayalalitha's photographs in their shirt pockets and shed copious tears when taking oath then, such demonstration of loyalty was conspicuously missing this time.

The narrative that is perhaps consciously built by Sasikala is unmistakable. In making the party accept her leadership without asking any questions, Sasikala is as impeccable as Jayalalitha was, if not more. Images of party seniors standing in front of her with folded hands as if urging her to don the role of saviour are being released to the media every day.

Days after Jayalalitha passed away, Sasikala began to meet visitors at Poes Garden and accept their condolences. Leaders such as Sengottaiyan, Thambi Durai and O. Paneerselvam, who were expected to kick up some noise, released statements professing their loyalty to Sasikala's leadership. Paneerselvam even said anyone opposing her leadership couldn't be a sincere party cadre. Party-owned television channel Jaya TV began -addressing Sasikala as Chinna Amma (junior mother) and visuals of leaders expressing their support were repeatedly

telecast. Images of party MLAs and some ministers falling at Sasikala's feet in front of Jayalalitha's memorial emerged, even as Chinna Amma stood stoically, sometimes even looking away. It looked like Chinna Amma had finally arrived.

For Sasikala, who was introduced to Jayalalitha as the proprietor of a video--recording company interested in shooting her public meetings in 1984, this was a big moment. This could be the -moment she had been awaiting all along, the moment she probably had been betting her entire life upon. "Since her first meeting with Jayalalitha, Sasikala has been taking the right decisions. The decisions led her to where she is now," says Durai Karuna, a senior Tamil political commentator, who has closely observed the AIADMK over three decades. It was through IAS officer Chandra Lekha (who would later become a victim of acid attacks by AIADMK goons) that Sasikala had first met Jayalalitha. Sasikala's husband Natarajan was working as the government public relations off-icer at Cuddalore district when Chandra Lekha was the collector. The friendship grew as Sasikala kept going to Poes Garden and the party office under the pretext of handing over video cassettes of public meetings. When Jayalalitha was elected as Rajya Sabha MP, her personal secretary had fallen ill and Jayalalitha needed someone to assist her in Delhi. That's when Sasikala moved in and her family began to advise Jayalalitha on political matters. During politically trying times, Sasikala's family threw their lot behind Jayalalitha, urging her to hang on, telling her she was capable of being a mass leader. And yet many say Chinna Amma managed to stay in Amma's good books mainly -because Jayalalitha needed someone who would attend to her needs.

"There are certain issues that

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Dangal begins

Aamir hosted twin screening of the film on the same day for select audience



Aamir's wife Kiran Rao (left) and his co-star in *Dangal*, Sakshi Tanwar, at a special pre-screening of the film in Mumbai.

By Mail Today Bureau

IF THE buzz that Aamir Khan's latest, *Dangal*, generated at a special pre-screening on Wednesday evening in Mumbai is anything to go by, the film could well be on its way to creating history.

Actor-producer Aamir hosted a private screening of his film for friends and select industry colleagues at a theatre in the Mumbai suburb of Santacruz. Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut was the prime draw for the gathered shutterbugs.

Kangana walked in sporting a casual style sense that complimented her persona. She looked pretty in a sleeveless, pale-blue denim frock teamed with a pair of stocky brown shoes. The no-accessories mantra only accentuated her carefully-careless chic. Cricketer Ajinkya Rahane was there too, along with wife Radhika Dhupavkar. Rahane spoke of how he had eagerly waited for the film.

Host of the evening Aamir was happy striking for photo-ops with daughter Ira. Wife Kiran Rao was there too, looking bright as ever in a simple printed dress.

Aamir's first wife Reena made a rare appearance at the do, showing solidarity to ex-hubby's hard work that is widely been acclaimed as the best piece of cinema commercial Bollywood has made this year.

Early reports of the film — coming from those who have seen an advanced screening — are solid, and most people at Wednesday evening's screening seemed to agree.

Of the cast, one spotted Sakshi Tanwar looking gorgeous in a dazzling green sari.

Aamir had also hosted another screening on the same day at Yash Raj Studio in Andheri.

Dangal features Aamir as real-life wrestler Mahavir Singh Phogat, who fulfilled his ambition of winning an international gold medal for India through his daughters Geeta and Babita. Opening this weekend, it's Bollywood's last major release of the year, with the trade looking at it for some mega collections.



Aamir Khan strikes a pose with daughter Ira.



Kangana Ranaut kept it casual, sporting a sleeveless denim frock teamed with a pair of stocky brown shoes. (Left) Cricketer Ajinkya Rahane with his wife at the event.

Two-day-old Taimur is breaking the Internet

WITHIN two days of his birth, Taimur All Khan has already become a star. From his nursery to his first photos to his name, everything about this new star kid on the block has caught the fancy of many.

After a few pictures of the newborn with mother Kareena Kapoor Khan from the hospital surfaced on the internet, few more cute moments from the hospital stay ready to make your heart melt.

If the adorable picture of Saif Ali Khan about to kiss Kareena as she is holding Taimur in the hospital is too cute to miss, another photo of Taimur lying in his crib will make you go all aww.

Kareena and husband Saif became proud parents to a baby boy on Tuesday morning.

Kareena delivered the baby at Mumbai's Breach Candy Hospital on December 20.



Proud parents Kareena and Saif posed for shutterbugs at the balcony of their house.

Soon, the proud parents issued a joint statement sharing the joyous news, which read, "We are very pleased to share with you all the wonderful news about the birth of our son: Taimur All Khan Pataudi, on the 20th of December 2016. We would like to thank the media for the understanding and support they have given us over the last 9 months, and of course especially our fans and well wishers for their continued affection. Merry Christmas and a happy new year to you all...With love, Saif & Kareena."

Kareena and son Taimur went home from hospital on Thursday with Saif by their side. Before entering their Mumbai residence, Kareena and Saif waved cheerfully at the cameras from what appears to be the front porch. The new parents could not stop grinning while baby Taimur was safely ensconced in his father's arms.

India Today



Gujarati bootlegger Abdul Latif's son claims the movie is a biopic of his father but it portrays him wrongly.

Don's son threatens Raees makers

By Mail Today Bureau

SUNNY Leone's item jig *Laila o Laila* in Shah Rukh Khan's upcoming film *Raees* was greeted with trending response on Thursday, but the film itself has run into a fresh bout of trouble.

The release of *Raees* has already been postponed once, with the film getting pushed to Republic Day 2017 from Eid 2016, to avoid clashing with Salman Khan's *Sultan*. Now, when all is set for the film to open on January 26, opposition is said to be coming from the family of Gujarati bootlegger Abdul Latif, on whose life the film is reportedly based.

Producers SRK, Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani, and director Rahul Dholakia, have maintained that *Raees* is not a biopic of Latif, but the don's son Mushtaq Sheikh is allegedly not satisfied.

According to a report in the entertainment portal businessofcinema.com, Sheikh has threatened the makers of *Raees* not to release the film.

He has also said he would take the makers to court if *Raees* is released, and sue them to the tune of ₹100 crore.

Sheikh's claims against the film come in the wake of a series of controversies

Producers & director of the film say it's a work of fiction

that *Raees* has courted for a while. After a storm over its release date, the film fetched the ire of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena chief Raj Thackeray, who objected to the casting of Pakistani actress Mahira Khan, who makes her debut opposite SRK.

While on Sheikh, this is not the first time he has objected to *Raees* being released. In April 2016, even before the film was wrapped up, he had filed a defamation case against the makers in Gujarat High court, rejecting the claim of the filmmakers that *Raees* is a work of fiction.

He stated the film unit had met his family as part of research before beginning to shoot.

Sheikh now contends that the film portrays his father in a lopsided manner. He is unhappy over the fact that SRK's character Raees Alam, based on his father, is shown to own brothels and use sex workers for his bootlegging trade.

He added that the trailer of the film only paints SRK's character as an evil man and overlooks the fact that his father did charity and engaged in public service, which even won him elections.



Urvashi Rautela, the solo performer of Haseeno Ka Deewana shines without any background dancers!

(By Our Staff Reporter) Haseeno Ka Deewana, the latest entrant in the Bollywood Chartbusters of the year is playing on our minds on loop, but can you blame us? The combination of Rajesh Roshan's music, Ahmed Khan's choreography, Urvashi Rautela's sizzling moves and Hrithik & Rakesh Roshan's film is the formula for success!

In most dance numbers we've always seen an actress performing her moves with dancers in the background but this time round, the team of Kaabil has stepped into an entire

new concept. With just Urvashi Rautela setting the stage on fire, there are absolutely no dancers in the background, leaving you no option but to focus on her sizzling moves. Choreographer Ahmed Khan says "We had around 100 odd dancers and 200 junior artists in the song and decided to use them to add energy and cheering to the song rather than dance behind the artist. Generally there is one principal artist with dancers behind him or her but this time we entered into a new concept of just the principal artist performing with absolutely

nobody supporting or dancing behind them in the same frame. It was great working with Urvashi for Rakesh & Rajesh Roshan's Saara Zamaana. She is an amazing dancer and I had seen some of her earlier songs in order to get an idea of her abilities and her good height and amazing dance moves helped! Generally having such height restricts you from being agile and fast but that was not the case with her!"

The idea of having only Urvashi mesmerizing the audience with her suave dance steps is fascinating and will mark the



start of a new concept in Kaabil, produced by Rakesh Roshan and directed by Sanjay Gupta, stars Hrithik Roshan & Yami Gautam. It will hit theatres on 25th of January 2017.

Just 7 Stills From Ranbir-Katrina's 'Jagga Jasoos' That'll Make You Swoon Over Its Striking Visuals



(By Our Staff Reporter) The much-awaited trailer of Anurag Basu's Jagga Jasoos finally landed on Hotstar early morning today. The film has been in the making for a couple of years now and nobody quite knew what to expect. Well, that strategy, if at all it was conscious, has worked quite well as the film's trailer is vibrant, refreshing, and has a distinct stamp of originality (We can only hope this doesn't go the Barfi! way.) Here are 5 of the most striking visuals from the film's trailer. As per reports, Ranbir plays a gifted detective on the search for his missing father while Katrina, it appears, joins him in his adventurous trail. The once real-life couple share an easy chemistry as they traverse through what is seemingly the South African land-

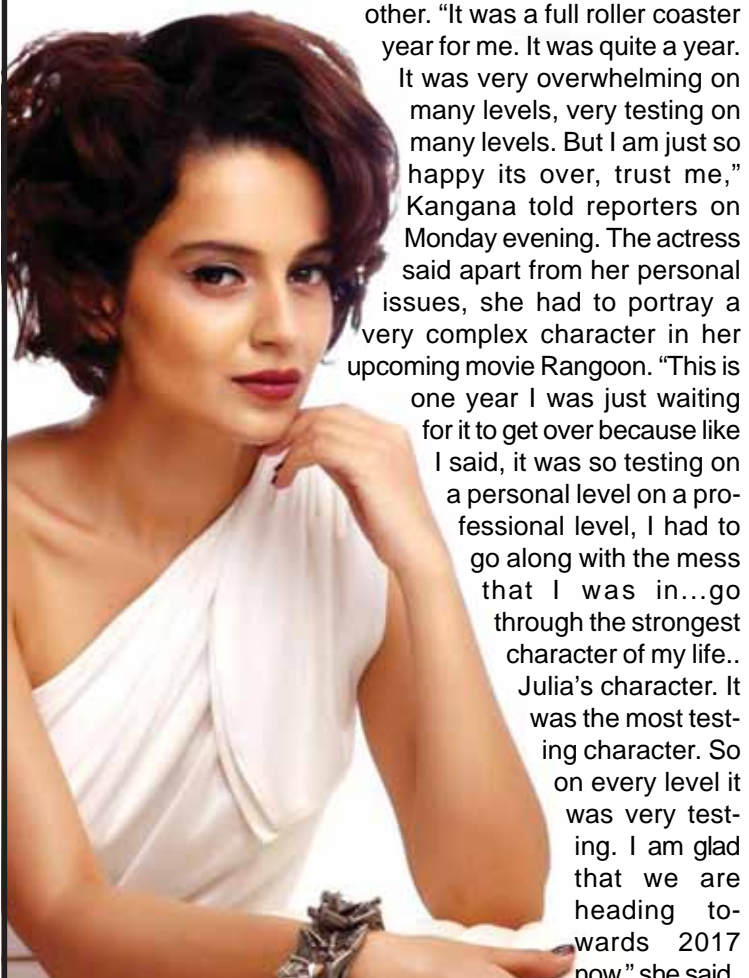
scape. Save for half a line, there's no dialogue in the trailer that is just a video montage of breathtaking visuals with a dreamy colour palette. It wouldn't be wrong to assume that the film will also delve

into magic realism too as some scenes subtly indicate. The film has been shot by ace DoP Ravi Varman and each frame looks lyrical as Ranbir-Katrina's faces lift up with a golden tint.



Kangana Ranaut Is Glad (Obviously) That 2016 Is Coming To An End

(By Our Staff Reporter) Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut says 2016 was a very "testing" year for her with lots of ups and downs, and she is happy that it is coming to an end. While Kangana did not have any film release this year, she was more in news due to her personal life, mainly her public spat with Hrithik Roshan. The two actors have been at loggerheads since the Queen star hinted at Hrithik as her 'silly ex'. The feud between Hrithik and his Krrish 3 co-star turned nasty after they slapped legal notices on each other. "It was a full roller coaster year for me. It was quite a year.



It was very overwhelming on many levels, very testing on many levels. But I am just so happy its over, trust me," Kangana told reporters on Monday evening. The actress said apart from her personal issues, she had to portray a very complex character in her upcoming movie Rangoon. "This is one year I was just waiting for it to get over because like I said, it was so testing on a personal level on a professional level, I had to go along with the mess that I was in...go through the strongest character of my life.. Julia's character. It was the most testing character. So on every level it was very testing. I am glad that we are heading towards 2017 now," she said.

I'm like a hungry tigress on the prowl, thinking of the next meal: Vidya Balan

Ever since she delivered powerful performances in back-to-back films such as Paa (2009), Ishqiya (2010), No One Killed Jessica (2011), The Dirty Picture (2011), and Kahaani (2012), Vidya Balan (right) didn't just make people sit up and take notice, but also changed the way women-oriented cinema was seen in Bollywood.

"It all sounds nice but I see myself only as an actor (smiles)," says Vidya Balan, as she receives rave reviews for Kahaani 2. Here, she talks about her life and her career.

At this stage of career, does a successful film excite you just as much as it did during your initial days?

Absolutely. It is heartening, gratifying and reassuring because it [Kahaani 2] was not an easy film to make or an easy story to tell. I remember when Sujoy came to me with the script, I told him, 'Are you sure you want to make this film as Kahaani 2?' And he said, 'Read the script and then we will take a call.'

Then, I realised that if you take a franchise forward, it gives you an opportunity to push the envelope and use the value of a franchise to tell a story. I feel good about the appreciation that I have got, and that the numbers are good [at the box office]. At the same time, it is also humbling, and reassuring that people are willing to watch such films.

As women-centric cinema has become a buzzword, do you admit that you were the one who started the trend?

I think I was definitely the face for it, but I can't take the full credit. While someone wrote those scripts and wanted to tell those stories, others funded it. And I agreed to do it because that's the hunger I have as an actor. I am constantly hungry. I am constantly looking for my next big catch. I am like a hungry tigress on the prowl, who's thinking of my next meal (smiles). It's a matter of timing; I have never calculated my career and I have never strategised in life. It doesn't come naturally to me. It only puts more pressure on me and I realised early [in my career] that I am not capable of it. But I graciously accept the tag and take that compliment.

Does that make you feel powerful?

No, but it feels wonderful when people appreciate you. The kinds of messages and reactions I have been receiving is humbling. But

do I feel powerful? Of course, when you are appreciated, you feel that your head maybe gets a little weighty; it sounds good and I am happy. I am not questioning it beyond that (laughs).

Do you feel things are changing for women-centric films?

Yes, definitely, there is a change. Ever since I did Parineeta (2005), I was offered many of these films. But now, their tone and texture have changed. Also, the range of subjects and the kinds of roles have also become more exciting year-on-year. And when I talk about the tone and texture, previously it used to be very unidimensional. But no longer is that the case.

Therefore, they are doing well because they are entertaining and engaging. You're not seeing a woman either as a devi (goddess) or a dayan (witch). I think we are treating women characters more as human beings now, and that's why they are becoming more relatable. Also, the number of female-centric films has increased. But it's not a trend anymore as it's here to stay. Yes, there aren't enough number of such movies, but we are in a much better place than we were.

Have you completely recovered from dengue by now?

Yes, I am absolutely fine. It was mild dengue, but I think it became big news.

Due to Shahid's 'alleged' involvement...

Poor Shahid, it's as if he sent the dengue mosquitoes to my house (laughs). It's crazy. Unfortunately, the BMC (Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation) found dengue mosquito larvae in his pool. He called and said, 'I am so sorry'. I was like, 'Don't say that. You didn't send the mosquitoes up to my house'. So, we laughed about it. I might have gotten it from somewhere else.

Rumours have been rife that you are going to become a mother...

If and when it's meant to happen, it will happen, and it will show (laughs). Until it shows, don't ask me. No one should be asking me that question, because do you ever ask a male actor, 'When are you impregnating your wife?' People keep asking me this; it's crazy.

Were you apprehensive about how the topic (child sex

abuse) of Kahaani 2 would be handled?

I feel proud of the way Sujoy handled the subject. He dealt with it delicately because it could have gone either way. It's something people don't want to hear, let alone talk about or watch it [on screen]. We wanted to portray it in a way that was straightforward, but with sensitivity. That was a difficult balance to strike.

I was okay telling the story because I have known survivors of child sex abuse. I suspected that a friend from school/college was suffering from something like that, but I never had the guts to ask her. Then, we lost touch. Later, I got to know that my suspicion was right. It's such a taboo subject that you feel awkward bringing it up. I remember feeling, 'Oh my God, maybe there is something I could have done if I had asked her then'.

What do you think about the work of other actresses?

They are doing wonderful work. I loved Piku (2015), Tanu Weds Manu 2 (2015), Udta Punjab, NH10 (2015), Neerja and so many films. It's amazing that so many different kinds of films are being made and actresses are doing other stuff.

Almost every female actor is doing one such film.

And, though Akira didn't work, at least Sonkashi (Sinha) did a film like that. Some of these films will work, while some won't. Some of them will also be cult films, but we just have to keep going.

Why is there a feeling that you have slowed down in your career?

Last year, I didn't work much. So, people feel that way. But, now, they will see me in back-to-back films. After Kahaani 2, there's Begum Jaan. Then, I start work on Tumhari Sulu. I

have realised that I need a little bit of time to myself in between films. I am an intense person.

So, at times, I need time to do nothing at all and then come back refreshed and re-energised. I normally like to time my films better. I like to take two-three months off in between two films.

There's a perception that married actresses don't have a place in films, especially Bollywood.

I don't think this exists anymore.

In the past, the lives of women would stop once they got married and had children.

This is not true anymore. Similarly, in films, the

careers of actresses doesn't stop after marriage or child birth.

As long as you are interested in yourself, people will be interested in you. I think more and more women are becoming interested in themselves.

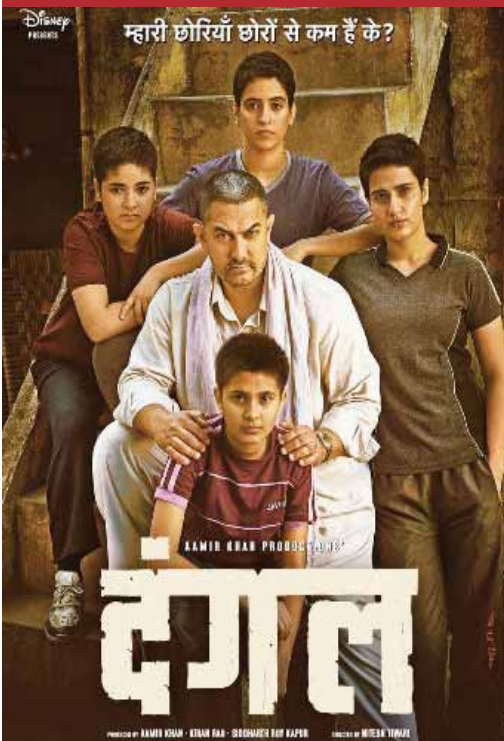
Your name has been associated with a number of biopics of late...

It's amazing that I have got 10-12 biopic



offers after The Dirty Picture (2011). But there is nothing as

Aamir Khan's 'Dangal' will not release in Pakistan, say distributors



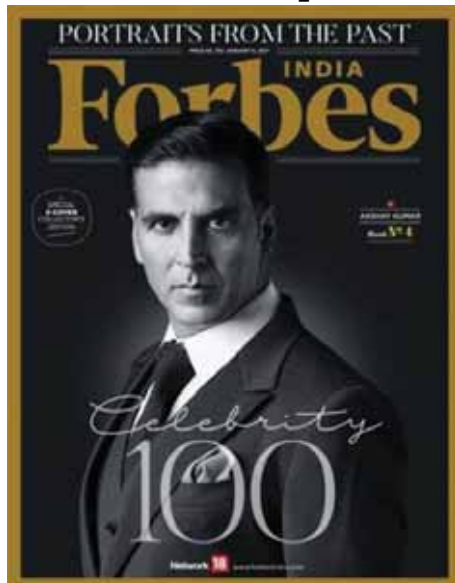
(Agencies) Actor Aamir Khan's upcoming film "Dangal" will not be released in Pakistan, contrary to some media reports which said that the movie will have a theatrical screening in the neighbouring country. Cinemas in Pakistan on Monday began screening Indian movies, over two months after film exhibitors and theatre owners suspended it amidst Indo-Pak tensions following the Uri terror attack and cross-border firing incidents. The cinema owners across Pakistan have suffered about Rs 150 million loss and some 100 employees lost their jobs since the non-screening of Indian movies, an official had earlier said. There were reports that Aamir's biographical sports-drama will also be released in Pakistan. However, the spokesperson of the distributors of the film has issued a statement and confirmed that "Dangal" will not be releasing in Pakistan and "any news reports to the contrary are false." "Dangal" is based on the life of ace wrestler Mahavir Singh Phogat and the journey of his daughters Geeta and Babita Phogat. The film stars Aamir in the role of Phogat and also features Sakshi Tanwar, Fatima Sana Shaikh, Sanya Malhotra among

Playing Riya in 'Half Girlfriend' was challenging, says Shraddha

(Agencies) Mumbai: As been challenging and so @mohit11481 and it's been Shraddha Kapoor wrapped much fun... Memories, so so special. 80 days. 6 up the shoot for her memories, memories," she states, 3 continents," she upcoming film "Half wrote on Twitter. "It's been wrote. In another post she Girlfriend", an adaptation of amazing with an amazing said, "Living the journey of a Chetan Bhagat's novel of the team. Such awesomely character... Takes so much from same name, the actress says passionate talents coming you and gives you back so much bringing the popular author's together. This beautiful world in return! #RiyaSomani." Directed words to life was a quite of making films," she by Mohit Suri, the upcoming "challenging" task. The 29- continued. The actress also romantic-comedy also stars year-old star, who plays a shared that the film has been Arjun Kapoor. "Half Girlfriend" rich girl Riya Somani in the completed after being shot marks third collaboration film, says it has been an across six states and three between Shraddha and Suri, amazing and special journey continents. "And it's a film they were previously worked for her. "Bringing Chetan wrap on #HalfGirlfriend!!! together in "Aashiqui 2" and Bhagat 's words to life has Hatrick completed with "Ek Villain".



**2016: The Year of Superstar Akshay Kumar
AK climbs two points to reach fourth in Forbes India's Celebrity 100 Index**



International megastar Akshay Kumar has ended the year on a high, with all three of his releases – Airlift, Rustom and Housefull 3 ringing a phenomenal success in the box office, propelling him forward as the 4th ranking celebrity of India (up 2

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spaces from 6th in 2015) according to Forbes India's Celebrity 100 index. The superstar who continues to challenge the rest of the industry's contenders, had made a whopping 203.03 crores in the year - the third highest in the list. Akshay Kumar's presence was not just limited to Bollywood as he rubbed shoulders with some of the biggest Hollywood stars by hosting his friend Will Smith at his Mumbai house, while joining Salma Hayek and Mathew McConaughey at the Global Teachers Awards held in The Atlantis Palm hotel in Dubai . The superstar is currently busy with sci-fi thriller 2.0 in which he co-stars with superstar

Rajinikanth, and Toilet: Ek Prem Katha opposite Bhumi Pednekar. His first release of 2017 is the courtroom dramedy Jolly LL.B 2 releasing worldwide on 10th February 2017. It has been produced by Fox Star Studios. Akshay Kumar's role as the oddball lawyer Jagdishwar Mishra, aka Advocate Jolly, has met with an outstanding response. A small-time, struggling lawyer who moved from Kanpur to the city of Nawabs, Lucknow, to take on the establishment, is set to Inspire and entertain audiences with equal measure! And what's more Jolly LL.B 2 marks the first time Akshay Kumar will perform the role of a lawyer - refreshing to say the least!



Saif on paternity leave till mid-January

(Agencies) Actor Saif Ali Khan will be on paternity leave till mid-January. After which he will resume the shooting of his next film, tentatively titled "Chef". Saif's wife Kareena Kapoor Khan, who gave birth to a boy on December 20 She was discharged from Mumbai's Breach Candy Hospital yesterday. The Bollywood star couple, who got married in 2012, have named their son Taimur Ali Khan Pataudi. Taimur is 36-year-old Kareena's first child with Saif, who already has two children — daughter Sara and

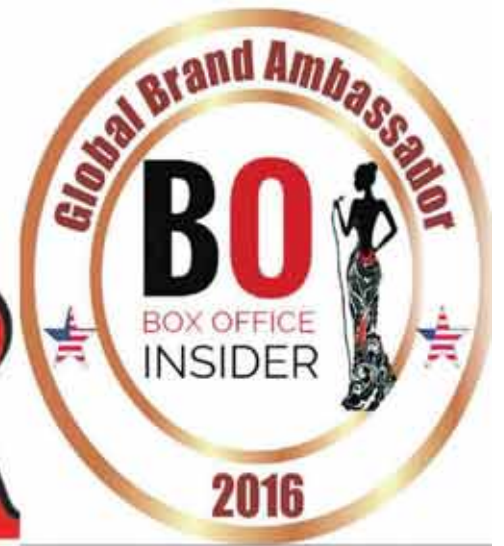
son Ibrahim — from his previous marriage to Amrita Singh. Kareena and her 46-year-old husband Saif yesterday posed with the baby for the shutterbugs at their residence in suburban Bandra. "Saif last shot for the film (re-make of Hollywood movie 'Chef') on December 12. He will resume the shoot by mid January," Director Raja Krishna Menon told PTI. According to Raja, only 20 per cent of the shooting is remaining which will be done abroad.

"I went on a recce to the US and Europe, we will zero-in on the location soon for the last schedule," the "Airlift" helmer said. Raja spoke to Saif after the birth of his son Taimur. "He is very happy and excited. I will try and visit the baby soon," he said. Saif's next release will be Vishal Bhardwaj's "Rangoon", slated to hit the screens in February next year. Kareena, who was last seen in "Udta Punjab", had earlier signed the film "Veere Di Wedding", co-starring Sonam Kapoor and Swara Bhaskar.

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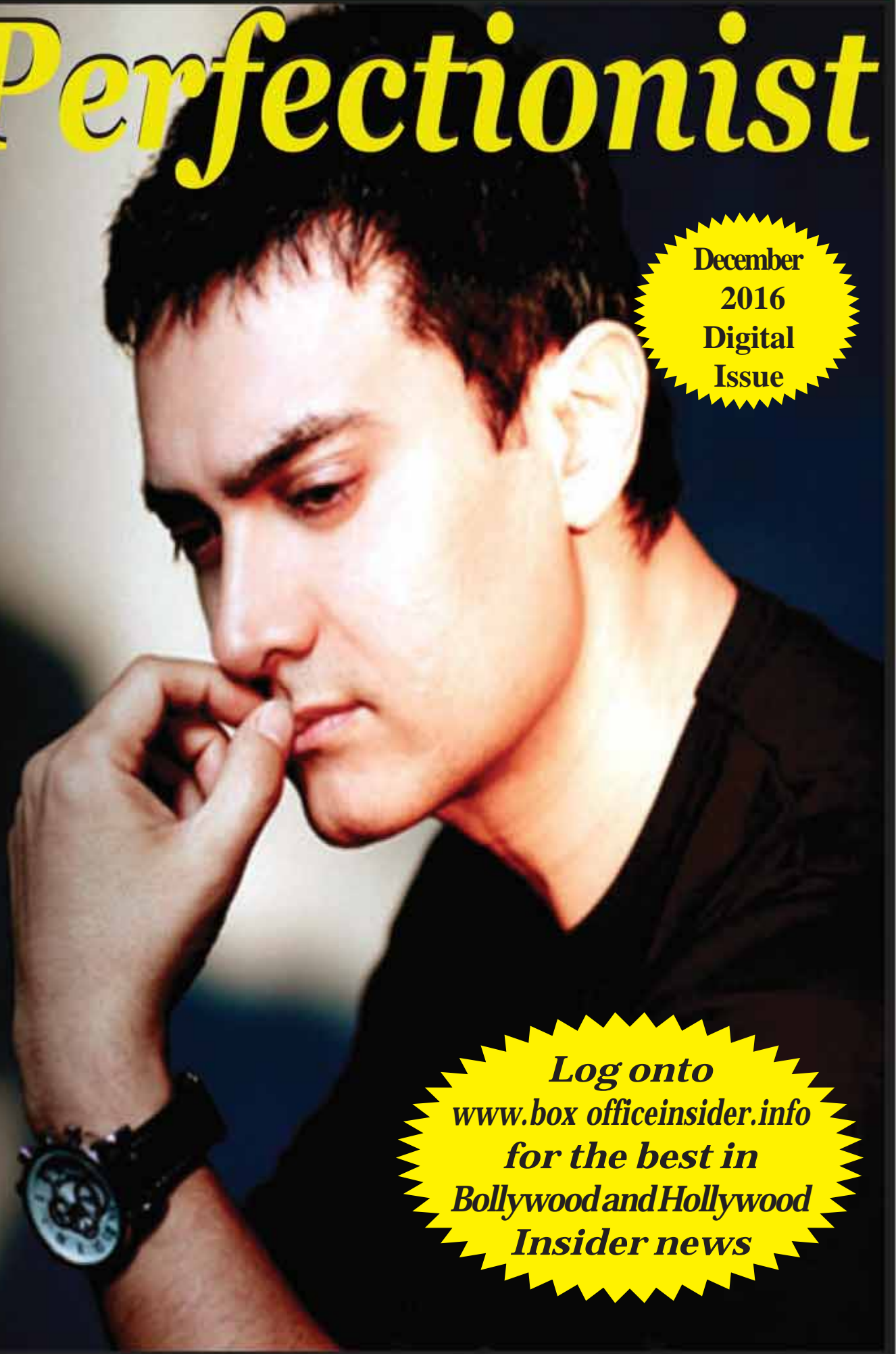
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Mr. Perfectionist

The young man who entered the hindi film industry with Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak, is all set to capture the imagination of millions of his fans worldwide with his new offering "Dangal". Aamir Khan, is a versatile actor, who does everything to get under the skin of the character he plays.



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