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Patna turns Mini-Punjab for Shri Guru Gobind Singh's 350th Birth Anniversary Celebrations



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi offering Prayers during 350th birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Gobind Singh at Gandhi Maidan in Patna.

(Agencies) Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 5 January, partook in the celebrations for the 350th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh at Patna Sahib, the birth place of the 10th Sikh Guru in Bihar. This is the first time that Modi shared the stage with Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who had defeated the Prime Minister in the 2015 Bihar Assembly elections.

Speaking at Patna Sahib, the Prime Minister praised Kumar for personally taking care of the minutest details and organising the celebrations successfully.

He also congratulated Kumar for his 'nasha-mukti abhiyan' or

alcohol ban policy, soon after the Bihar CM made an example of Modi, for carrying out prohibition successfully when he was the CM of Gujarat. Guru Gobind Singh was born on 22 December 1666, and spent the first seven years of his life in Patna. He was anointed the supreme leader of the Sikhs at the age of nine, becoming the last of the living Sikh gurus. Hundreds of devout Sikh NRIs have trooped into Patna for the celebrations and are enthusiastically performing 'seva' or voluntary service.

About 350 members, including 60 women from UK-based Guru Nanak Nishkam

Sevak Jatha have also arrived to offer voluntary service at different community kitchens. The state expects at least 5 lakh devotees, an unprecedented number, to attend the celebrations.

The preparations have been in full swing for the last several months. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar designated top officials to monitor the preparations for the mega celebrations, and the state has announced a three-day holiday during the 'Prakash Parv' at Takht Harmandir Patna Sahib. "Patna to Patna Sahib has turned into a mini Punjab," Patna District Magistrate Sanjay Kumar



Agrawal said. The Bihar capital has transformed into a special tent city with accommodation of every form packed to its brim till 7 January.

Three mega tent cities have been erected at Patna's Gandhi Maidan, Kangan Ghat and the Patna Old bypass.

At least 10 special trains and

300 buses have reportedly ferried over 25,000 devotees from Punjab, free of cost.

Cooks from Amritsar in Punjab have arrived at the historic gurdwara to prepare this special 'prasad' for devotees.

This is one of the largest celebrations of the Sikh guru's birth anniversary.

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नववर्ष की शुभकामनायें
7 जनवरी 2017

माता की चौकी
बैष्णो सेवा समिति द्वारा

**माँ भगवती की चौकी पर आप
सभी परिवार इष्ट मित्रों सहित
सादर आमंत्रित है**

शनिवार 7 जनवरी 2017 शाम 6:00 से 9:00 बजे तक
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Raj Shah, appointed Deputy Assistant to the President Trump



(Agencies) Washington : US President-elect Donald Trump on Wednesday appointed young Indian-American Raj Shah, who played a leading role in the Republican party's anti-Clinton campaign during polls, to a key White House position. Shah, whose parents immigrated to the US from Gujarat, has been appointed as Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy Communication Director

and Research Director, as per an announcement made by the Presidential Transition Team. Shah, who is in his early 30s, is currently head of Opposition Research in the Republican National Committee. In this position, he led a team of experts to carry out research against Hillary Clinton, the Democratic presidential candidate. Shah was behind all

the anti-Clinton campaign during the presidential elections. The announcement of Shah's appointment to this key White House position was made by incoming White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus along with other appointments. "These individuals will be key leaders in helping to implement the President elect's agenda and bring real change to

Washington," Priebus said. A second generation Indian American, Shah's parents are from Mumbai having origins from Gujarat. First his father came to the US for studies in 1970s then moved back to India. But after marriage his father and mother moved back to the US in late 70s. They lived in Chicago and then moved to Connecticut, where he was born and raised.

Indian Americans Gain Milestone as Four Members Sworn in to U.S. House of Representatives



(By a staff reporter) Washington, DC – Four Indian American members of the House of Representatives and the first Indian American Senator were sworn in to the 115th Congress of the United States, not only exceeding the number of Indian Americans ever elected to Congress, but quadrupling the community's representation in the House. "This milestone is not only a proud moment for Indian Americans, it's a proud moment for all Americans," said Rep. Ami Bera of California's 7th Congressional District. person's gender, race, or sexual orientation?—will always be side-by-side with my commitment of economic fairness for all."

To prove love, NRI woman becomes part of sex racket

(Agencies) Jaipur: In an urge to prove her love for the man she wanted, a 26-year-old NRI woman became part of an alleged sex racket that later blackmailed at least six persons. The special operation group (SOG) wing of Rajasthan police on Thursday found out about this after the woman's arrest from Kota by the police on charges of extortion and blackmailing.

The arrest came almost a fortnight after the SOG busted a gang in the city involved in blackmailing wealthy people. Two persons were also arrested in this regard. The story of the woman, Ravneet Kaur - born in Hong Kong and residing with her grandmother in Punjab's Faridkot - is nothing short of a film script. "In 2008 she came to India to her native village in Punjab and did a one-year certificate course in investment management. In 2009 she came to Gurgaon and stayed with the family of her friend. In the year 2012 she met a man identified as Rohit Sharma who was pursuing MBA from a



private university where she was doing BBA course. That's when both fell in love," said Karan Sharma, additional superintendent of police, SOG. After completing their courses, they decided to get married but the boy's family was against this relationship as neither of them were earning. "In the interrogation she confessed that rejection by the mother of the boy she loved made her go for easy money. Thus in 2013 she met the kingpin of the sex racket Akshat Sharma who offered her a job of Rs 12,000 per month. That's when she met other gang members," Sharma added. "All these people frequented Akshat's

office. The gang realized that the girl was desperate to earn money by hook or by crook. So in 2014 they sent her to a leading builder in the city. Later the gang threatened the builder and demanded he pay them Rs 1.20 crore, else they will lodge a rape case against him. This was her first deal in which the gang members gave her Rs 30 lakh," Sharma said. Thereafter the gang members hunted for other soft targets varying from doctor, engineer, builders and others. "Since 2014 to February, 2016 when she got married the woman has nearly earned Rs 1 crore plus and was part of blackmailing at least six men," he said.

'I am not sorry, I have not shed a tear': Charleston church shooter Dylann Roof

(Agencies) Dylann Roof's chilling lack of remorse for killing nine black parishioners at a Charleston church in 2015 was laid bare on Wednesday as his prison diary was shared. The 22-year-old is representing himself at the sentencing phase of his highly publicized trial. He was convicted of 33 federal crimes in December and will now either be imprisoned for life or sent to his death.

As prosecutors demanded the latter on Wednesday, they shared excerpts from notes he wrote himself in the weeks after June 17, 2015, when he opened fire on a group of parishioners at Emanuel AME Church.

'I am not sorry, I have not shed a tear for the innocent

people I killed,' he wrote in one harrowing entry.

'I would like to make it crystal clear I do not regret what I did.

'I do feel sorry for the innocent white children forced to live in this sick country and I do feel sorry for the innocent white people that are killed daily at the hands of the lower races. I have shed a tear of self pity for myself.

'I feel pity that I had to do what I did in the first place. I feel pity that I had to give up my life because of a situation that should never have existed,' it continued.

Roof spoke on Wednesday for the first time publicly to demand that the jury throw out any previous suggestions he was mentally unfit.



New US Army regulations let soldiers wear hijabs, turbans and religious beards



(Agencies) The U.S. Army has issued a directive on grooming and appearance regulations that allows observant Sikh men and conservative Muslim women to wear religious head coverings. The policy, announced Tuesday, also permits Sikh soldiers to maintain their beards and female soldiers to wear their hair in dreadlocks.

"The Army has reviewed its policies to ensure soldiers can serve in a manner consistent with their faith so that we can recruit from the broadest pool of America's best," Army Secretary Eric Fanning said in a statement.

"Over the last year, the Army

conducted rigorous evaluation and validation of how commonly requested accommodations would impact force effectiveness," Fanning said. "Our goal has always been to ensure soldier readiness and safety while providing reasonable accommodations for these established and recognized faith practices." Soldiers will still have to submit their requests for brigade-level approval, the Army Times reported.

The directive states that since 2009, the religious accommodation requests received by the Army have mostly

come from soldiers wanting to wear a hijab (Muslim woman's headscarf) or a Sikh patka (turban) with an uncut beard and hair. Soldiers, however, will still be required to wear combat helmets or other protective gear when training or deployment requires it. The changes come after West Point graduate and Bronze Star recipient Capt. Simratpal Singh filed a lawsuit against the Defense Department in 2016. Singh was permitted to wear the beard and turban in the Army until a ban was imposed in the 1980s, according to the Army

Times. "Military experts have always questioned why the U.S. military has restricted Sikhs from serving," said Eric Baxter, Senior Counsel at Becket Law, which acted as co-counsel on Captain Singh's behalf. "Our Army will be stronger and our nation safer with Sikhs serving alongside their fellow Americans."

The military had previously approved other religious head wear. A directive from 2009 states that "a Jewish yarmulke may be worn with the uniform whenever a military cap, hat, or other headgear is not prescribed."

Rockefeller Foundation Picks Rajiv J. Shah, as President



for the post.

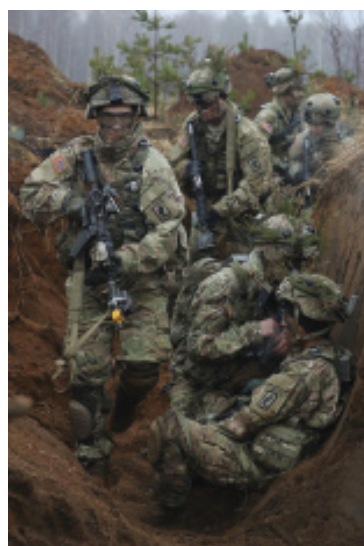
He got the job. On Thursday, the Rockefeller Foundation, one of the country's largest and most influential philanthropies, will name Mr. Shah to succeed Judith Rodin, who has been president for 12 years.

The appointment will make Mr. Shah one of the most powerful forces in charitable giving, overseeing a foundation that donates roughly \$200 million each year and corrals governments, companies and organizations to contribute money and resources in tandem.

At 43, Mr. Shah will be the youngest person and the first Indian-American to lead the Rockefeller Foundation, which has gained stature in recent years through some prominent projects but has sometimes been criticized as being more interested in its publicity than its grantees. Founded in 1913 by the oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller, the foundation says it has given away the equivalent of more than \$17 billion in today's dollars. Its first grant was to the American Red Cross, and it went on to play pivotal roles in establishing the field of public health, creating vaccines for yellow fever and malaria, and bringing agricultural advances to the developing world.

(Agencies) Rajiv J. Shah, a trustee of the Rockefeller Foundation, was asked about six months ago to join the committee that would select the foundation's next president. He said no. Instead, Mr. Shah, who until recently had been the administrator of the United States Agency for International Development, ultimately said he wanted to be considered

US sends elite commandos to the border of Russia



(Agencies) The United States has deployed dozens of special forces troops to the Baltic region in recent months in a bid to lift the morale of anxious European allies who are suspicious of Russia, it was learned on Wednesday. The Americans are

eager to help the small armies of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia repel any possible threat from their neighbor to the east. The Baltic countries have grown increasingly nervous over President-elect Donald Trump's stated intentions to improve relations with Russia, The New York Times reported. That is why the US and NATO allies plan to deploy battalions that number between 800 and 1,200 to each of the three Baltic countries and Poland by the spring.

Federal bribery trial for Harendra Singh indefinitely delayed



(Agencies) The federal trial of the once prominent Long Island restaurateur Harendra Singh, which was scheduled for jury selection Monday, has been delayed indefinitely, according to court records, the judge's clerk, and sources. Singh has been negotiating a plea deal to be a key witness in Eastern District prosecutors' corruption case on Long Island against Nassau County Executive Edward Mangano, his.



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Americans want Trump to focus on jobs



important for them to hear the president-elect talk about bringing back manufacturing jobs from other countries during his inaugural address.

Another 28 percent said it was somewhat important for him to speak to that issue.

A near-majority, 48 percent, also said they thought it was very important for him to talk about keeping manufacturing jobs in the United States, with 27 percent rating that somewhat important.

Those priorities they expected to be answered with 46 percent saying they thought it very likely the subject of bringing jobs back would end up in his January 20 speech. Another 30 percent said it was somewhat likely the topic would come up. Additionally, 45 percent said it was very likely he'd talk about keeping those jobs within U.S. borders, with another 32 percent said it was

(Agencies) Voters want to hear Donald Trump talk about jobs – and expect him to do just that, in his forthcoming inaugural address.

They also believe that more traditional methods of communications, including speeches, television appearances and press releases, are more effective than

using Twitter and Facebook, a new poll shows.

Morning Consult and Politico interviewed 2,000 registered voters and asked them which campaign talking points Trump should pursue once he enters office – and how he should communicate his priorities to the public. Forty-seven percent of respondents said it was very

The percent of registered voters who found this communications method to be 'very effective'

Presidential speeches	45%
Press releases or official statements	41%
Network or cable news appearances	32%
Daily press briefings	31%
Interviews with TV journalists	30%
Interviews with print journalists	26%
Facebook	18%
Twitter	17%
Appearances on late night or daytime talk shows	15%

somewhat likely he would make that point during his address. 'It's no surprise that Americans want Trump to focus on jobs in

his inauguration speech,' said Morning Consult Chief Researcher and Co-founder Kyle Dropp to Politico.

The US could be vastly different a year from now. Here's how

(Agencies) Every administration tries to reshape American policy to reflect its ideals. But the discrepancy between outgoing president Barack Obama and president-elect Donald Trump is especially stark.

From health insurance access to abortion rights, Trump and his cabinet nominees proffer the opposite of the progressive stance that has defined the last eight years in this country.

And with a Republican-controlled House and Senate, it's possible that our new chief executive could make real headway rolling back Obama's agenda. Next year at this time, America could look very different than it does today. Here are some issues that could be in the crosshairs.

A year from now, the US supreme court will probably look like ... it has since Samuel Alito replaced



Sandra Day O'Connor in 2006. Antonin Scalia's vacant seat will be filled by a justice very comparable to Scalia, and on

most politically important issues Anthony Kennedy will be the swing vote. This means a court that is generally conservative but

liberal on a few key issues. This is a tragic missed opportunity for the Democratic party, who lost its chance to have

a Democratic-majority court for the first time since early in the Nixon administration. But Donald Trump will not immediately be able to transform the court upon taking office.

Still, with three justices who are approaching or have already passed their 80th birthday, the possibility of a second Trump appointment is very real right now. And since the oldest justices on the court are the liberals Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer and the moderate conservative Kennedy, a second Trump nomination would be mean a major lurch to the right that would just start with the destruction of Roe v Wade. Electing Trump might mean a holding pattern for the supreme court, or it may mean a majority dedicated to rolling back civil rights and liberties entrenched on the bench for decades.

Assange says a 14-year-old could have hacked Democratic

(Agencies) Wikileaks founder Julian Assange has said a 14-year-old could have hacked into the emails of Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman.

John Podesta's emails were made public by the whistleblowing website and proved to be a hammer blow to the Democrat's election campaign as she lost out to Trump. In an interview, Assange revealed the campaign chairman's password was 'password' and that he had responded to phishing emails.

The Wikileaks founder said he was 1,000 percent confident the Russians did not hack the Clinton campaign, adding Barack Obama was 'trying to delegitimize the Trump administration'.

'A 14-year-old kid could have hacked Podesta that way,' Assange told Sean Hannity on Fox News.

He added Clinton made 'almost no attempt' to secure her private emails, which featured in more than 50,000 leaked documents published by Wikileaks. Assange, who was

interviewed at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, also said he questioned whether US media outlets would have done the same.

'It's more like, "You rub my back, I'll rub yours. I'll give you information, you'll come to my – I'll invite you to my child's christening or my next big party",' he said in the interview, referring to the Clinton party's relationship with reporters. President-elect Trump reacted to the news by tweeting: 'Julian Assange said "a 14-year-old could have



hacked Podesta" - why was DNC so careless? Also said Russians did not give him the info!

This whole thing is a scam'

Skeptics claim video of two-year-old saving his brother

(Agencies) The Herculean strength of a toddler who saved his brother when he got trapped under a toppled dresser swept the internet earlier this week. But some skeptics have cast doubt over the astonishing feat which was

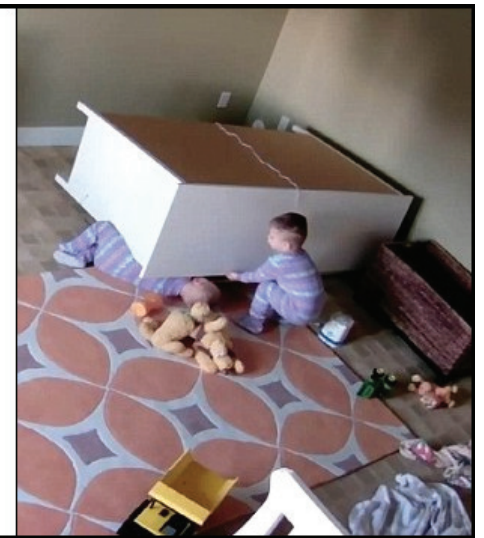
caught on the boys' nanny cam, claiming it was all too conveniently set up. Empty dresser drawers, the absence of adults and the fact the camera was pointed squarely on the piece of furniture have prompted critics to label it a stunt.

Neither Brock or Bowdy Shoff, the twin toddlers, were harmed when the dresser fell on to them as they played at their Utah home.

Bowdy was able to wriggle free from the furniture but Brock became trapped beneath it. For seconds, his twin brother surveyed the situation before using all his strength to lift it high enough for Brock to break free. The boys' parents shared footage of the incredible moment online as they pleaded for other families to be more aware of their children's safety. Among the four million people to have viewed the clip, some have cast doubt over its authenticity.

They said the fact the boys' father Ricky works for a home-monitoring firm proves the family is being dishonest. 'This whole thing is a scam. The father works for the video company,' said one naysayer.

Others said it was suspicious neither of the children's parents heard the furniture fall. 'HOAX! Come on



© youtube/Kayli Shoff

people, nothing in the drawers! Dad works for Cam company! Cam facing wrong direction! No one comes right away! FRAUD. 15 minutes of fame,' said another. The children's parents have insisted it was not a stunt, telling CNN it was pure coincidence they were able

to capture it on camera. 'It's ironic that it actually worked at my house that we caught something like that,' Mr Shoff said. Full of praise for his son, he added: 'He's pretty tough, he's a strong kid but we think there was a little bit of extra help in there.'

Mrs Shoff said she ran to the boys' room when she looked at her phone, which had a live feed of their nanny cam up, to see the dresser had fallen down. 'I run downstairs, fling open the door, I had heard nothing...I just opened the door and they're quietly playing in their room in the corner.'



Obamacare wars: Trump calls it 'disaster' courtesy of Democratic 'clowns'

(Agencies) President-elect Donald Trump urged Republicans to blame Democrats for the 'mess' of Obamacare, while President Obama counseled Democrats not to 'rescue' Republicans by signing on to replacement efforts once Republicans go through with their plan to repeal Obama's signature proposal.

The countercharges in the rekindled Obamacare wars came as Republicans are planning an immediate attack on the law through executive actions and an early legislative push.

Obama went to the Capitol to meet with Congressional Democrats to plot strategy in an effort to prevent his achievement from getting dismantled – a victory Democrats won only at great cost, including with the loss of their congressional majorities.

The president told Democrats not to 'rescue' Republicans by joining their effort to passing replacement measures, amid GOP efforts to court some conservative Democrats.

He pointed to the post-Obamacare Tea Party revolution, and even urged his party to try to brand Republican-

backed changes as 'Trumpcare' as a rhetorical way to saddle the opposition party with responsibility for what ensues, CNN reported.

Asked by reporters what he said on his way out of the closed door meeting, Obama said only, 'Look out for the American people.' White House press secretary Josh Earnest said Obama said he felt 'envy' for those who have the opportunity to 'keep up the fight' as he prepares to decamp the White House for a rented home in Northwest Washington. Republicans, who caucused with the Vice President-elect Mike Pence on Wednesday, are forging ahead with their plan to repeal the law – with Trump planning swift executive actions on the day he takes office. The new Senate Democratic leader, Charles Schumer, warned that the GOP's new plan would lead to 'chaos' and mocked Trump's campaign slogan with a sarcastic response, saying Republicans would 'Make America Sick Again.'

Trump kicked off the dustup when he provided political advice to Republicans via Twitter Wednesday morning.



Why Bengaluru's Men Felt Entitled To Molest Women That Night

Revathy Ashok

December 31, 2016 will go down in the memories of Bangaloreans as a very sad day to be remembered for all the wrong reasons. A city that always prided itself on being bold, progressive and safe for women proved to be a nightmare. On New Year's Eve, over 2 lakh people took the Metro and thousands of people converged on MG Road and Brigade Road. 1,500 policemen were deployed. Over the last two years, the police had done an exceptional job in keeping miscreants under check with elaborate bandobast in all key areas. The police and citizens prided themselves in celebrating New Year's Eve safely, year after year.

So what went wrong this time? Were we lulled into complacency? The horrific events of December 31 raise many questions:

Why were there last-minute senior-level changes in the police administration coinciding with New Year? Pravin Sood took over as the city's new police chief on January 1. Did this lead to any lapses during handover at a very critical time? Why were senior police officers not to be seen anywhere?

What safety mechanisms were deployed? Where was the smart use of technology in warding off potential trouble through CCTVs or camera drones monitoring ground action?

Police preparedness on various fronts, citizen awareness on Do's and Don'ts - had adequate and complete information been shared?

More importantly, if there are thousands of people in one location on a happy occasion, yet women cannot be safe, what is wrong with our society? When can women feel safe? Can we feel safe at all in public spaces?

This brings us to safety in public spaces, and what people pass off all too lightly as "eve-teasing" as a serious offence amounting to sexual harassment and the role of bystanders and whether or not they intervened. We have always felt that there is safety in numbers. So what went wrong? Is there a sense of anonymity that creeps in on a crowded day when hooligans, stalkers, molesters feel that that they can get away with it? What was the role of the police who had deployed 1,500 personnel?

What gives people the licence to misbehave and resort to "mass molestation" with impunity? Disinhibition under the influence of alcohol, mob mania which quickly transcends reason

and norms of decency, potential for anonymity in large crowds, no consequences of abhorrent actions, lackadaisical law enforcement - all these combined in Bengaluru for extreme deviant behaviour.

Given the strength of the police force deployed that evening, and their apparent helplessness, was this a planned attack by groups of people looking to create trouble? If yes, how is it that the police did not have the requisite intelligence on this attack? If not, and it was spontaneous, what prevented the police from responding swiftly before the situation got out of hand?

This leads me to the next logical question, do we really believe that "eve-teasing" is a big offence? In spite of the relatively recent 2013 amendments to the Indian Penal Code where Section 154 seeks to have a wide ambit of actions classified as sexual harassment including any unwelcome gestures or advances such as touching, groping, flashing, passing lewd remarks etc. attracting stiff

punishment, somehow this particular topic is still not taken very seriously in India.

For years, women have endured groping and flashing in crowded place, in buses, ticket queues, and have suffered in silence. Even our popular subculture reflected through the lens of Bollywood cinema, has, over the years, glorified eve-teasing by the hero as an acceptable way of serenading the heroine. Possibly the Indian psyche does not consider eve-teasing as sexual harassment - which it absolutely is - and an invasion of woman's right to privacy. It is possible that this subconsciously encourages or seemingly justifies unwanted advances in the minds of the perpetrators and tends to be either ignored or not given due importance by the police or any law enforcement agency. It is the first sign of such behavior that needs to be severely dealt with a firm hand without waiting for a Nirbhaya-type incident to take place. Instead of being apologetic, the heavy-handed and dismissive responses from senior



politicians stating "Youngsters who are almost like Westerners, they try to copy the Westerners not only in the mindset, but even the dressing" or "What were these women doing out post 10 pm?" etc only goes to show the patriarchal nature of society and compound the issue. The victim as usual is made the accused and made to feel guilty.

It is good that the media has covered the public outrage on the events of 31st December, but the real deterrent will be if the media relentlessly follows this news till the offenders are convicted. It is not the severity of punishment alone but also the certainty of punishment and the swiftness with which the police

file charges and courts dispense justice that will prove to be a deterrent to such bad social behaviour.

If the police failed that night, citizens could have been good samaritans and come to the rescue of women if they had not been mere passive onlookers. It was our collective failure as a society to protect women in public spaces and we need to reflect on this.

Candlelight vigils and pink chaddi campaigns are symbolic gestures; we require much more purposive and decisive action which is preventive. Without that, we will see history repeating itself year after year with worse consequences...

Could an Embassy in Jerusalem Bring Us Closer to Peace?

By Martin Indyk

As President-elect Donald J. Trump prepares to assume office, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been forced onto his agenda by President Obama's decision to have the United States abstain on United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334, which condemned Israeli settlements.

Mr. Trump has repeatedly declared his desire to make peace between Israelis and Palestinians, saying he viewed it as the "ultimate deal." But he has also pledged to do something that will most likely impede brokering such a settlement: move the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Israel considers undivided Jerusalem its capital, but its eastern half is treated by most of the world, including the United States, as occupied territory.

Moving the embassy has been promised before by winning presidential candidates, but abandoned once they entered office and came to understand its complexity and the extreme reactions it would provoke. It looks as though the Trump White House could be different. Mr. Trump's pick as ambassador to Israel, David M.



Friedman, has said that he looks forward to officially recognizing Jerusalem as "Israel's eternal capital."

It might seem that these two desires — to cut the "ultimate deal" and to move the embassy — contradict each other. Indeed, recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital could be disastrous. But it doesn't have to be. In fact, Mr. Trump could both fulfill his pledge and move the Israeli-Palestinian peace process forward if he plays his cards right.

In previous peace talks, negotiations over the status of Jerusalem have been left for last, when progress on the other, less contentious issues might have made each side more amenable to accepting the legitimacy of the other side's aspirations in the

holy city. The new president, who seems attracted to disruption, can break this rule, using the embassy move to jump-start the moribund peace negotiations and deal with the thorniest issue first.

Jerusalem is contentious because Israelis and Palestinians deny one another's claims in the city. Both sides demand sovereignty over the area in the Old City known as the Temple Mount to Jews, and the Haram al-Sharif to Arabs. The Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third-holiest site, stands there atop the ruins of Judaism's holiest of holies. Similarly, some 300,000 Israelis now live in areas of Jerusalem that Israel captured and annexed in the 1967 war. But the Palestinians view East Jerusalem as occupied territory

and claim it, with its approximately 300,000 Arab residents, for the capital of their state.

Despite these zero-sum assertions, a rational compromise isn't difficult to envision.

The undivided city could become the shared capital of the two states with Jewish suburbs under Israeli sovereignty and Arab suburbs under Palestinian sovereignty, an idea advanced both by President Bill Clinton in his last days in office and by Secretary of State John Kerry in his speech last week outlining his principles for a peace settlement. The area bounded by the walls of the Old City, meanwhile, could be administered by a special regime that maintained the religious status quo and ensured that the three religious authorities continued to administer their respective holy sites, an idea supported by President George W. Bush during negotiations between Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel and the president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas. Such rational compromises have, to date, not proven acceptable to either side. (Contd on page 25)

Republicans Are Courting Disaster on Health Care

And so it begins. After six years of posturing and futile votes to repeal the Affordable Care Act, Republicans in the Senate have started a process to erase the most important provisions of the health reform law with a simple majority. Millions of Americans are at risk of losing their coverage.

Republican opponents of the health care law insist that it has failed, though it has reduced the number of uninsured Americans to the lowest level in history. They say that it has driven up costs, though health care costs have risen at a much slower pace since 2010 than they did in years past. And opponents promise they will somehow make health care cheaper and more readily available, though after all these years of reviling Obamacare they have yet to offer any serious alternative. The reality is that the repeal-at-all-costs crowd is ideologically opposed to any government role in the health care system, though every other advanced economy in the world has embraced some form of government intervention as the only way to manage costs and ensure universal access.

With a narrow 52-to-48 majority in the Senate, Republicans are seeking to evade a Democratic filibuster by instructing congressional committees to draft a budget reconciliation bill to effectively repeal the tax and spending provisions of the A.C.A., gutting the law and increasing the deficit. The House is expected to easily pass a repeal of the A.C.A., since it has already done so dozens of times. It should perhaps come as no surprise that zealots would resort to using a budgetary maneuver to fundamentally change national policy. But it is still galling, especially because the Republicans have put forward no coherent plan for what would replace the A.C.A. To cope with that rather glaring omission, leaders like the House speaker, Paul Ryan, and Vice President-elect Mike Pence have discussed repealing the law but then delaying its end — claiming political victory while leaving Mr. Obama's plan largely in place — to give Congress and the Trump administration more time to come up with a replacement.

This is cynical politics, of course, but it is also dangerously irresponsible governance. Most experts and much of the health industry — including trade associations representing insurers, hospitals and doctors — have warned that repealing the law without an adequate substitute could be disastrous. Health insurers that see no long-term future for the law will have little incentive to keep offering plans that it would support. And the health insurance marketplaces set up by the A.C.A. will collapse in much of the country if Republicans repeal the individual mandate to purchase health insurance and get rid of or scale back the subsidies available to help people buy policies.

President Obama and congressional Democrats met on Wednesday to discuss how best to protect the A.C.A. They might start by making the case that Mr. Obama has never quite managed to make for the benefits of the law and the dangers of repeal. In particular, they might highlight the stories of the millions of people who voted for Donald Trump and congressional Republicans and now stand to lose their health insurance. A recent Urban Institute study estimated that 956,000 people in Pennsylvania and one million each in Georgia and North Carolina could lose coverage under a repeal done through a reconciliation bill. Most of them are among the very population Mr. Trump said he was running to give a voice to — nationally, 56 percent of those who would lose coverage are white, and 80 percent of adults who would lose insurance have less than a college degree.

The best hope for protecting the major provisions of the A.C.A. rests with the handful of Republicans in the Senate who hold more common-sense views than right-wing ideologues like Mr. Ryan and Mr. Pence. They include: Susan Collins of Maine, who voted against a similar reconciliation bill the Senate passed in 2015 because it would also have defunded Planned Parenthood; Bob Corker and Lamar Alexander, both of Tennessee, who have said they would prefer to repeal once they can replace it with something else; John McCain of Arizona, who told reporters on Tuesday that “we’ve got to concentrate our efforts to making sure that we do it right so that nobody’s left out”; and Rand Paul of Kentucky, who is concerned that repeal will greatly increase the federal debt.

Republican leaders in Congress and Mr. Trump seem eager to show that they can quickly deliver on their campaign promises. If the good of the country is not enough to give them pause, then they might consult their own political self-interest before stampeding to enact policies that will hurt so many Americans.

BJP against the rest

Like the general election, the battle in assembly polls is between regional titans and the prime minister's appeal.

State elections have a logic of their own and rarely follow any national pattern. The five states that go to polls beginning February 5, have dissimilar political histories and voter concerns. However, the outcomes are likely to influence the national discourse and the political fortunes of the two national parties, the Congress and the BJP. A third party, the AAP, has invested heavily in two states that head to polls on February 5 — Goa and Punjab. A good show could energise the party to present itself as a national alternative to the BJP and the Congress, a project it launched in the 2014 general election with disastrous results.

The crucial state, of course, is UP, where the BJP is eyeing office after 14 years. At his Lucknow rally on Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked voters to trust him and sought an absolute majority for the BJP. In the 2014 general election, the BJP won 71 of the 80 Lok Sabha seats with over 40 per cent votes. That election was fought as a vote for Modi as PM. Voters differentiate between elections and local factors have a significant influence on assembly election outcomes. The fragmented anti-BJP political space in UP and the presidential-style pitch of the Modi campaign helped the BJP in 2014. The political space remains fragmented, but it may not be sufficient to turn the tide in the BJP's favour. In fact, a leader-centric campaign could work to the advantage of its primary rivals, the Samajwadi Party and the BSP, which have charismatic chief ministerial candidates and strong organisational network. The challenges are different in Goa and Punjab, where the BJP will need to defend its record in government; the AAP is the unknown variable in these states and is likely to decide the outcome. Uttarakhand and Manipur, where the Congress holds office, will see the party face-off with the BJP. The Congress has been on a losing wicket since its 2014 debacle. The party needs to do well in this round of elections to reaffirm its position as one of the poles of the national polity.

Modi's campaign style is a throwback to Indira Gandhi, when the Congress sought votes in the party supremo's name. In the absence of strong regional leaders in the poll-bound states, the BJP may also be forced to fall back on the charisma of the prime minister. If so, the poll campaign could also turn out to be a referendum on the record of the Narendra Modi government. Topping the list of agendas then could be Modi's radical initiative to demonetise high value currency notes. The repercussions of the move are still unfolding. The notebandi initiative is identified with Modi and a debate on it could turn the contest into a battle between the prime minister and the regional challengers.



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Akhilesh Yadav's Hostile Takeover Of His Party

Swati Chaturvedi

After Akhilesh Yadav's coup against Netaji and Pitaji Mulayam Singh Yadav, songs from the movie "Sultan" were blaring all over Lucknow as delirious youth danced to "Tipu Bhaiyya" being crowned Sultan. The song that they should have been playing was Queen's "I want to break free" - Akhilesh Yadav's favourite song. The most significant fact however, remains that while Mulayam acted swiftly against Ram Gopal Yadav and expelled him for the umpteenth time from the Samajwadi Party, officially, he has neither removed Akhilesh Yadav nor said a word against him. That tells quite a story which will take a while to unfold and impact the mother of all election battles - the Uttar Pradesh election slated to be held in February or March.

Yadav Junior has broken free from the stranglehold of five and a half uncles and his bete noire, Amar Singh, who he used to derisively call "Shakuni Uncle" for the amount of trouble he creates within families. Yadav Junior anointed himself national President of the Samajwadi Party and consigned its founder to the "Margdarshak Mandal" in a case of LK Advani. Akhilesh's public show of strength with nearly 80 percent of the party's MLAs supporting him caused dismay in the trio of Shivpal Yadav, Aparna Yadav, Sadhana Gupta who were on constant calls with Amar Singh, who has departed London for India.

Interestingly, Samajwadi strongman Azam Khan who loathes Amar Singh had brokered a truce between father and son amidst much melodrama with tears and shayri on both sides. Sources say that Mulayam Singh even told Azam Khan that he was proud of Tipu's popularity, which seems to indicate that he knows that today, his son is more popular than him and that this cuts across the traditional Yadav vote-bank, the mainstay of the party. It's still unclear what changed after the truce, but Mulayam brought this fate upon himself. Initially, Akhilesh did not want to replace his father; he wanted Amar Singh's head and Shivpal Yadav to be cut to size with no say in ticket distribution. In the parallel ticket list issued by Akhilesh, politically ambitious sister-in-law Aparna also did not find a place.

In true Mahabharata style, Sadhana, Mulayam Singh's second wife, who Yadav Junior once allegedly slapped and for which he was banished

from the house, prevailed on the 77-year-old Netaji to go back on the truce as she saw power ebbing from her side of the family. Thus, Ram Gopal Yadav was expelled again.

The on-going soap opera indicates four things:

1) A generational change has happened in the Samajwadi Party as Akhilesh emerges as the supreme leader in an identical parallel with Sasikala Natarajan in Tamil Nadu. While Netaji has issued letters declaring today's convention invalid and expelling Ram Gopal for the second time and finally calling him an agent of the BJP, with legislators firmly backing his son, all this is moot.

2) Akhilesh Yadav and Mulayam Singh both plan to approach the Election Commission over the SP name and symbol but sources close to Akhilesh say that his camp is not fussed as an alternate name and the symbol of a tree are ready. Said a loyalist, "Maan lijeje Netaji koh naam or symbol mil jaye toh kya hua? Cadre toh

Tipu bhaiyya kei saath hai. Netaji sirf Amit Shah ki madad kar rahe hain. Voter sab milli bhagat samjata hai" (Even if Netaji gets the SP name and symbol so what? The SP cadre is with Tipu. Netaji is only helping Amit Shah. The voters understand everything).

3) Akhilesh's takeover has cleared the way for an alliance with the Congress and Ajit Singh's RLD in what can be only be described as a "mini gatbandhan". Yadav, however, will deal directly with Congress Vice-President Rahul Gandhi and will not brook any interference from any middlemen. This is likely to happen sooner rather than later.

4) Akhilesh has been planning this shrewd move for a while. The 24x7 advertisement campaign he has been running across all media showcases himself and his nuclear family of wife Dimple and kids and highlights the "developmental work" he has done as Chief Minister. He calls all of UP his family in what is quite a snub to his real

family who find no mention. Yadav Junior wants to emphasise Brand Akhilesh as a mascot for "governance" and "yuva peedhi" (new generation) and focus less on his second name. He realises that the SP will need to widen its voter base and appeal to a cross-section of voters. His tenure as Chief Minister has ensured that he has total name recall all over UP and at every chai shop, groups gather and express sympathy for the hard done by bhaiyya. Mulayam by his actions has already ensured that public sympathy is with the "dutiful son". The SP cadre is confused and torn between father and son but most say that Mulayam, who by making Akhilesh Chief Minister had passed on the baton, is trying to snatch it back which is quite distasteful.

So what happens next?

Mulayam is slated to come to Delhi on Monday where he will meet his consigliere Amar Singh, who is his main conduit to the BJP. It may be recalled that even

after his expulsion from the SP, when Singh had an organ transplant in Singapore, Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, then in the opposition, and his friend, India TV owner Rajat Sharma had taken a chartered flight to see Singh. Singh's links to the BJP are deep and abiding. He has always been Mulayam's link to other parties, Bollywood and big business.

Other parties who are in the UP fray are quite delighted at the Yadav wars. Amar Singh's NBF Amit Shah scents an opportunity, despite the demonetisation voter disenchantment, and so does Mayawati.

The Congress is happy that it can remain relevant by allying with the Yadav Junior faction. But, says a BSP leader with acuity, "Mulayam is pehelwan (wrestler), while Junior plays cricket. Hardly any rules apply in wrestling so this could even be a pehelwan's way of anointing his son while ensuring his extended and second family is appeased." Noora Kushti (fixed fight), anyone?

Modi Rings In 2017 With New Set Of Falsehoods

Mahua Moitra

The Honourable Prime Minister's address to the nation on New Year's Eve adhered to his usual style - it was full of sound and fury and signified absolutely nothing. Rather, it heralded in a new low in the affairs of the nation. At the end of the promised 50-day period of state-inflicted abrogation of constitutional rights on the vast majority of innocent law-abiding Indians, the PM chose to ring out the old and ring in a new set of falsehoods.

It is necessary to strip off the cloak of verity Modiji seems to be clothing himself in even at the risk of abuse and invective by the ever-vigilant army of trolls, the vanar sena of the social media (for whom the essence of democracy lies not only in their being entitled to their own opinion, but more important, to their own facts). Quite like the disrobing of the fabled emperor's new clothes that required a child to publicly counter with fact an oft-repeated lie masquerading as truth. It is indeed an unfortunate day when the man holding the highest elected office in the land also chooses to propound his own brand of "sachai" based not on fact or accountability, but on rhetoric, empty promise and

repackaged half-truths.

Fifty days on from November 8th, the Prime Minister applauded his "pyaare deshwasiyon" for joining him in the fight against the three stated evils of corruption, black money and counterfeit currency. Laughably, he even invoked parallels with the border wars of 1962, 1965 and 1971. Apparently the lack of widespread popular revolt against his government was sufficient proof of unflinching support for this undemocratic and constitutionally invalid move! Did no one beat up a bank manager? Did no one set fire to an ATM machine or a bank branch? Did no one lay siege to the residence of the Finance Minister, the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India or even the Prime Minister? No, no one at all. Their basic law-abiding instincts, their inherent patience and resignation to their destiny made every poor farmer and every construction-site worker wait out the queues silently for the 50-day period. The lack of looting, rioting and arson was no evidence of mass support for demonetisation as the mother of all cleansing rituals. It was merely proof of India's forbearance.

Rhetoric aside, the

Prime Minister offered no data, no statistics, no information at all as to what the real benefits had been so far, even using just the three parameters he put out. Just how much had corruption been reduced? What was the quantum of black money unearthed? By what percentage had counterfeiting been reduced? Show us the numbers, Mr. Prime Minister. The nation is still waiting.

In totally unprecedented dark comedy on national television, audiences were treated to the unseating of a Finance Minister on live TV by his own Prime Minister who chose to deliver an impromptu budget speech complete with sector allocations and plans. What made this doubly ironic was that there is no hard evidence to suggest that the Finance Minister had even been consulted on demonetisation in the first place! The RBI stonewalled a legitimate RTI query on whether Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian and Finance Minister Arun Jaitley were consulted before the demonetisation, using the excuse that the query was "in the nature of seeking opinion from the CPIO." However, two former Commissioners of Information,

AN Tiwari and Shailesh Gandhi, both disagreed and pointed out that whether someone was consulted or not was a matter of public record, and was a fact sought by an RTI applicant and could not be termed as an opinion. They were both of the unequivocal view that the Central Public Information Officer of the RBI was completely wrong in rejecting the query. The same RTI query remained unanswered by the Prime Minister's Office and the Finance Ministry even 30 days after its filing.

To crores of farmers who had unwittingly constituted the oblations in Modiji's great demonetisation yagna, he sprung another cruel joke. Rabi sowing, he said, was actually up by 6.9%. The truth is that for the vast majority of Rabi crops in India, the sowing season is from the beginning of October to mid-November. As of November 11, government data shows that Rabi sowing was already up 15.7% on the previous year. This means that the period from November 11 to December 30 actually registered a steep percentage decline in sowing! Rice, whose sowing begins later in mid-November,

(Contd on page 25)

Devotees from America, Europe and China reach Patna, join 'nagar kirtan'

(Agencies) Patna : Thousands Sikh devotees from the across the country and world joined "nagar kirtan" (religious procession) on the streets of Patna on Ghaighat Gurdwara and the Gandhi Maidan tent city. The devotees have come all the way from London, Canada, the US,



Wednesday to commemorate the 350th birth anniversary of the 10th Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Forty-five devotees from a dozen countries have reached Takht Patna Sahib to participate in the celebrations that began with "akhand path" at Australia, China, Mexico, Italy and other countries and were engaged in serving other guests at the "langar", besides cleaning the premises at the gurdwara and tent cities. Around 120 devotees of the Sikh International Congregation from Canada

and the US also reached Patna together. One of them, Sri Singh Sahib Yogi Bhajan said: "It is a pious journey. The journey was made via Amritsar and many would recite shabads at the Guru darbar on January 5," he added. Meanwhile, scores of devotees led by Baba Bhai Sahib Satpal Singh Khalsa of California who also arrived in Patna, said: "We consider ourselves honoured to serve at the Guru darbar. We reached India on December 26 and visited all five Takhts." Jaot Kaur, a yoga teacher in China said: "This is one of the most pleasant trips. I am lucky to be at the mega event. I visited the Guru darbar and felt peace. I think that I will not get this opportunity again in my life." Hanuman Singh, a retired officer with a US security agency said: "No work could be more pious than this. I congratulate the government for the good arrangement. The nature of local people has won many hearts," he said.

UAE about to seize Dawood's assets worth Rs 15,000 crore?

(Agencies) New Delhi : Unconfirmed reports that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) government may have moved to seize assets worth Rs 15,000 crore of Mumbai blasts mastermind Dawood Ibrahim has on its soil set off fevered speculation in political circles. The Indian intelligence and investigative agencies, as well as the ministry of external affairs, insisted that they were unaware of any such development. However, the assertions failed to quell the speculation about the UAE authorities following through on the growing cooperation with India in the field of counterterrorism by moving against the former boss of the Mumbai underworld who has been designated a "global terrorist." There were indications that the reticence may be partly due to a desire to protect the UAE government's sensitivities and considerations of confidentiality.



Punjab riddle still to be answered



(Agencies) Chandigarh: The EC signalled the slog overs of the Punjab elections on Wednesday giving parties just 30 days between now and February 4 when votes will be cast. And despite being in election mode for nearly 12 months now, none of the main players can claim that they have nosed ahead to be in a position to get a majority when votes are counted on March 11. If anything, uncertainty is the central theme of the 15th election in the state since Independence. A special characteristic of this election is that for the first time it is a three-cornered fight, thanks to AAP's popularity here since the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. Of the major players, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and AAP have announced most of their candidates with only a handful seats left undecided. Both parties had expected a rebellion when tickets would be announced and used the extra time on their hands to quell protests and tempers. Surprisingly, the Congress is yet to announce candidates on as many as 40 seats.

VVIP copter scam: Politicians to be focus of CBI probe now

(Agencies) New Delhi : The CBI has now shifted the focus of its investigation into VVIP chopper scam from former Indian Air Force Chief SP Tyagi to the "politicians" who were allegedly identified by the middlemen as crucial for swinging the deal signed under the UPA government. Top CBI sources said they were required to examine those named by the alleged middleman, UK national Christian Michel, in his two notes. "The arrest of former Air chief does not bring the probe to a close. It marks the beginning of the investigation," said a senior source who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "The two notes were taken cognizance of by an Italian court when it convicted Bruno Spagnolini and Guiseppe Orsi, the former bosses of AgustaWestland and its Italy-based parent company Finmeccanica, in April this year for bribing Indian officials in connection with the chopper deal. "The need for investigation require that we view the notes as evidence," said the source,

emphasizing that the notes were acquired through Letter Rogatory which is a judicial process. In one of the notes, Michel described Congress president Sonia Gandhi as the "driving force behind the VIP (choppers), she will no longer fly with MI-8". Besides Gandhi, Michel's note to then India region sales and liaison head of AgustaWestland Peter Hulet suggested that the latter should "target" PM of the time, Manmohan Singh, Pranab Mukherjee, then defence minister and Ahmed Patel, Congress president's political secretary. The other note was headlined "budget expenditure items". Michel dictated it to another middleman Guido Haschke in 2008 when AgustaWestland was seeking to bag the Rs 3767 crore deal for supplying 12 choppers. The 2008 hand-written note, referred to as Michel's only, mentioned acronyms of individuals who were to be allegedly paid bribes totalling 30 million euros. The mentions included "FAM" as



well as 'AP', both being mentioned under a head captioned 'POL' which Italian investigators interpreted as referring to politicians. A senior source said that CBI has not yet accepted conclusion of the Italian investigators that AP was a reference to Congress president's political advisor Ahmed Patel. "We will not go by what others say. This is a subject of investigation", he said, adding that entries by themselves are not conclusive evidence. Ahmed Patel has repeatedly denied that he had any role to play in government's decisions, leave alone deciding who gets defence orders

Poll survey gives BJP clear majority in UP

(Agencies) New Delhi : On a day when Election Commission announced the poll schedule+ for five states, an India Today opinion poll projected clear majority for BJP in Uttar Pradesh.+ Conducted from October and December last year in the politically crucial state, the survey shows Prime Minister Narendra Modi's demonetisation+ move as having a positive impact on BJP's vote-share. Demonetisation was announced on November 8, halfway through the survey period. The survey shows the BJP's vote share increasing from 31% in October (before note ban) to 33% in December. In terms of seats, it projects 206-216 seats for the saffron party in the 403-member UP assembly. In the 2012 assembly election, BJP commanded a 15% vote share and won 47 seats. The ruling Samajwadi Party is



likely to emerge as the second largest party with a vote share of 26%, according to the survey which puts its seat tally at 92-97. Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party is neck-and-neck with SP in terms of vote share, and is projected to win 79-85 seats. This shows that despite repeated reminders of Mayawati asking Muslim voters to shun SP,

it has had little impact as the community remains loyal to the SP even as party remains a divided house.in the state as party is projected to win barely 5-9 seats with only 6% vote share in the state. The other parties in the state — Rashtriya Lok Dal, Apna Dal, the Left and others -might win 7-11 seats. The February-March election will test the popularity of Modi's decision to ban Rs 500 and Rs 1000 notes in India's most populous state. However, chief minister Akhilesh Yadav emerges as a clear choice for the next chief minister with 33% of those surveyed wanting him to return to power. Among choice of CMs among the BJP faces, Rajnath Singh is the most preferred with 20% in his favour. However, Gorakhpur MP, Yogi Adityanath has been second preference with 18% preferring him as chief minister candidate.

EC blows poll bugle in five states, results on March 11



(Agencies) New Delhi : The announcement of poll dates+ for five states — Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur — takes the spiralling battle between BJP and its adversaries into a crucial phase that promises to be a test and an opportunity for PM Narendra Modi to expand and consolidate his power, but could provide a launch pad for the revival of the Opposition should he fail.

The stakes are high for major players BJP and Congress and regional heavyweights like Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party and Akalis as well as ambitious political upstart AAP. The elections coincide with the mid-way mark for the Modi government and a satisfactory performance will provide the PM with the necessary reassurance to persist with his high-risk initiatives in the second half of the term.

97% of scrapped notes deposited with banks as on Dec 30: Report



(Agencies) New Delhi : Nearly 97% of the outlawed Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes has been deposited with banks as on December 30, according to Bloomberg news service.

Quoting two people with knowledge of the matter, Bloomberg said banks had received Rs 14.97 lakh crore by the last date for depositing old cash, adding that the figures were provisional and could be revised. Rs 15.44 lakh crore, representing about 86% of all currency, was declared void on November 8. Reporter had reported on December 28 that about Rs 14 lakh crore, or 90%, of the demonetised currency had been deposited with banks. At the time the decision to demonetise was announced, the view within the government was that roughly Rs 3 lakh crore of the scrapped currency would not come back into the system. There was also a view within a section of the government that this money, once legally extinguished, would constitute windfall gain for the RBI and could be transferred to the Centre as special dividend. Top RBI officials have since said such a transfer would not be possible.

Will step aside for Akhilesh in case of pact with SP: Sheila Dikshit

(Agencies) New Delhi : Congress did not rule out the possibility of an alliance with Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh, with its chief ministerial candidate Sheila Dikshit saying Akhilesh Yadav would be the mascot in case of a tie-up. Soon after the election commission announced poll schedule for five states, Congress said its primary objective was to keep the fascist forces out of power.

Ghulam Nabi Azad, party general secretary in-charge of UP, indicated that Congress was keen on tying up with SP and that the only hindrance was the confusion created by the feud in the Yadav clan. As of now, we are working on the recommendations of the screening committee for (candidates on) all the 403 seats in the



state ...what can happen in future will be known only later ... but there is a lot of pressure on secular parties (for alliance)," he said in Lucknow.

Dikshit stepped in to say that in case of an alliance, Akhilesh was likely to be the face of the joint campaign since he

was young as well as experienced. "If there is an alliance and there are joint efforts, then I would rather step aside as the CM candidate. If SP and Congress work together, there cannot be two faces," she said, with agencies quoting her as saying that she would prefer that the alliance has a young chief ministerial face. She, however, refused to make "assumptions" on which way would the issue of alliance settle, saying she had not been consulted and would abide by the decision of the high command. When told that the party was not denying the possibility, she said, "Nobody is ruling it out but nobody is finalising it." Dikshit said Akhilesh Yadav's public remarks that an alliance with Congress will fetch them over 300 seats alerted her to the possibility.

Sahara gets immunity, tax panel accepts its claim that seized papers not evidence

Sahara diaries: The 50-page order, accessed by The Indian Express, shows that the ITSC had earlier rejected the application of the company and then on September 5, 2016 re-admitted it.

(Agencies) In what could be one of the quickest orders passed by the Income Tax Settlement Commission (ITSC), Sahara India has been granted immunity from prosecution and penalty following raids conducted on November 2014 during which

"diaries" listing alleged pay-offs to politicians were recovered.

Significantly, the ITSC has concurred with Sahara's claim that the "evidentiary value" of the "loose sheets" recovered during the raids "could not be proved" by the Income Tax Department.

The 50-page order, accessed by The Indian Express, shows that the ITSC had earlier rejected the application of the company and then on September 5, 2016 re-admitted it.

After just three hearings, a final order — granting immunity — was passed on November 10, 2016. This was just three days after the last hearing in the case on November 7, 2016.

Usually, the ITSC is given about 18 months to pass final orders and insiders say rarely is an order passed in less than 10-12 months.

The final page of the order states that only Rs 137.58 crore



— which was seized during the raids — will now be taxed, which too can be paid by the company in 12 instalments.

The order mentions that Sahara had claimed it was passing through "difficult times" and wanted to pay the tax and penalty in instalments.

On the very first page of the order, the ITSC mentions that "the applicant's contention is that these are dumb documents written by some disgruntled

employees..."

The evidence discussed by the ITSC at length in the order includes the loose sheets and computer print-outs which form so-called Sahara diaries that have alleged payoffs to over 100 politicians from more than 14 parties. A petition mentioning the Sahara diaries was filed by Prashant Bhushan in the Supreme Court on November 15, 2016 and the next hearing is scheduled for January 11, 2016.

Nitish Kumar to share dais with Narendra Modi in Bihar after 9 months

(Agencies) PATNA: Bihar's ruling JD(U) has deferred plan to review its stand on the Centre's move of demonetisation, as its president and Bihar CM Nitish Kumar is all set to share dais with his arch political rival Narendra Modi on Thursday (January 5) when the PM will visit Bihar capital to participate in the main programme related to 350th birth anniversary of Sikh's tenth

Guru Gobind Singh.

Earlier, the JD(U) had announced that Nitish Kumar would take a final call on the issue of supporting the Centre's decision of demonetisation after completion of 50 days since the note ban or December 30. But after December 30, the JD(U) did not come out with any official statement about its stand on the note ban. Whenever Modi and

Nitish share dais in Bihar, they draw attention of national media because both the leaders had been seen spitting venom against each other during the Bihar assembly elections in October-November, 2015. While Modi, during election campaign, had questioned Nitish's DNA, the JD(U) had launched campaign against Modi accusing him of "giving only false promises to people."

Prashant Kishor disappears from Uttar Pradesh, pops up to help Congress in Uttarakhand polls

(Agencies) Upon realising the importance of poll campaign strategist Prashant Kishor, the Uttarakhand Congress has roped him in to give a final push to its Assembly election campaign. Kishor's last-minute entry — after the announcement of Assembly poll dates on Wednesday and a month ahead of the election in Uttarakhand — has come as a big surprise not only for the state Congress leaders but also for Kishor's I-PAC team. As per the Election Commission's announcement, the Assembly election in Uttarakhand will be held on 15 February for 70 seats.

A close source aware of the recent development told Firstpost, "Kishor had met Uttarakhand chief minister Harish Rawat a day before and everything happened so quickly that it came as a surprise both to the state Congress leaders and I-PAC team members." Kishor, who is regarded as the brain behind the BJP's massive victory in the 2014 General Election and Nitish Kumar's win in Bihar in 2015, was roped in to repeat a Bihar in Uttar Pradesh. However, after a couple of initial reports, Kishor went missing from the scene in the state. The Financial Express reported

in November that post Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi's 'khaat pe charcha' debacle, the Congress cut all ties with Kishor who has been called the Digital Chanakya. Kishor was handpicked for the job by Rahul.

At present, Kishor's I-PAC team members have been working in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. So just why has Rawat brought in Kishor?

According to a source in the Uttarakhand Congress, "Although the state Congress believes it is quite capable of pulling off the election campaign itself, an internal review — with

the chief minister at the helm — identified the need to have Kishor by its side. Besides, there are allegations of corruption against Rawat, and the BJP has been targeting the chief minister on this."

The CBI has already summoned Rawat, asking him to appear before it in connection with a probe into allegations of bribe against him. The investigation agency had registered a preliminary enquiry on 29 April to probe a sting operation that purportedly showed Rawat offering bribes to rebel Congress MLAs to support him during the floor test.

BSP to battle alone in UP, Punjab and Uttarakhand: Mayawati



(Agencies) The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) on Wednesday said it will contest assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Uttarakhand on its

own. BSP chief Mayawati said this was being done so as not to compromise the interests of the Bahujan movement.

She also urged the Election

Commission to tell the central government not to present the annual budget on February 1 and to wait until elections in all five states end on March 8.

The budget announcements could influence the voters and take away the level playing field, the four-time Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh said in a statement. She also demanded a larger presence of paramilitary forces and a tight vigil on the working of state government officials and police force in the states. The Bahujan Samaj Party leader also welcomed the seven-phase polling to the Uttar Pradesh assembly.

Demonetisation blues

Woman becomes topless at RBI gate

(Agencies) Unable to get a few junked currency notes exchanged, a frustrated poor woman became topless in front of RBI regional office in New Delhi on Wednesday.

The woman, who was with her child, was in tears when turned away by guards after repeated request to exchange her junked notes. In protest she sat in front of the RBI entrance gate.

When the guards tried to forcefully



move her away from the entrance, the woman in disgust took off her clothes and sat topless in front of the iron gate, stunning the onlookers as well as the security personnel.

Later, the RBI guards called the police and she along with her kid was bundled away to police station, thus ending the charged drama at the high profile building which is just a stone's throw away from the Parliament House.

Many others including retired and aged persons who have come to exchange their old notes said the government should not go back on the promise made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his November 8 address to the nation that old notes could be exchanged at the select RBI offices till March 31.

Same fictitious name nails two Punjab men in fake passport cases



(Agencies) Two men have been awarded three years' rigorous imprisonment each in separate cases of fake passports bearing same fictitious name by a Delhi court which also slapped a fine of Rs 1 lakh each on them.

While Punjab resident Dalbir Singh was held here after being deported from the UK for using a fake passport and overstaying there under the name of Rajesh Vohra, Jasvender Singh, another native of the state, was held at IGI Airport while trying to travel to Paris with the same fictitious name.

Special CBI judge Pawan Kumar Jain held guilty the two men, who claimed that they were illiterate and were unaware of the fictitious name on their passports, under various sections of the IPC.

In the case of Jasvender, the

court held that the accused knew very well that the passport was forged as it was issued in the name of Rajesh Vohra. "It also becomes clear that the accused knew very well or having reasons to believe that the passport was forged as the same was not issued in his name, but issued in the name of Rajesh Vohra. Despite that he used the said passport with intention to travel abroad (Paris), which establishes that he used the said passport dishonestly as a genuine passport in order to deceive the officials posted at IGI Airport," it said.

In the case of Dalbir, who was deported by the UK, the court dismissed his contention that he could not read the contents of passport as he was an illiterate. "Visa was only for 15 days, yet the accused preferred to stay beyond the period of visa. It is unbelievable that person who visits abroad would not be aware about the validity of his visa. This shows that the accused had mala fide intention when he travelled to abroad on the strength of passport," it held.

According to the prosecution, Dalbir was held

from IGI Airport here on August 28, 2004, after being deported as he had travelled on a fake passport. Jasvender was apprehended at the airport here on May 25, 2004, while attempting to travel to Paris on fake passport.

Both the men had claimed that they procured the passports from different agents after paying Rs four lakh and Rs three lakh respectively.



IF YOU DON'T PICK IT UP THEY WILL.

Kejriwal alleges PM Modi's 'attempts' to scuttle inquiry proves he took bribe from Sahara

"Shocking. Modi ji misuses CBI to frame his political opponents but gets himself immunity without any investigation," Kejriwal said in another tweet.

(Agencies) Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's alleged attempts to scuttle inquiries against himself proved he took bribes from Sahara.

"Not Sahara but Modi ji who gets immunity. He recd bribes from Sahara. Modiji scuttling all enquiries against him. Proves he took bribes," Kejriwal said in a tweet Thursday in response to The Indian Express report on how the Income Tax Settlement Commission (ITSC) in one of its quickest

orders granted Sahara India immunity from prosecution and penalty after November, 2014 raids threw up 'diaries' listing alleged payoffs to politicians. "Shocking. Modi ji misuses CBI to frame his political opponents but gets himself immunity without any investigation," Kejriwal said in another tweet. The Delhi chief minister and Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi citing the Sahara 'diaries' had alleged that PM Modi received payoffs from Sahara when he



was the Gujarat chief minister. The BJP had dismissed the claims. The final ITSC order, that came just after three hearings,

stated only Rs 137.58 crore seized during the November, 2014 raids will be taxed, which the company can pay in 12

installments. The order also mentioned that "the applicant's contention is that these are dumb documents written by some disgruntled employees..."

The Sahara 'diaries' had listed alleged payoffs to over 100 politicians across 14 political parties, including former Delhi CM Sheila Dikshit, who questioned the authenticity of the papers. She had also asked the PM why he was shying away from an independent probe into the alleged payoffs deal.

Nearly 200 children rescued from brick factory in Telangana



(Agencies) Police rescued nearly 200 children, most of them under the age of 14, who had been found working in a brick kiln in Telangana in one of the biggest operations in the region, officials said on Wednesday.

The children were rescued from a brick kiln in Yadadiri district, 40 kilometres (25 miles) from state capital Hyderabad, as part of 'Operation Smile', a national campaign to tackle child labour and missing children. The rescued children had moved from Odisha and were living and working with adults presumed to be their parents in the brick kiln, police said. "We are not sure if the parents are genuine and there is a possibility that some of the children were trafficked," Mahesh Bhagwat, a police commissioner, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "The rescue teams spotted girls as young as seven and eight carrying bricks on their head. Some of the children were as young as four." In 2015, the International Labour Organization (ILO) put the number of Indian child workers aged between five and 17 at 5.7 million, out of 168 million globally. More than half work in agriculture and over a quarter work in the manufacturing sector, the ILO said.

Rose Valley chit fund scam

Sudip Bandyopadhyay remanded in 6-day CBI custody



(Agencies) Trinamool MP Sudip Bandyopadhyay was remanded in six days of CBI custody by a special court in the Rose Valley chit fund scam case.

Following the court order, his party activists staged a demonstration before CBI's Odisha headquarters in Bhubaneswar. The TMC MP's lawyer Rajiv

Majumdar and others were present in the chief magistrate's court when judge P K Mishra remanded Bandyopadhyay for six days against CBI's appeal for a 12-day remand.

The CBI lawyer argued in the court that the agency should be given maximum time to interrogate the MP as he was not actively cooperating with the investigation.

The MP's petition for bail was also rejected by the court even as his lawyer pleaded that his client was unwell.

"I am innocent. I have no

involvement in the scam. I have placed my point of view before the court and will again appeal the court to consider my point of argument," Bandyopadhyay told reporters after appearing in the court.

He was produced at the CBI-designated special court amid tight security after his medical examination at the Capital Hospital.

Bandyopadhyay, also the TMC parliamentary party leader in the Lok Sabha, was the second party MP after Tapas Pal to be arrested by the CBI in a span of five days.

Trekkers celebrating New Year in Lonavala thrashed, stripped by 'fort lovers' group

(News Agencies) A group of trekkers who were camping at a fort in Lonavala near Pune were allegedly roughed up, and male members were forced to strip by 10 to 12 men and women who claimed to be 'heritage buffs', on New Year's eve, police said on Wednesday.

The victims, who had come to celebrate New Year at Visapur Fort, had registered through a website for the camp at Lonavala, about 50km from Pune.

The incident comes close on the heels of an alleged mass molestation of women on December 31 night in Bengaluru.

According to a police complaint

registered by a 36-year-old woman from Pune, 10 to 12 men and women, who claimed to be members of a 'fort lovers' group, allegedly roughed them up with sticks and belts.

She also alleged that the accused humiliated the male trekkers by forcing them to strip and abused the women.

"I along with my husband and other fellow couples had booked a camp, which was organised at Visapur Fort, through a website," said the complainant, a fitness trainer, who claimed she suffered a hand fracture in the incident.

"We reached the spot at around 1pm on December 31 and found that there

were around 25 more couples, who too had come on New Year's eve through the same organisers," the woman said in her complaint.

"At around 9.30pm, we were sitting around a camp fire when 10 to 12 persons came and accused us of littering the place," she said.

"One of the women came near me and snatched a glass of cold drink. She thrashed me with a stick and kicked me and accused us of littering the fort," she alleged. Later, the other accused forced male trekkers to strip and thrashed them with sticks and belts, and hurled abuses at the women, the victim said in her statement to police.

Rattled by Agni, China asks India to cool its missile fever

The Global Times editorial piece shows how two back to back missile tests, earlier Agni V with a range of over 5000 Km and now Agni IV, have rattled China.



that owning several missiles does not mean it is a nuclear power. Even though India does become a nuclear power, it will be a long time before it can show off its strength to the world. The write-up uses some harsh words for India after its successful Agni IV missile test yesterday that has a range of 4000 Km and can reach China. It shows how two back to back missile tests, earlier Agni V with a range of over 5000 Km and now Agni IV, have rattled China. These tests show India's prowess for its Inter Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) development programme.

When India had test-fired its ICBM Agni V on December 26, China was quick to question India

quoting an 18 year old UNSC resolution that seeks that India and Pakistan should shut their ballistic missile development programmes. Reacting on India's launch, Hua Chunying, spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry had said that 'the UN Security Council had explicit regulations on whether India can develop ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons'.

The editorial piece says that India is treading a path that breaks the United Nations' protocols, "India has broken the UN's limits on its development of nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missile. New Delhi is no longer satisfied with its

nuclear capability and is seeking intercontinental ballistic missiles that can target anywhere in the world and then it can land on an equal footing with the UN Security Council's five permanent members." India's claim for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council is another soar point for China and like India's bid to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), China tries to thwart the Indian efforts here as well. Though the editorial piece, that we can say conveys the official position of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), speaks on the need of developing rapport between India and China, the tone is both patronizing as well as threatening.

(News Agencies) Global Times, the mouth organ of the China's ruling Communist Party, has dismissed India's missile programme saying 'India needs to cool its missile fever'. The Global Times editorial piece writes that 'India should realize

World Bank envoy to meet India, Pakistan officials over Indus water dispute



(News Agencies) A senior World Bank official will on Thursday meet a team of Indian officials to break a deadlock between India and Pakistan over two hydropower projects coming up in the border state of Jammu and Kashmir. The neighbours, whose ties plunged in 2016, are locked in a dispute over the Kishanganga and Ratle projects that India is building in the Indus river basin. Pakistan says the projects violate the Indus Waters Treaty. Ian H Solomon, senior adviser to the World Bank president, would meet officials of ministries of external affairs and water resources to hear the Indian side, sources said. India side will be led by Gopal Baglay, a joint secretary in MEA. After Delhi, Solomon will head to Pakistan. "The World Bank is keen that the dispute is sorted out in an amicable manner and in line with the spirit of the treaty. Any fall out will adversely impact the future of the IWT (Indus Waters Treaty) that the bank had brokered," a government official said. Pakistan has objected to the projects, saying they flout the Indus treaty under which waters of Indus, Beas, Ravi, Sutlej, Chenab and Jhelum rivers are to be shared between the two countries. Waters of eastern rivers – Beas, Ravi and Sutlej—are allocated to India, bulk of the water from the three western rivers is for Pakistan. Islamabad says the Kishanganga project, coming up on Jhelum, will reduce by 40% the water flowing into its territory. It wants the storage capacity of the reservoir of the Ratle project, coming up on Chenab, to be reduced to eight million cubic metres from 24MCM. India says the two projects do not violate the treaty. Solomon's visit is the first move by the World Bank after it "paused" on December 12 the mediation process initiated between the two countries, asking them to consider "alternative ways" to resolve their disagreements.

Chinese Media Warns Beijing Of India's Takeover As World's Manufacturing Hub



(News Agencies) BEIJING: Apple expanding its business in India could have other tech giants follow suit and threaten China's position as the manufacturing powerhouse, Chinese state media said today, adding that Beijing will have to upgrade its manufacturing to further attract offshore production. "Apple's possible supply chain transfer to the South Asian country adds further pressure on China as its domestic manufacturers show a growing interest in offshore production to low-cost countries," the state-run Global Times said.

Even as US President-elect Donald Trump pledges to bring manufacturing jobs back to the US, China's competitors seem to be further expanding their businesses offshore. An Apple manufacturing partner is working to build an assembly facility in India, the article said.

"Whether India is ready to embrace the supply chain

transfer and replicate China's success as a manufacturing powerhouse is another story. But the evolving landscape highlights the need for China to design a strategy to retain manufacturing jobs and upgrade its manufacturing industry to maintain competitiveness," it said.

Apple's three major assemblers - Foxconn Technology Group, Pegatron Corp. and Wistron Corp - are all Taiwanese and any one could be willing to set up India operations. Despite Apple's bumpy journey to expand operations in India when its application to open stores was rejected because at least 30 percent of mobile parts production was not localised, an opportunity seems to have opened up as senior Indian officials have softened their stance, it said.

Apple's three major assemblers - Foxconn Technology Group, Pegatron Corp. and Wistron Corp - are all

Taiwanese and any one could be willing to set up India operations.

If Apple decides to set up assembly facilities in India, more global tech giants may follow suit and China is likely to see a further transfer of the supply chain given India's abundant supply of working-age labourers and low labour costs.

"And it won't be difficult for Wistron to make a large investment or generate jobs. Apple's partner Foxconn has displayed the potential for job creation in India," it said, adding,

The article said that China can't afford to lose manufacturing jobs while it has not made a major breakthrough in upgrading its industry. It also warned Beijing of Donald Trump's plans to draw manufacturing jobs back to the US. It however said China's skilled labour was its edge over India.

"Industrial competition between China and India comes down to the labour force, where costs and the level of skills are two major factors that influence business decisions. Although China has an edge having nurtured skilled workers over past decades, a majority of Indian states have an absolute labour cost advantage over China," it said. Advising China to scale up its manufacturing, the article said it should upgrade through restructuring and reorganisation of technologies, talents, capital and other resources.

China must hear voice of the world on terror: India on Masood Azhar issue



(News Agencies) India on Wednesday urged China to renew its decision to block designating Jaish-e-

“double standards of this self-defeating purpose.”

China, an all-weather ally of Pakistan, has been hampering Indian efforts to bring Azhar, who heads the JeM India blamed for terrorist attacks on Pathankot airbase January last year in the UN sanctions list.

The individuals and entities in the list face an asset freeze, travel bans and other measures that would cripple their efforts to carry out terrorist activities.

“We hope as a responsible and mature nation, China will understand double standards of this self-defeating purpose,” minister of state for external affairs M J Akbar said.

“We expect China to hear the voice of the world, not just voice of India on terrorism,” he said, recalling barring veto-wielding China, 14 out of 15 countries in the UN Sanctions Committee favoured action against Azhar.

He also hoped China can be “persuaded to see the evil

of the menace.”

Akbar and his ministerial colleague V K Singh, flanked by foreign secretary S Jaishankar were addressing the mid-term press conference of the external affairs ministry.

Replying to a volley of questions on talks with Pakistan, the ministers said terror and talks cannot go together, in reference to the reported cross-border terrorism sponsored by the neighbour. When asked why India is not closing down Pakistan’s diplomatic mission even after some ministers declared it a terror state, Akbar quoted former prime minister AB Vajpayee, “we cannot choose our neighbour.”

“We need to deal with them. We deal with them with our eyes open and not with our mind closed,” Akbar said. He refused to comment on reports that the UAE government seized assets worth `15,000 crore belonging to gangster Dawood Ibrahim who lives in Pakistan. Answering another question, VK Singh dismissed Russia, China and Pakistan meeting to discuss Afghanistan. “Mere meeting of countries without any result on the ground will not make any difference to the situation in Afghanistan”, he said. Singh said the greater flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) to India is a sign of success of the country’s foreign policy.

Asia shares rise as US interest rates ease

(News Agencies) Asian shares recovered to four-week highs as a surge in the US dollar and its borrowing costs sparked by Donald Trump’s election eased, with the US 10-year yield slipping to one-month lows.

European shares were expected to be little changed on Friday, with financial spreadbetters expecting a flat to 0.1 per cent rise in Britain’s FTSE and a flat to slightly weaker opening in Germany’s DAX.

The US dollar stayed near three-week lows against a basket of currencies though it bounced back slightly as the Chinese yuan gave up some of its massive gains made in the previous two days despite Friday’s strong midpoint fixing by China’s central bank.

“The market appears to be on risk-on mode. It could be because of stabilising US yields. It could be signs of stability in Europe, or a recovery in oil. Anything that has been battered by higher US rates is coming back,” Yoshinori Shigemori, global market strategist at JPMorgan Asset Management. MSCI’s gauge of the world’s stock markets hit its highest levels in a year and a half, taking its gains since the start

of the year to 1.7 per cent, helped by this week’s generally upbeat economic readings in the United States, China and Europe.

In Asia, MSCI’s ex-Japan Asia-Pacific shares index hit four-week high before paring gains to stand little changed. It has gained 2.7 per cent in the first week of 2017.

In contrast, Japan’s Nikkei, one of the best performers since Republican Trump won the November 8 election, dropped 0.3 per cent as the yen gained versus the US dollar.

“What’s going on is a correction of the ‘Trump trade’ since the election. The markets have been trying to fully price in his policies just based on hopes,” said Koichi Yoshikawa, executive director of finance at Standard Chartered Bank in Tokyo.

“From now on, it’s not going to be a simple one-way bet,” he said.

The benchmark Hang Seng index finished 0.2 per cent higher, while the Hong Kong China Enterprises Index gained 0.1 per cent.

The blue-chip CSI300 index fell 0.6 per cent while the Shanghai Composite Index lost 0.4 per cent. Trump’s surprise victory

had sparked a major realignment in markets.

Expectations that his administration will bring tax cuts, higher spending and deregulation have boosted US bond yields and the US dollar, to the detriment of many emerging economies that have benefitted from cheap US dollar funding and had attracted trillions of dollars from investors shunning low US yields.

Already under pressure from profit taking as the Trump rally wanes, the US dollar extended losses on Thursday as China stepped up efforts to support the yuan, sparking speculation that it wants a firm grip on the currency ahead of Trump’s January 20 inauguration.

“Chinese authorities might be wary because of rising possibility that the US President-elect Trump might impose restrictions on trade with China,” said Takahiko Sasaki, market economist at Mizuho Bank.

While there are many hurdles for designating China as a currency manipulator or slapping on a higher tariff, Washington could impose more anti-dumping duties, he added.

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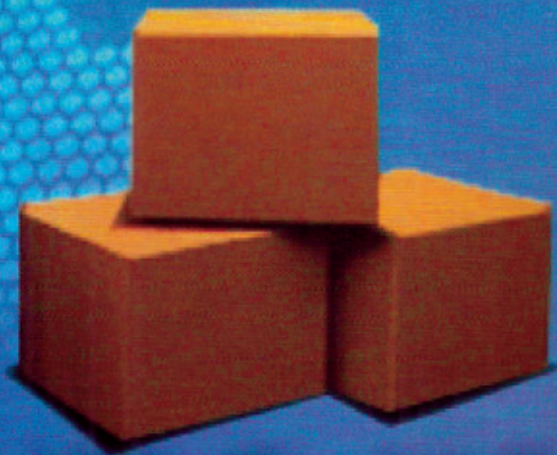
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The Chachas And Chanakyas

Uttar Pradesh is a triangle of shifting proportions with a minor fourth side. Alliances may decide the final shape.

The fabled battlefields of history are mostly to the northwest, or elsewhere. But post-independence, these vast Gangetic plains have hosted the decisive contests. To that extent, with just the latter part of winter left before Uttar Pradesh votes—an event whose significance will go way beyond the fact of a new government being elected—it's surprising that no election banners or posters have appeared in its town streets. A few old Diwali buntings or New Year fliers flutter in the cold air. Like a deathly calm before the storm, perhaps. The only consensus: the playing field is a triangle of shifting proportions. Akhilesh Yadav, rather than the Samajwadi Party, will be trying to hold out against the BJP and the Bahujan Samaj Party, and the odds lengthen or otherwise unpredictably.

UP's aam admi relates more to Akhilesh than his party (just the way most Indian voters today relate more to Narendra Modi than necessarily to the BJP) and he seems to have survived the fratricidal bouts in the family more than intact. Mayawati's rallies have been impressive, but few speak of her or the BSP unless it's a Dalit-dominated area. Behenji's politics too has been waged in a hidden way. The Congress, for all the premature lather it worked up thanks to its strategist Prashant Kishor, now seems to have waned from the radar without any credible faces. The one chance of visibility it has is if a late alliance with the SP works out, or if the demonetisation debate gives it some play. Otherwise, Akhilesh's development plank may set the agenda.

On the Allahabad-Varanasi highway, over 30 newly-bought black Boleros in the service of 'Dial 100' and 'UP 100 UP' whiz by at high speed, trailing a cloud of dust. It's a popular people's project for quick anti-crime response, conceived by Akhilesh. He has been working hard for a year, clearing Metro lines, infrastructure projects, innumerable Innovas and Boleros for Dial 100 in big districts like Lucknow, Varanasi, Kanpur and Allahabad, a women's power line ('Dial 1090') and a pension scheme for women. Then, there's Dial 108, also known as 'Samajwadi 108', for ambulance;



it's a huge success in villages. Besides, there are dialyses done with minimum charges.

Yes, the SP still carries the goondaga-rdi stigma. Only in mid-December, Atiq Ahmed, mafia head-turned-politician and candidate from Kanpur Cantonment, was seen on CCTV leading goons to an institute in Allahabad's Naini, where the staff had tried to thwart malpractices. SP sup-remo Mulayam Singh Yadav has also spoken of partymen involved in land-grabbing, and being least bothered about the party's reputation. All the periodic muscle-flexing by partymen did dent Akhilesh's image. Demonetisation has slightly helped the CM. Debate on the note-ban has gained more volume over Samajwadi style anarchy.

As for the family feud, Akhilesh's back-to-the-wall battle with 'chacha' Shivpal and 'uncle' Amar Singh actually gained him people's sympathy and burnished his clean image. Many in the power corridors still whisper of a likely split in the party but it may be too premature in terms of the bigger political canvas at the moment. The uneasy balance of terror between the BSP, SP and BJP may yet decide how internal events in the SP play out. As of now, Akhilesh goes about as usual, taking his wife Dimple to most of his programmes such as vikas yatras. She has also been attending most project inauguration functions.

What has helped Akhilesh in

the face of what should have been near-insurmountable odds has been the fact that he is able to relate to the youth, who are an ambitious lot. His schemes of distributing laptops and tablets, besides now a promise of smartphones if brought back, goes down well in new Uttar Pradesh. Many complain that the party's young cadres are the primary beneficiaries of the freebies, but a message goes out to the student fraternity that the CM wants to work for them. Akhilesh in general is also considered a far better politician in the province where senior SP leaders, traditionally, have patronised those with dubious antecedents.

Satyadeo Tripathi of the Congress, who was with Mulayam for 14 years in Janata Party, has a different take. "I don't feel SP is samajwadi. They are casteist. There is no difference between father and son," notes the 72-year-old. "I am from Auraiya (carved out of Etawah) and have seen the family from close quarters. Mul-ayam is a 'jatibadi neta' with the label of a socialist.

Akhilesh is also charged with neglecting the education sector in reality. Cheating in exam halls is common. A 'Yadav mafia' allegedly controls the sector, grabbing contracts for holding exams, and extracting money to help candidates pass. Civil rights activist Tarique Shafiq of Sanjarpur says textbooks from the government are yet to reach the schools in Azamgarh's primary class. "This, when the

half-yearly exams are over," he points out. Jobs, too, smack of social bias. Many complain that Yadavs are favoured in appointments in the police departments.

The BJP plans to make anti-incumbency a big factor in the elections. It's another matter the party is yet to highlight a big issue or put up a credible face. The party's last big local face was Kalyan Singh. Today, the BJP is trying to utilise the OBC support base of Anupriya Patel's Apna Dal and also rebel BSP leader Om Prakash Rajbhar's Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party in eastern UP. So far, the leadership hasn't touched upon the Ram mandir issue that is pending in the Supreme Court. At the same time, the party is sanguine over one thing: voters seem to favour the PM-announced demonetisation despite attendant hardships. Many are impressed with Modi's claim of a 'surgical strike' on black money that, they feel, the urban rich "stocked at the expense" of the rural poor. If in the rural belt, people express faith that Modi will be able to prove what he stated, it can also be seen as the poor feeling pleased that their leaders/superiors are getting caned now.

"A big boil necessitates surgery; it will pain," says Sudhir Kishore, a Kurmi in Balsingh Khera village of Mohanlalganj (SC) constituency in Lucknow district. Clearly, not all Dalits support Mayawati. The BJP's social engineering aims to broaden its profile from its old

image as a bania party. It's getting the favour of many Dalits—such as Pasis, Dhobis, Khateeks and Balmikis.

Even so, local BJP leaders have alerted the top brass that post-demonetisation blues would have to end in two months for the party to be effective in the poll race. "With 71 MPs from UP, the party should win at least 71 assembly seats," a senior leader said, indicating diffidence in the BJP. It is to be seen how much of the 'Modi magic' will repeat in the state two-and-a-half years after it did at the national level.

Earlier, the business classes were the known BJP supporters. Post-demonetisation, the Vaishya community of small-time traders feel they have been stabbed in the back with a dearth of liquid cash. The note-ban, they feel, could have been implemented in a phased manner. In Rae Bareilly, entrepreneur Trilochan Singh told Outlook that demonetisation led to the cancellation of six events in his hotel recently.

In Faizabad, Ashok Pandey has a shop selling mainly sarees. For a fortnight that followed demonetisation, the wholesaler got no customer. Even the towels, bedsheets and lungis he'd typically bring from Tanda and Akbarpur stopped coming. For, the weavers didn't have money to buy threads; the wholesalers had no cash to pay either. The vicious cycle continued for a month. In Varanasi's Pili Kothi, weavers are going through a challenging time. Most of its nearly 3,500 looms, big and small, are shut. Some have sent the children out to look for work elsewhere. To recover from the political damage, the BJP is now giving the spin, which has reached the grassroot, that bankers and hoarders have played mischief.

Muslims are a sizeable community in the state. The BJP appears to be hinging more on fragmentation of this votebank in as many compartments as possible. A section of the Muslims, who are annoyed with the SP over the party's 'failure' to keep its 2012 election promises made to the community, are openly speaking in favour of a replacement.

India's Call-Center Talents Put to a Criminal Use: Swindling Americans



fraud, said Suhel Daud, an F.B.I. agent who serves as assistant legal attaché at the embassy in New Delhi. Several trends have converged to make this happen, he said: a demographic bulge of computer-savvy, young, English-speaking job seekers; a vast call-center culture; super-efficient technology; and what can only be described as ingenuity.

"They have figured all of this out," Mr. Daud said. "Put all of these together, with the Indian demographics in the U.S., and it's a natural segue. Whatever money you're making, you can easily make 10 times as much."

Pawan Poojary and Jayesh Dubey, best friends and college dropouts, were impressed with the Phoenix 007 call center in Thane, a suburb northeast of Mumbai. The interviewer carried an iPhone; there were racing sport bikes parked outside, and, as Mr. Poojary put it, "girls roaming here and there." The monthly salary was average for call centers, 16,000 rupees (about \$230), they said, but the bonuses were double or triple that, based on sales.

The two friends had been playing a video game for up to eight hours a day, pausing occasionally to eat. They wanted in.

"At that time, in my mind is that I want money," Mr. Poojary, 18, said. "That's it. I want money. That's why."

They said they showed up for training in a room of young Indians like themselves, the first in their family to be educated in English. They were a slice of aspirational India: Mr. Poojary's father, who owned two welding shops, was adamant that his son would rise to a higher place in society, an office job. Mr. Poojary was afraid to tell him he had dropped out of college.

The trainer assigned them names, Paul Edward and Adam Williams, and handed out a six-page script that started out, "My name is Shawn Anderson, with the department of legal affairs with the United States Treasury Department," the teenagers said.

"We read the script, and I asked, 'Is this a scam?'" Mr. Poojary said. "He said, 'Yes.'"

"At that time I am money-

minded. I thought, 'O.K., I can do this,'" he said.

Mr. Poojary was excited and nervous about speaking to an American for the first time, and he was alarmed by the resulting bursts of profanity. Mr. Dubey said he tried to commit the entire experience to memory, in case he and Mr. Poojary someday decided to start a business of their own.

"I just wanted to become a great scammer," Mr. Dubey said. "Everyone was scamming around me. I thought, 'I will also become a great scammer.'"

The key to the whole thing, Mr. Dubey decided, was a psychological fact: Americans fear their state.

"I think they actually are really afraid of their government," he said. "In India, people are not afraid of police. If anyone wants to come and arrest, they say, 'Come and arrest.' It is easy to get out of anything. But in America they are afraid. We just need to tell them, 'You are messing with the federal government,' and that is all."

THANE, India — Betsy Broder, who tracks international fraud at the Federal Trade Commission, was in her office in Washington last summer when she got a call from two Indian teenagers. Calling from a high-rise building in a suburb of Mumbai, they told her, in tones that were alternately earnest and melodramatic, that they wanted to share the details of a sprawling criminal operation targeting Americans. Ms. Broder, who was no stranger to whistle-blowers, pressed the young men for details.

"He said his name was Adam," she said, referring to one of the pair. "I said: 'Your name is not Adam. What does your grandmother call you?' He said, 'Babu.'"

As it happened, the United States government had been tracking this India-based scheme since 2013, a period during which Americans, many of them recent immigrants, have lost \$100 million to it.

Though India had no reputation as a large-scale exporter of fraud in the past, it is now seen as a major center for

SP's battle differs sharply from the ideological rifts in past socialist parties



As the internecine strife in the Samajwadi Party played out last weekend, the BJP's Venkaiah Naidu quipped that the socialist parties "unite in the morning, divide in the afternoon, operate in the evening, and separate at night". A veteran of the movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan in the mid-1970s, Naidu presumably knows whereof he speaks. But a closer look at the history of socialist parties shows that the ongoing convulsion is qualitatively different from those of the past. And these differences underscore the fundamental challenge confronting the Samajwadi Party.

The Congress Socialist Party (CSP) formed in 1934 reflected the dissatisfaction of the younger Congress workers — JP and Rammanohar Lohia among others — with their party's

conservatism on social and economic questions. The CSP sought to act as a pressure group within the Congress. But its decision to take in the Communists proved disastrous. As the latter tried to push the CSP in a more radical direction, the first schisms appeared in the party. After Independence, the socialists were forced to rethink their relationship with the Congress. And it remained a thorny issue over the following decades. In 1948, JP and others left the Congress and started the Socialist Party (SP). Three years later, another group of Congressmen led by JB Kripalani formed the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP). Both the SP and the KMPP were unhappy with the Congress' conservative leadership, notwithstanding Jawaharlal Nehru's progressive

outlook. But their poor showing in the first general elections led them to combine in 1952 to form the Praja Socialist Party (PSP).

Within three years, Lohia left to form his own Socialist Party. The move was prompted by his substantive differences with the PSP leadership. Lohia found the PSP insufficiently militant in its opposition to the Congress. This came to the fore during party's lukewarm support for his efforts in 1954 to mobilise farmers in Uttar Pradesh against the hike in the price of canal water. Further, there were ideological disagreements over the relative importance of caste (emphasised by Lohia) and class in Indian politics. Despite periodic calls for socialist unity, these differences widened over the following decade.

Personalities aside, there were important issues in contention. The PSP opposed Lohia's decision to work with the Jana Sangh in the by-elections of 1963 and his call for extending such an alliance to include the Swatantra Party and the Communists. Then there was Lohia's insistence on doing away with English in both the central and state governments. Finally there was Lohia's demand for reservations for the backward classes as well as the SCs and

STs. Although the two parties merged in May 1964 to form the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP), a section of old PSP leaders peeled away to retain their identity.

Both the SSP and PSP managed to perform better in the 1967 election and joined the anti-Congress coalition — Samyukta Vidhayak Dal — governments. By this time another strand of socialist politics was crystallising. Charan Singh's decision to leave the Congress and form his own party marked the rise to prominence of a new form politics that underscored the gulf between the peasant and town-dwellers, rural and urban India. Although Charan Singh was a Jat, he sought to project a broad peasant identity that subsumed several lower and upper castes.

The coming together of the Lohiaite and kisan politics could be seen in the career of the young, first-time MLA from Charan Singh's party who had come to political consciousness during Lohia's canal rate agitation: Mulayam Singh Yadav. It was also evident in the merger in 1974 of a section of the SSP with Charan Singh's party to form the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD). More importantly, the BLD now embraced the Lohiaite demand

for reservation for backward classes.

The JP movement against Indira Gandhi once again brought together socialists of various hues and the Hindu nationalists. After the Emergency, they combined to form the Janata Party that dislodged Gandhi from power. This short-lived government awaits its historian, but popular accounts tend to harp on the socialists' habitual squabbling without taking into account the serious issues that rent the party: The appointment of the second Backward Classes Commission led by BP Mandal; Charan Singh's push for reorienting economic policy towards rural India; and the links between Janata members from the Jana Sangh and RSS.

The Janata Dal of the 1980s also fissured on similar issues, especially the implementation of the Mandal Commission report and the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. The shadow of family politics also began to lengthen over the socialists — especially with Charan Singh and his protégé Devi Lal. The parties that came out of the wreckage of the Janata Dal in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar benefited enormously from the implementation of the Mandal Commission's report and the upper castes' opposition to it.

Trump's Commerce pick, billionaire Wilbur Ross, got a DUI in the Hamptons in 1991, serves as a director of 48 companies

Wilbur Ross, President-elect Donald Trump's selection to run the Commerce Department, has acknowledged getting charged with driving while impaired in the Hamptons in 1991.

Ross, a billionaire investor who has spent a career focusing on corporate turnarounds, acknowledged the incident in a questionnaire submitted to the Senate Commerce Committee, which will be considering his nomination.

'In September 1991, I was stopped in Southampton, New York for a traffic violation, and subsequently charged with driving while impaired (DWIA),' he wrote.

'In November 1991, I paid a fine of approximately \$400, and my license was suspended for 90 days,' he wrote.

He disclosed the information in response to a standard question about whether he had been arrested or charged with any state, local or federal entity 'other than for a minor offenses.'

In response to another question, he answered 'yes' when asked if he had ever



been convicted (including plea of guilty and no contest) of a criminal offense, and referenced his earlier statement. The document doesn't state precisely the offense Ross was convicted of committing.

Ross also disclosed an array of directorships and board positions with companies that he holds, as he prepares to join a cabinet stocked with millionaires and billionaires.

He said he was working

with the Office of Government Ethics to identify any potential conflicts of interest, including any 'that may arise in connection to my retained investments.'

Any potential conflicts of interest will be resolved in accordance with the terms of an ethics agreement into which I will enter with the department's designated agency ethics official and will provide this to the committee.

I am not aware of any potential conflicts of interest other than

those that will be the subject of my ethics agreement,' he wrote.

In a section on awards and honors, Ross said he had been named among the 50 most influential people in global finance by Bloomberg in 2015, as well as being elected to the Private Equity Hall of Fame, although the year wasn't mentioned.

A release from back in 2003 put the number of inductees at just 38. Among those added that year were

Bain Capital, which was 'honored in the buyout category for its creative approach to deal making, specifically its utilization of specialized consultants and its willingness to expand into new geographies and asset classes.'

Ross wrote that over 55 years, he has participated as an owner, lead director, or chairman of over 100 businesses, providing him with a 'deep understanding of what makes a successful, job creating enterprise.' Forbes lists his worth at \$2.9 billion.

He said he had negotiated the purchase of troubled businesses from Korea, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Greece, and Cyprus.

If confirmed as expected, Ross will play a leading role in implementing Trump's trade agenda.

He served on the board of a U.S.-Russia investment fund under President Clinton. He was a privatization advisor to then-New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani.

Ross disclosed giving political donations to Giuliani, Senator John McCain, Marco Rubio's Senate campaign, Mitt Romney in 2012, \$5,000 to Paul Ryan in 2014, and a \$25,000 contribution to a campaign for former Speaker John Boehner and the House campaign arm.

His largest contribution appears to be a \$250,000 contribution to the Republican Governors Association in 2015. He lists contributions totaling \$66,600 to the Republican National Committee last year.

He lists an array of companies where he was director, manager, or member over the last decade. Among them are Diamond S Shipping Group Inc., the Brookings Institutions, Governor and Company of the Bank of Ireland, Invesco Ltd and its affiliates, and W.L. Ross & Co. He discloses being chairman of the Southampton Bath & Tennis Club, a member of the Palm Beach Civic Association, the Japan Society, and numerous other clubs and groups.

Note ban effect on vote bank



The BJP's thumping victory in the Chandigarh municipal election on December 20 led party chief Amit Shah to describe it as a "stamp of approval" for Narendra Modi's demonetisation decision. He had reasons to make that claim. BJP won almost every poll countrywide, post the note ban.

But Shah has taken a huge risk in describing election victories as endorsement of demonetisation. Any adverse outcome in the ensuing

assembly elections in five states – Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur – will deny him the liberty to delink the election result and demonetisation.

Is Shah's bravado driven by "ground reports" about an overwhelming support for demonetisation, or a misplaced confidence that had earlier seen him claim that the BJP would get two-thirds majority in Delhi and Bihar?

Demonetisation has

dominated the national discourse for past two months, but can it really overshadow the feud in Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh? Or will it negate the anti-incumbency of 10 years faced by the Akali Dal-BJP government in Punjab? Will demonetisation upset the calculation of Harish Rawat in Uttarakhand who is counting on factionalism in BJP in Uttarakhand to pull off a victory? Can it prevent entry of a third player – the AAP – in Goa or help the BJP end the three term rule of the Congress in Manipur?

State elections have their own flavour, mostly decided by local issues. But demonetisation which has touched every countryman will be common to all five elections. "Local issues will dominate and demonetisation will be like background music," says Pramod Kumar, the Director of Chandigarh-based Institute for Development and

Communication. "The note recall has a moral dimension. Arvind Kejriwal's opposition to the decision hurts his image."

BJP leaders claim Modi has created a 'pro-poor' image for himself by taking an 'anti-rich' position. "It should benefit us in election as we pass new milestones, winning over new social groups. This is a well thought move by Modi," a BJP general secretary told HT.

The BJP and the Congress will be in a direct contest in Uttarakhand and Manipur. Goa and Punjab will have triangular contest between NDA, Congress and AAP, and Uttar Pradesh a four-cornered fight.

Among parties who have stakes in these polls, the Congress, BSP and AAP have strongly opposed the note ban. They are counting on people's anger against demonetisation. But both the BJP and its rivals may be overestimating the impact of demonetization.

The Clock Is Ticking on Guantánamo



As the Obama administration makes a final push to reduce the number of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay, President-elect Donald Trump is vowing to halt transfers, saying that those remaining are “extremely dangerous people and should not be allowed back onto the battlefield.”

Mr. Trump’s latest Guantánamo remark, delivered in a tweet on Tuesday, is consistent with his misguided campaign vow to keep the offshore prison open and “load it up with some bad dudes.” He seems oblivious to the risks and costs that keeping the prison open, and perhaps expanding it, would entail.

This makes it imperative

that the Obama administration spare no effort in its remaining days to release the roughly 18 detainees who are cleared for transfer to a handful of countries that have agreed to take them. That would leave about 40 detainees, down from the 780 men who have been held at the prison, which was created after the Sept. 11 attacks.

Among the detainees who would remain, three were convicted in the military commission system and seven have charges pending before that commission. Twenty-six are deemed too dangerous to release, but the government has no plans to prosecute them; officials have concluded that prosecuting

them would be nearly impossible because they have been held for years without trial and several were tortured while in custody. That assessment needs to be revisited. Holding these prisoners at Guantánamo forever is untenable for a nation that claims to adhere to the rule of law, and can only fuel the enmity of extremist groups around the world toward the United States.

Since 2009, Republicans in Congress have done everything possible to thwart President Obama’s goal of shutting down Guantánamo. They opposed his plan to prosecute detainees in federal court and have imposed unreasonable rules for the release of inmates

whom national security officials have cleared for transfer. They blocked a plan to move the prisoners to a facility in the United States, where holding them would be considerably cheaper. Operating the prison at Guantánamo, Cuba, has cost taxpayers more than \$5.6 billion over the years.

Republicans cloaked their opposition behind claims of national security, but it was primarily driven by antipathy toward Mr. Obama. Even with him leaving office, there is little reason to believe that the Republican-led Congress will have any interest in hastening the end of Guantánamo.

This means that challenges in the courts by the prisoners to

wartime detention without trial is more important than ever. “Federal courts are going to be the last, best hope for the men at Guantánamo that Obama leaves behind,” said J. Wells Dixon, a lawyer at the Center for Constitutional Rights, which represents Guantánamo detainees. Unfortunately, a 2011 ruling by the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit made it significantly harder for Guantánamo detainees to challenge their detention in civilian courts.

The courts ought to take a fresh look at new legal claims in light of how long these men have been held, and the fact that soon, no one in the executive branch will be working toward a sensible resolution.

Who is poll-ready in Punjab? AAP, SAD claim lead as Cong campaign sputters

As the Election Commission (EC) sounded the poll bugle on Wednesday by announcing February 4 as the voting day for Punjab, the reactions said a lot about which party stands where.

Excitement was palpable in the Aam Admi Party (AAP), the new challenger in the state elections. Party convener and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, who is in storm-the-barn mode now, is camping in Punjab and issuing statements to whip up a poll frenzy. As the stakes go up, Kejriwal’s attacks on Punjab Congress president Captain Amarinder Singh have become close and personal. The first to go off the block in naming nominees for elections, the AAP has already declared candidates for 114 of the 117 seats, including five by its ally Lok Insaaf Party of the Bains brothers of Ludhiana. The party has restored internal peace after facing a quake of revolts and allegations of ‘tickets on sale’ that almost

derailed its campaign. It also claimed to have a “clear lead” over rivals, the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the Congress, in door-to-door campaigns by volunteers and public meetings by its leaders and candidates. The SAD, too, has made a headstart in terms of campaign and candidates. The party president, deputy chief minister Sukhbir Singh Badal, who has shuffled candidates in as many as 33 seats, has announced names for 89 of the 94 seats that the party contests even its ally, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), that fields its candidates on the remaining 23 seats is yet to open its cards. The SAD claimed that chief minister Parkash Singh Badal and Sukhbir have already held sangat darshans, rallies and workers’ meetings in 52 constituencies, and the party will now ramp up its campaign in the remaining seats.

The Congress, meanwhile,

seems to be competing with itself when it comes to distribution of tickets. It created history of sorts by announcing candidates on 77 seats before the announcement of polls. But, with exactly a month to go for the polls, it finds itself in an unenviable position. While Kejriwal is camping in Punjab, Amarinder is busy in Delhi to clear names for the remaining 40 seats, all of them “contentious”.

The party has tied itself up in knots over tickets to Akali turncoats, kin of leaders, youth and women with the underlying theme of “winnability”. Once the remaining tickets are announced, the party will be racing against the clock to placate or tackle rebels.

Lead in campaign

AAP leader Dugesh Pathak said their party has the “highest visibility”.

“We had announced our candidates well in advance and dealt with the dissidents. We

have three times the number of volunteers than the Congress or the SAD-BJP, and these volunteers have already completed 10 rounds of door-to-door campaign since April 2015,” he said.

“We are showing 40 videos on our policies and programmes in every constituency, every day, on projectors. Our leaders and candidates, including Bhagwant Mann, have held more than 1,000 rallies and public meetings already,” he further claimed.

“Our campaign is on track while the Congress will be busy fighting dissent as its most contentious 40 seats have yet to be announced,” he added.

SAD’s A to D

SAD spokesman Manjinder Singh Sirsa said the party, which has just five more candidates to announce, has constituencies that are “sure wins” where the party “need not worry”.

“We have categorised the constituencies into A, B+, B, C

and D, depending on the winnability. We don’t need to make extra effort in those falling in the ‘A’ category. We are in a winning position in B+, and can win those in B. It is these two we will be focusing on,” he explained. In last-hour rush, the Badal father-son duo has also showered memorials, free pilgrimages and jobs to woo different sections of voters. The Congress, whose two flagship campaigns, ‘Coffee with Captain’ and ‘Halke vich Captain’, have been overtaken by Amarinder’s recent roadshows and poll promises — 50 lakh smartphones with one-year free data and calling, one job per family, and farm debt waiver — appears to be losing the momentum that it built after AAP got mired in controversies and SAD was struggling with revolts by its MLAs who were denied tickets and were getting onto the Congress ship.

New Chief Justice of India JS Khehar will have a challenging 8 months



(News Agencies)Face off with the government, differences in the Supreme Court collegium, vacancies in high courts and burgeoning backlog – these are the challenges that await Justice JS Khehar who took over on Wednesday as the 44th Chief Justice of India. CJI Khehar has barely around eight-month to fix these problems. He retires on August 27. Ever since a bench headed by Justice Khehar declared unconstitutional the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) – that was to replace the opaque collegium system of judges appointing judges — in October 2015, the government and judiciary have been at loggerheads.

As the government and judiciary indulged in a slugfest, vacancies in 24 high courts are at an all time high at 430. As on

January 1, 2017, HCs have 649 judges against a sanctioned strength of 1,079. Outgoing CJI TS Thakur blasted the government several times for inordinately delaying the appointments.

But the NDA government has its own arguments. It says it has appointed 130 high court judges — the maximum in a year, surpassing the UPA's record of appointing 121 HC judges in 2013.

But the government's latest move to return for the second time names of 13 candidates for appointment as judges in the Allahabad HC is bound to further complicate the already restrained executive-judiciary relationship. As per existing norms, the government can the names return only once.

The differences in the

collegium and its failure to recommend names for seven vacant posts in the top court gave an opportunity to the government to question the manner in which the over two-decade-old judicial appointment system operates. Justice J Chelameswar — has openly questioned opacity in collegium's functioning.

Amid showdown between the government and judiciary, there is a silver lining in Justice Khehar's elevation to the top post. It was he who headed the constitution bench which in December 2015 admitted shortcomings in the functioning of the collegium system and suggested changes, including those in the memorandum of procedure, to make it transparent. Justice Chelameswar — who was a part of the bench — is now part of the Supreme Court collegium.

Now that Justice Khehar has taken over as the CJI, it's expected that he would ensure implementation of his own judgment to end the stalemate.

Successive governments have been complaining about judicial overreach, including judicial takeover of the appointment process. Unlike in the past when coalition governments plagued with corruption failed to assert, the

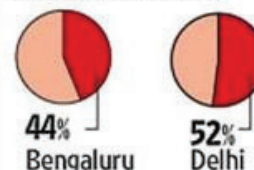
ROAD AHEAD FOR NEW CHIEF JUSTICE

Vacancies throughout the judiciary and differences with the government over selecting judges are some key issues

20% judges' post vacant at both SC and district courts

40% benches vacant in HCs

JUDGES SPENDING TIME ON ADMIN ISSUES



PENDENCY

SUPREME COURT

2015 | 59,272

2016 | 60,938 (sept 2016)

HIGH COURTS

2015 | 36,81,299

2016 | 37,49,865

SUBORDINATE COURTS

2015 | 27,131,409

2016 | 28,125,066

At the current level of efficiency, if you increase the number of judges significantly, you can (only) make a dent in the problem within the next three-four years

ALOK PRASANNA KUMAR, senior resident fellow, Vidhi Centre

TEXT: GARIMA GARG

current NDA government has been vocal about judicial overreach.

The political class is not ready to digest the SC verdict on NJAC over which there was a political unanimity. A recent parliamentary standing committee report once again emphasized that judicial appointments are a shared responsibility. It called for restoring the original constitutional provision on judicial appointment that gave some say to the executive in the process. How things unfold in the next eight months and how much improvement is made in the executive-judiciary relationship would depend upon the way CJI Khehar puts his judicial statesmanship to use.

EXCLUSIVE : The Obamas set for a \$40 million payday

(News Agencies)Jerry Oppenheimer is the New York Times best-selling author of books about the Clintons, the Kennedys and the Hiltons. His thirteenth book, 'The Kardashians: The True, Untold Story,' will be published in 2017.

President Obama has made more than a tidy \$15 million from his books since he published his first - Dreams from My Father - in 1995, and now he's set to earn another \$15 to \$20 million - or even more - from his forthcoming presidential memoir, top publishing insiders tell DailyMail.com.

And high-ranking publishing insiders are talking at least another '\$20 million' in an advance paycheck for First Lady Michelle Obama's long-awaited - and highly anticipated - memoir about her eight White House years.

A source claims she's been quietly working on her book already.

'Michelle's more popular and likable than Barack - and definitely more salable,' one top acquisition editor tells

DailyMail.com, 'so she's likely to garner an even bigger advance than the president.

'If I jump into the bidding, I'd definitely offer more for her story than his.

'He's a known quantity, she's the golden goose with the best dishy stories about her White House life. And I think she can be very catty.'

As The Wall Street Journal points out, 'Michelle Obama's talents as a memoirist are so far untested, but with a 59 percent approval rating...she is one of the most well-liked figures in American public life.

'As publishers prepare to compete for a slew of political memoirs, all eyes are on the president and first lady.'

And there is some chatter in the highly competitive New York publishing world that the Obamas might collaborate and pen a dual memoir with a pay day of many millions of dollars more.

Since becoming the first couple eight years ago, book sales have made the Obamas - from middle-class Chicago roots - multimillionaires, with more big

bucks on the way.

'Not a bad nest egg for their golden years,' observes former senior White House aide Tevi Troy, who wrote a book about White House pop culture. For the biggest advance, sources interviewed for this story agree, the president is going to have to reveal long-held Oval Office secrets to make readers want to spend \$30 or more per copy.

As one top editor from a major publishing house, who requested anonymity because he will be involved in the bidding, told DailyMail.com, 'We want to know the Obamas true feelings about the Clintons. 'We know there is no love lost, but we need to hear that in the president's words, or directly from the first lady, and in her own candid words. 'We want to hear what the president's true reaction was when Benghazi happened, when he first learned about Mrs. Clinton's secret email server, and how he felt about Mrs. Clinton's failed candidacy, and his true feeling about Donald Trump — all of that needs to be told in no uncertain terms,



because that's what the public — the book buyers — are interested in hearing. 'And all of that if honestly told will garner a publicity tsunami. We'll sell hundreds of thousands of books, and make the Obamas even richer with the royalties.' A high-ranking female publishing executive who also asked for anonymity reveals she'd 'kill and offer millions to get the first lady's book.' But she asserts that Mrs. Obama needs to give gossipy White House dish — 'the ups and downs of her marriage, horror stories about raising her two daughters in the public spotlight.'

Why UP matters: Can India's most populous state decide the fate of Delhi ?

His personality coupled with Amit Shah's poll strategy can throw a massive challenge to both the ruling SP as well as the BSP. Shah has already weakened both – engineered defections in the BSP and fuelled differences in the Yadav family.

Nonetheless, UP is a tough nut to crack. Demonetisation is a gamble that could pay off or boomerang badly.

There's another thaw: BJP may manage to set its caste arithmetic right but it does not have an attractive CM candidate.

The Parivar feud

Can the Samajwadi Party

overcome the bickering within the party founder and inheritor? Initial signs showed confusion among its ranks, but as the drama drags on, there are signs of Akhilesh emerging stronger and as a leader on his own.

There are far too many imponderables as of now. Will the father-son duo reconcile, or will the party split? If they split, who gets the party symbol, or will it be frozen? Will a sulking Mulayam cost Akhilesh votes? Or whether Akhilesh's clean pro-development image a recipe for electoral success?

Talk of Akhilesh aligning with the

Congress is still a subject of speculation.

Behenji's big battle

If one person has the highest political stakes in the 2017 elections, it is BSP national president Mayawati. Several top leaders have deserted her in the recent months. But some political commentators say it won't hurt the BSP much as it is a cadre-run party. But many at the same time believe that Mayawati will have a tough time stopping the exodus if she loses in 2017. Read |

Assembly polls 2017: Elections begin on February 4, counting on

March 11 Her confidence, however, comes from the fact that though she lost the 2012 assembly and 2014 general elections, her vote percentage and popular vote remained impressive – 25.91% in 2012 as against 29.31% of the winning Samajwadi Party and 19.77% in 2014 when the Modi wave had literally swept the state. The Congress is the fourth player, and UP is central to its revival, but it seems unlikely it will be able to change the game this time. As the fate of 200 million people of Uttar Pradesh hangs in the balance, the stakes are indeed high for the political players.

Scent Of The Lotus Bloom

Minister of state for Information and Broadcasting Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore told Outlook that the government had “just played the first ball”, and there will be further decisions to curb the shadow economy and corruption. The government “is keen to go in for simultaneous elections” that will bring about the much-needed reforms in the electoral system. “With elections scheduled in some state or another, political parties are always on a poll mode. Unaccounted money is used for elections; this must change. We require a consensus of political parties on this,” says the minister. The PM is “committed” to change the country and “not bothered” about political expediencies, he insists.

In the last two-and-a-half years, the emphasis of the government had been ‘Antyodaya’—to take the benefits of development to the last man. Rathore says the PM is also keen about connecting with the masses. In addition to social media presence where one can write to them with their problems, he also wants ministers and MPs to travel and hold motorbike rallies, where people can see them and connect with them. As the MPs were encouraged to travel, the PM had earlier asked them to get the feedback of people on their expectations from the 2016-17 budget. This time, he has sought feedback from the ground on demonetisation and also wants the MPs to encourage people to adopt digital methods of payment and go cashless.

Communication in-charge for Congress Randeep Surjewala alleges that Modi's half-tenure has been about empty vessels making much noise. “Rhetoric without reality check, rehashed half-implemented schemes, re-fixing goalposts constantly without tangible delivery and retribution

against every dissenting voice have become the hallmarks of Modi administration,” he says. “There is growing disappointment and dejection among people of India with a PM who sells new dreams everyday that are turning into dreadful reality.”

Surjewala promises an “all-new” Rahul Gandhi to take on Modi. “Our vice-president is playing on the front foot. He has rattled the PM. This will continue,” he says, indicating a compelling second half.

Modi's relationship with the Opposition has always been uneasy as they accused him of being autocratic, divisive and indulging in double-speak. In the wake of the November 8 demonetisation, it has become even more acrimonious: the Opposition had united to stall the winter session of Parliament that ended without conducting much business.

The head of a think-tank, working closely with the government, says a lot of thought had gone into demonetisation. “While it is expected to bring in economic benefits in the long run, the move can catapult the PM to being a pan-national leader, cutting across caste and religion,” he explains.

Crunching complicated numbers of community and religion, they found the BJP had just about 18 per cent of the national vote-base. The only way to expand it was to go beyond these considerations. “As demonetisation is projected as a crusade against the corrupt, Modi has attempted to make the underprivileged the soldiers in this fight,” the think-tank head says. “Since they are all stakeholders, they may be willing to take the hardships in their stride.”

This may just prove to be a game-changer in the country's electoral landscape. With polls round the corner in five states, demonetisation and its

fallout have overtaken the usual issues of caste and community.

While it may have changed the political discourse for the time being, it is still tough to say if it will yield electoral dividend for the BJP. According to the party's national vice-president Vinay Sahasra-budde, it is a huge risk the PM has taken. “But then, risk-takers are always rewarded. Modiji firmly believes that there can be no change without taking risks. He likes to catch the bull by its horns,” the MP adds.

A Cabinet minister told Outlook that Modi he has been “impatient for change” ever since he took over as the PM in May 2014. “Change in the way the capital's entrenched bureaucracy functions, change in the way the government at the centre functions, change in its relationship with the states and most important, change in the way the office of Prime Minister is perceived,” says the minister. “His oft-repeated refrain has been that status quo is not an option.”

Vijay Chauthaiwale, who handles the foreign affairs cell of the BJP, endorses the view that PM Modi likes to lead from the front. “Do you think if the RBI governor or even the finance minister had announced demonetisation, it would have been the same or got the same support from the people? It is how the PM communicates. That makes all the difference,” he says.

BJP national general secretary Murali-dhar Rao also speaks of an “intense association” Modi has with the masses. “We never saw this kind of a dialogue process between the leader and people. He communicates with them over issues of development and good governance. In the next two-and-a-half years, he is ready to face the judgement of the people on the same issues,” he told Outlook. This, and Modi's unpredictability in giving

the country a fresh agenda with regularity has stumped the Opposition, making them wary. “This has been the hallmark of the first half of Modi ji's government,” says Rao.

A BJP leader says the PM's style of functioning sometimes gives the impression that he is autocratic and riding roughshod over colleagues and Opposition. “No doubt the government is driven by the PMO, but the ministers and bureaucrats are in no way being stifled. In fact, the PM encourages them to think out-of-the-box and come forward with innovative ideas. There is better inter-ministerial coordination as he did away with the high powered committees that were the norm during UPA tenure,” the BJP leader says.

However, Modi did have to contend with interference from the RSS and its affiliates. So, while initiatives like Make in India, Digital India, Start Up India and Swachh Bharat were rolled out by the government, fringe-driven movements like beef ban and ghar wapsi threatened to overshadow them. Dealing with these elements certainly posed a challenge to Modi, admits a senior BJP leader.

“The Sangh had been waiting for a BJP-led government for a long time. When Modi took over—that too with such a huge majority—many of these elements felt a sense of entitlement,” says the BJP leader, believed to be close to the RSS. They thought they could have a say in the government and its policies. And they probably succeeded for some time.”

It was a delicate balance for Modi to achieve. Sources claim that while the PM appeared to condone the doings and utterances of the so-called fringe elements, he actually made it a point to put them down in private. “Now, the Modi government and the Sangh have attained a working relationship. While most of the elements have been reined in, the PM has allowed them a tacit role in one or two ministries of their interest,” the BJP leader adds.

Could an Embassy in Jerusalem Bring Us Closer to Peace?

Mr. Trump could change that by using the embassy decision to inject some urgency into negotiations over Jerusalem.

He could begin by announcing, as promised, that he had decided to begin the process of moving the embassy to western Jerusalem. But he would need to make a parallel announcement that he would establish an embassy to the state of Palestine in East Jerusalem when a final status agreement is reached.

That would not quell the furor over moving the embassy. Indeed, it would likely increase it. So, Mr. Trump would also need to declare that he was willing to suspend the embassy move while the Israelis and Palestinians negotiate Jerusalem's status.

He could then invite President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt and King Abdullah of Jordan — two Arab leaders keen to curry favor with the new president — to join him in convening a summit meeting

with the Israeli and Palestinian leaders. They could then establish a three-month timetable to conclude the direct negotiations. During that period, Israel would need to freeze housing construction and demolition in East Jerusalem.

To give the Trump administration leverage on both the Israelis and the Palestinians, the president could declare that if either side were unwilling to negotiate in good faith, it would forfeit American recognition of its capital in Jerusalem. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Mr. Abbas would then have an explanation for their outraged publics: They were accepting Mr. Trump's invitation to save Jerusalem, rather than to surrender it.

If the two sides failed to reach agreement, the United States, Egypt and Jordan could resort to a United Nations Security Council resolution, not to condemn any party, but rather to set out the parameters of a rational solution on

Jerusalem: Israel would be asked to accept a Palestinian capital in the Arab parts of East Jerusalem, and in return, the Palestinians, and all other members of the international community, would be asked to recognize Israel's capital in all of Jewish Jerusalem. The resolution would also need to call for a special regime to be established in the Old City to protect the status quo for the religious sites.

The United States could then set up two embassies in the undivided city, one on the west side for Israel and the other on the east side for Palestine. If the status of Jerusalem were resolved, it would open the way to negotiation on other final-status issues, like the borders of a Palestinian state. Arab countries would also be more likely to help with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict if they saw that the issue they care about most — Jerusalem — was resolved.

Far-fetched? Perhaps. But consider

the alternative: If Mr. Trump, as one of his first acts in office, moves the embassy to Jerusalem without simultaneously making efforts to jump-start peace talks, it would likely incite an explosion of anger among Palestinians and serve as a rallying cry for Islamic extremists from Tehran to Raqqa, Syria. American embassies and citizens in Muslim countries might well become targets of violent demonstrations. Stoked by Hamas, confrontations between Palestinians and Israelis could erupt in Jerusalem and the West Bank. Arab and Muslim leaders would most likely demand that Mr. Trump rescind the decision. And Mr. Trump's laudable aspiration to be the ultimate peacemaker would evaporate. For somebody who cares deeply about winning, this is a losing proposition. Mr. Trump should either defer the decision for now, or combine it with a carefully planned diplomatic initiative to resolve Jerusalem first.

Modi Rings In 2017 With New Set Of Falsehoods

is down 28% from last year (to 10.7 from 14.8 lakh hectares last year)! This is data publicly available on the Ministry of Agriculture's website backed by a note published by the Press Information Bureau, not disseminated by the alleged propaganda machinery of the Opposition.

These were just the evasions and the half-truths. The downright untruths are even more worrying. The Prime Minister declared in his address that he was "introducing a nation-wide scheme for pregnant women whereby 6,000 rupees will be transferred directly to their bank accounts. The sorry truth is that the Section 4(b) of the National Food Security Act 2013 already provided a universal maternity benefit of Rs. 6,000 (following from the Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana, IGMSY, 2010 which gave an allowance of Rs. 4000 to pregnant and

lactating mothers in 53 pilot districts). The Ministry of Women and Child Development, when questioned by the Supreme Court on non-implementation, filed a misleading affidavit on October 30, 2015, stating that the government would extend coverage of the IGMSY program from 53 districts to 200 by 2015-16 and to all districts by 2016-17. The budgetary allocation for IGMSY in 2016-17, in direct contrast to this claim, remains an abysmally low Rs. 400 crore (unchanged from the previous two years), which makes it impossible to increase coverage from the 53 pilot districts! You did not introduce the scheme, Mr. Prime Minister. You did not even implement it when you could have. Your ministry misled and prevaricated in a sworn document before the highest court of the land - you too are following in their inglorious footsteps by misleading the very

people who placed you in office.

The sops announced for senior citizens, aged 60 and above, include 8% interest in fixed-term deposits for a minimum of ten years - hardly much use in a country whose average life expectancy 68.3 years. Nine out of ten seniors will in all probability need to withdraw their deposits before the end of the ten year period, and will lose the higher interest rate which will then be deducted from the principal amount remaining. Net gain equals zero.

The speech abounded with countless examples of flawed economic theory. The most obvious one is that notes of large denomination - apparently - increase prices and inflation. Perfect logic no doubt then to replace notes of Rs. 1,000 with those of Rs. 2,000, Sir. Or that political parties should reject a "holier-than thou" approach to their

funding, a statement that would be laudable were it not so deeply steeped in hypocrisy. The Delhi High Court in a landmark judgement delivered in March 2014 found the BJP guilty of violating FCRA (foreign exchange) norms for accepting donations from a London-based mining firm. In the budget session of 2016, the government conveniently brought in an amendment to the FCRA Act, 2010 (with retrospective effect no less) via a money bill route that bypassed the need for a discussion in parliament, which ensured that donations made by foreign companies will not attract the provisions of the FCRA Act! Mr. Prime Minister - you spoke of sachai and achhai in your speech. What is perhaps more relevant is a Hindi phrase we all heard in childhood - Jhooth Boleya Kaua Kaatey. We still hope the dark crow will not grow into a bird of greater ill-omen.

Russia Used Fake News to Influence the U.S. Election

In the month since, there has been much debate over who was responsible for creating and spreading such stories, and what role they played in voters' decisions.

Clapper is not the first to suggest that Russian groups played a significant role in fueling fake news. And even his own testimony to Congress should not be taken as gospel. Still, his statements lend greater credibility to the allegations, which have in some cases relied on questionable evidence and methodology. A Nov. 24 Washington Post story linking Russia to fake news was justly criticized for its credulous presentation of findings by an anonymous group called PropOrNot, whose list of "Russian propaganda"

websites implausibly included a broad range of well-known, U.S.-based news and commentary outlets.

That the Post story was flawed does not mean that the Russians played no role in spreading fake news, of course. Adrian Chen, who criticized the Post's story for the New Yorker in December, wrote for the New York Times Magazine in 2015 about a group of Russian "trolls" who spread various hoaxes via U.S. social media even before the most recent presidential election cycle.

At the same time, it would be a mistake to overstate the Russian government's role in the fake news phenomenon. Plenty of it was homegrown: BuzzFeed, the Post, NPR, and others have independently

tracked down and interviewed the proprietors of some of the most prominent fake news purveyors, each of whom have their own motivations, and none of whom have obvious ties to Russia.

Multiple reports have also pointed to a cottage industry of fake news sites in Macedonia, at least some of which appear to be the work of entrepreneurs pursuing advertising revenue. This supports the argument that Facebook itself is at least partly to blame for the fake news phenomenon, because its news feed algorithm tends to favor sensational and partisan stories over sober, factual reports. (We at Slate have created a tool, This Is Fake, to help flag fake news on Facebook.

Facebook has since created its own tools, partnering with third-party fact-checkers.) A decline in public trust of the mainstream media, concerted propaganda efforts by U.S.-based political groups, and media illiteracy among the public share some blame, too. Still, Clapper's comments and the upcoming report are likely to raise fresh questions about the mechanisms by which fake news is created and promoted, and about how deeply Russian hackers and media outlets have ingratiated themselves into that distribution system. Disinformation and propaganda have long been specialties of the Russian government and state-run media. Increasingly, they're becoming endemic to the United States as well.

House GOP, Trump team hatch border wall plan

GOP lawmakers and aides believe they could win a public relations war over the matter by daring Democrats — particularly vulnerable red-state senators up for reelection next year — to shutter the government over one of Trump's most popular campaign pledges.

Bolstering their cause is a long list of Senate Democrats who voted for the border measure a decade ago, including Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) — making it harder for Democrats to say no now, Republicans believe.

"There's already in existing law the authorization for hundreds of miles of build out on the southern border ... so, one important step in the right direction will be funding the existing law and beginning the building out of hundreds of miles of wall, or fence, on the southern border," said House Republican Policy Committee Chairman Luke Messer (Ind.). The Indiana Republican added: "If tied to the rest of government funding, it's much harder for the Democrats to stop, and by the way, I think it's much harder for Democrats to vote against it if what you're doing is authorizing funding for an existing law."

The plan appeared to be an implicit acknowledgment by Republicans and the incoming administration that Mexico will not pay for the border wall. But in a tweet Friday morning, Trump denied that, saying he still plans to force Mexico to pick up the tab on the back end.

"The dishonest media does not report that any money spent on building the Great Wall (for sake of speed), will be paid back by Mexico later!" he tweeted just after 6 a.m.

The tentative plan would likely be just a piece of a broader, multiyear border security strategy, which Capitol Hill Republicans are still hashing out. They're already framing the spring cash infusion — which could total hundreds of millions, or perhaps billions, of dollars — as a "down payment" on Trump's "build-the-wall" platform. That pledge vaulted the New Yorker from afterthought to front-runner in last year's crowded GOP presidential primary.

Multiple Republican sources said the House will also likely pass a border-security package sometime later in the spring or summer. The plan could meld new provisions to older bills passed by the House and the Homeland Security Committee in 2014 and 2015, respectively.

The cost of a border wall is potentially enormous, with estimates ranging from a few billion dollars to \$14 billion. And that's just for constructing the wall or fence; it does not include a range of other expenses, from maintenance to border patrol agents to purchasing private property from Texas landowners.

Still, House Republicans feel they need to give Trump the tools he needs to

carry out his wall promise as quickly as possible. The proposal under discussion could offer a way to produce legislation within his first 100 days in office. All they have to do is fund it.

One of their biggest challenges in doing so will be Senate Democrats. To clear the upper chamber's 60-vote legislative threshold, Republicans will need eight Democrats to back the measure.

GOP insiders plan to pressure Democrats who voted for the original law to get in line with their plan. Schumer and Democratic Sens. Dianne Feinstein of California, Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, Ron Wyden of Oregon and Tom Carper of Delaware all voted for the legislation a decade ago. So, too, did then-Sens. Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

But the dynamics on immigration and border security have shifted dramatically since then. Democrats nowadays want comprehensive immigration reform to accompany any fortifications of the border. That sweeping approach would include a pathway to citizenship, which is extremely unlikely to happen under Trump.

It's one of the reasons Republicans may slip the funding into must-pass spending legislation. The government is currently operating on a stopgap "continuing resolution," which expires at the end of April, so they'll have to fund

the government for the rest of the year by then. Other wall funding vehicles being considered include the 2018 appropriations bill for Homeland Security and a standalone legislative package. There are legislative hurdles to both those approaches as well.

Republicans could also run into roadblocks within their own party. For one, the price tag could be a major issue with the far right. A new, yet-to-be-released Government Accountability Office study estimates the cost of a single layer fence at \$6.5 million per mile, or \$10.4 million per mile for a double-layer fence.

Insiders say Customs and Border Protection, at the request of the incoming Trump administration, has identified about 400 miles on the U.S.-Mexico border where structures could be erected or need to be fortified. Should Trump line that with double-layer fencing, for example, the cost would be about \$4.2 billion.

Conservatives are bound to demand any such cost be offset, another potential hurdle. Republicans could also face an uphill battle with Republicans from border towns, whose constituents would likely grumble at construction projects running through their backyards. There are also eminent domain wrinkles to iron out, as the government will have to purchase land from Texans to construct the project.

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The secret to a happy marriage every husband **NEEDS** to know

Relationship expert reveals how he salvaged his partnership with his wife after she admitted she was profoundly unhappy

(Agencies) When my wife Kate touches the side of her jaw, it's because it aches. If she stands in a certain way, her sciatica is playing up. These days I notice these tiny inferences that she's feeling under par. I listen when she talks, making eye contact, whereas once I would have hidden behind my newspaper grunting intermittently, feigning interest.

Today, I can say that our marriage is robust and joyful: full of laughter, occasional healthy bouts of contention, and above all, love. And the reason is that I'm in tune with Kate. I've learned to put her first; to think about her and what she needs. That's hard to do all the time, but I'm getting better at it.

I've learned from my own bitter experience that a marriage can unravel when a husband ceases to care enough about his wife. In fact, most marriages don't end with rows, adultery or even incompatibility, but with an aimless drift into separation.

'Growing apart' has now officially overtaken infidelity as the main cause of family breakdown in Britain, and the tragedy is that it is often utterly avoidable.

Relationships that could be salvaged — that are just going through normal, unhappy phases — are needlessly in jeopardy as couples sleepwalk into divorce. We've reached crisis point. Nearly half of teenagers sitting their GCSEs this year are not living with

both natural parents.

Yet there is hope. It may sound counterintuitive, but the evidence is that staying together in an unhappy marriage — and I'm not for one second talking about the tiny minority of awful or abusive ones — could be the best thing a couple ever do. This seems an astonishing proposition until we recognise that unhappiness is often a transient state.

Bad situations improve. Children grow up and become easier to manage. People change their attitudes.

Intent is the over-riding factor: if we want to stick together — for better, for worse, in sickness and in health — then we will.

I've spent the past 20 years teaching thousands of couples how to have a happy marriage and am now research director for Marriage Foundation.

And my formula for fixing things is a simple one: 'Happy wife, happy life' is a maxim that is backed by research and has saved my own marriage.

First-hand experience and a survey of almost 300 mothers my wife Kate and I carried out for our latest book, *What Mums Want (And Dads Need to Know)*, corroborates this. Half the mothers we questioned who were now 'happy with their relationship' had at some point in the past been 'unhappy'. One-quarter had been 'very unhappy'.



And the mums we surveyed told us that friendship, being 'interested in me' and 'interested in the children', and 'being kind' are the key qualities they seek in their spouse.

Surprisingly, at the bottom of the list come 'fixing things', 'earning a decent wage' and 'being adventurous, strong and sexy'. What's more, when Mum is happy, the rest of the family tend to be happy. This is much less true for dads. It is a simple truth that I have now acknowledged.

When I take responsibility for our marriage, and put Kate first in my pecking order of priorities, the rest will follow.

I learned this through first-hand experience when our relationship reached a crisis

point. It happened eight years into our marriage when Kate told me she was profoundly unhappy.

'You know I love you, Harry,' she said. 'But since we've had the children, I've found it harder and harder to talk to you. We have a comfortable life and you're wonderful with the children when it suits you. But you don't seem at all interested in me. We don't seem to be friends any more. I feel lonely and unimportant. I'm not sure how long I can go on like this.'

The white flash that shot through my head like a thunderbolt temporarily blinded me with a mixture of panic and terror. Was my marriage over? I never saw it coming.

Looking back, I can't believe I could have been so

oblivious to the fact that we were so perilously close to collapsing. We'd rarely rowed. We had two young daughters we both adored and my job as a stockbroker in Hong Kong gave us a comfortable lifestyle. My immediate fear was that I'd lose my children. Losing Kate would mean losing them. The thought

shocked me to the core.

Everyone accepts that good marriages can go bad. But it was never going to happen to us, was it? Yet insidiously we'd grown apart and, without knowing it, were drifting toward a break-up.

Fortunately for us both, Kate didn't leave me. As a result of the decision I made to put her first, to be her friend and take notice of her, we not only stayed together, but after 30 years of marriage — I'm now 56 and Kate is 52 — I can honestly say that today we're both happier than we've ever been.

Had I known then what I know now, we would never have got into the mess we did. Kate was a natural mum so it was easy for me to take a back seat at home.

I now know that my prime role is to take responsibility for my marriage, to love Kate, to be her friend, to be kind. When I do that, our marriage stays strong, we parent well as a team, and family life works well. That's what mums want. That's what dads need to know. After Kate's ultimatum 22 years ago, we went, reluctantly on my part I admit, on a marriage course. On every level since, our lives have undergone a sea change. We moved back to Britain in 1997, went on to have four more children — our brood of six comprises Rosie, 25, Polly, 23, Gracie, 19, Sizzle (Cicely), 17, Charlie, 15, and 13-year-old Johnnie.

I learned to stop taking Kate for granted. I started to show her affection, to say, 'I love you'; to notice the new dress she was wearing and to ask how she was feeling. I learnt to be kind to her — and this meant sometimes not doing the things I wanted to do.

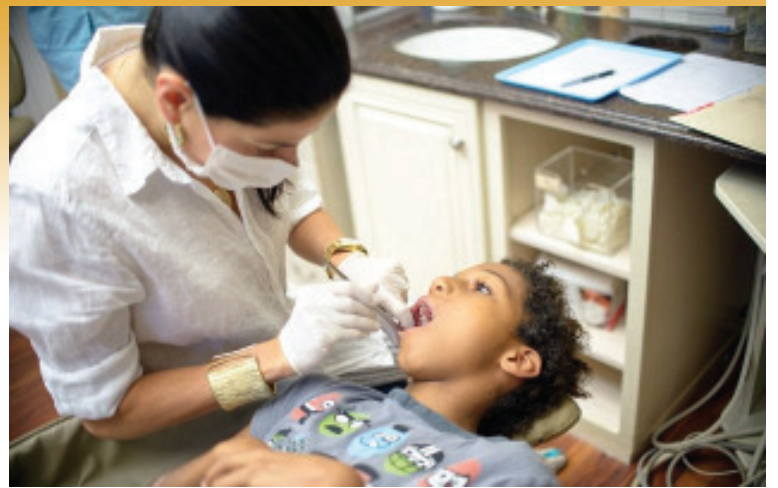
And this week, the first in January after the New Year holidays, when lawyers are inundated with couples seeking divorces, I'd advise all of them to pause before they take an irrevocable step. In conjunction with Professor Stephen McKay of the University of Lincoln, we analysed data from a large national survey of mothers. Most of the mums who were 'unhappy' with their relationship when their babies were born now said they were 'happy'. More amazingly, half of the mums who had been unhappiest now rated themselves 'very happy' with their partners a decade later. The biggest worry is the tendency for couples who are reasonably happy to drift into separation.



Alamy

The world's highest-paying jobs that cause the LEAST stress

(Agencies) January is a big month for job hunting, as all the promise of a new year sees people resolving to make positive changes in their lives. If you're contemplating a career change of your own in 2017, you might want to consider retraining as an orthodontist, an economist or even a mathematician. They might sound like tricky professions, but in fact they feature on a list of jobs that combine low stress levels with substantial salaries - up to as much as \$221,390 (£180,000) a year. The list shows that careers in maths and sciences are surprisingly low on stress in comparison to other professions.



Roles like mathematician, physicist, economist and astronomer all made the list - as did medical professions like optometrist and orthodontist. Business Insider used the US Department of Labor's Occupational Information Network (O*NET) database that gives jobs a 'stress tolerance' rating on a scale from zero to 100 to compile its rankings. A lower rating indicates a less stressful job relative to other professions. The rating takes into account how regularly workers have to accept criticism, and cope with high stress at work in an effective manner. Business Insider used the information to compile its list of 20 jobs that all have a stress rating of 70 or less, but still come with a healthy wage packet of at least \$70,000 (£50,000) per year. Although the data was compiled by a US organisation, the salaries and stress equivalents are believed to be comparable to the UK.

Beauty crash course: A dermatologist details the three skincare steps you should resolve NEVER to skip to achieve your best complexion in 2017

(Agencies) If you had the chance to pick the brain of a world-renowned make-up artist, a celebrity hairstylist or a dermatologist at the top of his or her field, what would you ask them? As beauty editors, we're fortunate enough to get one-on-one time with the industry's finest, and the tips and tricks we pick up are too good to keep to ourselves. Each week, we pass along knowledge on topics like make-up techniques, hair hacks and skin health straight from the pros. Here, New York City-based dermatologist Dr. Neal Schultz details the three products you should resolve to use every day of 2017 for younger, more radiant-looking skin.

SUNSCREEN
'If there's enough light where you can see your hand of innovative SPF products available that go on sheer and won't make skin feel greasy, so you won't be tempted to skip the all-important step. And when applying, don't forget about the backs of your hands and your décolletage. 'You don't want your face to look 20 years younger!' said Dr. Schultz.

AN ANTIOXIDANT
Because no sunscreen is 100-percent effective and most people don't use enough, Dr. Schultz also advises using a topical antioxidant daily. Antioxidants, he explained, neutralize free radicals caused by UV-radiation and pollution that can lead to



premature aging and cancer. every day. This not only makes products work better, but it makes your complexion look more luminous and supple and signals your skin to kick-start hyaluronic acid and collagen production. Physical exfoliants (like grainy scrubs) are too harsh for regular use, so Dr. Schultz recommends using a chemical exfoliant like glycolic acid, which he says is gentle yet effective. If you have sensitive skin, however, talk to your dermatologist first about what level of chemical exfoliant is right for you.

A CHEMICAL EXFOLIANT
'One of the reasons that moisturizers don't seem to work as well in the winter is that you have all of these dead cells on the surface of your skin that prevent it from getting into your skin,' said Dr. Schultz. The solution is to exfoliate

A CHEMICAL EXFOLIANT

'One of the reasons that moisturizers don't seem to work as well in the winter is that you have all of these dead cells on the surface of your skin that prevent it from getting into your skin,' said Dr. Schultz. The solution is to exfoliate every day. This not only makes products work better, but it makes your complexion look more luminous and supple and signals your skin to kick-start hyaluronic acid and collagen production. Physical exfoliants (like grainy scrubs) are too harsh for regular use, so Dr. Schultz recommends using a chemical exfoliant like glycolic acid, which he says is gentle yet effective. If you have sensitive skin, however, talk to your dermatologist first about what level of chemical exfoliant is right for you.

Google CEO Sundar Pichai calls demonetisation a bold move for India

(Agencies) Google CEO, Sundar Pichai is in India and has been making plenty of headlines. Before meeting the students and giving a speech at IIT-Kharagpur, Pichai told the Economic Times, that the prime minister's demonetisation move was a bold one for a country like India, and if things turn out as intended, it could propel the country to global ranks in terms of digital payments.

The CEO of the world biggest internet company commented that "I have spent my life developing platforms. Every time you drive a platform shift, it has

a big multiplicative effect, leveraged effect. Digitising a country of the scale of India, and making it work well, truly will have a beneficial effect,"

Google will also be working to build better digital products for a more digital savvy Indian economy going forward and is looking at the the Unified Payments Interface to for solutions to push out these products and services.

He brushed away fears about protectionism, a topic that recently generated interest when Flipkart's Sachin Bansal and Ola CEO Bhavish

Aggarwal raised flags about the government not doing enough for Indian companies (over foreign ones). "I have always felt the US to be an open and inclusive country. I don't expect any of that to change," said Pichai. "Companies in the US deeply care about being competitive. The reason why they are the best in the world is because they invest in the best resources and they have that mindset. There is nothing I see that indicates that will change," Pichai told the Economic Times.

At the same time Pichai hinted that Indian startups need



to look at global scale and test marketplace instead of just their products on a global sticking to India.

Apple demands for tax concessions and sops could adversely affect Make In India campaign



(Agencies) In the last week of 2016, news trickled in that Apple plans to start making iPhones in India through its contract manufacturer Wistron in a Bengaluru plant. Since then, there have been developments such as Wistron requesting for an expansion in its facility. But it seems like there are fresh impediments that could crop up with Apple's iPhone making plans in India.

According a report in Business Standard, a senior commerce minister has stated that Apple's growing demands for concessions, something that no other company making in India is asking for, could put some brakes to its plans. In addition to the exemption from local sourcing demand, Apple has requested for tax breaks and concessions with labelling requirements, according to sources.

It is said that the finance ministry is looking into the tax-break demand. Other demands are being looked at by an inter-governmental panel made of senior officials from department of industrial policy and promotion (DIPP) and department of electronics and information technology (DeITY) at a meeting scheduled for later this week. Apple has been identified as a company which brings in 'state-of-the-art' and 'cutting-edge' technology. So it has got the exemption from the 30 percent local sourcing rule for the first three years. Thereafter, according to the rules, the following five years the company has to meet the 30 percent local sourcing rule. But Apple, being Apple, wants an indefinite exemption from this domestic sourcing rule.

No wonder she's smiling!

NBC's new recruit Megyn Kelly laughs and jokes outside her NYC apartment as it emerges she turned down Fox News' offer of \$100m to stay



(Agencies) Megyn Kelly was spotted grinning from ear to ear Wednesday night as she stepped out of her New York apartment - no doubt buoyed up by the knowledge that she is moving on to new horizons at NBC.

The news on Tuesday that Kelly would be leaving Fox News put to bed months of speculation regarding what the star host planned to do when her contract was up with the cable news giant.

Not revealed during the big announcement of Kelly's hiring, however, was how much she would be getting paid in her new role at NBC, and just how much Fox News was offering to get her to stay.

It is now being reported that Kelly was looking at a four-year deal worth \$100million to stay at Fox News and host The Kelly File, but instead chose to sign with NBC where she will host two shows in addition to special events and make an annual salary of \$15million.

That means the NBC offer that Kelly accepted will pay her the same amount she is currently getting at Fox News.

Both Fox News and NBC declined to comment on contract negotiations.

Mediaite reports that Lachlan Murdoch, the Executive Co-Chairman

of News Corp and 21st Century Fox, approved a \$25million-a-year contract for Kelly in his bid to keep her on the network.

That amount was much higher than the \$20million that had been reported elsewhere, and all Kelly has said is that Murdoch gave her a 'generous offer.'

That contract was also for four years

according to a source close to Kelly, thereby totaling \$100million.

The Los Angeles Times meanwhile spoke to multiple people that were familiar with the negotiations between NBC and Kelly who said the network 'agreed to pay Kelly close to her current salary.' That would mean that Kelly would be accepting her new post with an annual salary of \$15million, which is notably less than the annual salaries of Robin Roberts and Kelly Ripa, who make \$18million and \$17million respectively at ABC.

Kelly will also make far less than her new co-worker Matt Lauer, who now takes home \$25million a year as host of Today.

It was reported last month however that money was not the key issue for Kelly, who instead was looking to have a schedule better suited to her life as a mother to three young children. The Kelly File tapes live at 9pm each night, and kicking off her last week of shows on Tuesday Kelly explained the toll that took on her relationship with her kids in explaining her reason for jumping ship.

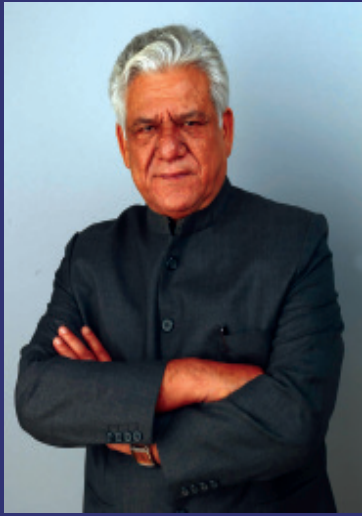
Instagram 'tricks children into signing away privacy'

(Agencies) Social media giants were yesterday accused of bamboozling children into signing away their privacy. Youngsters desperate to get online agree to 'hidden clauses' that allow pictures they share with friends to be bought and sold, said a major report. It named Instagram – the photo messaging service hugely popular with teenagers – as one site which confronts new users with densely-packed terms and conditions when they sign up, running to 17 pages. The report by Children's Commissioner for England Anne Longfield said these should be rewritten to make them clearer. It also accused social media firms of doing



too little to help youngsters who are bullied online report it and get abusive messages or pictures taken down. The Growing Up Digital report said the explosion in children's social media use means typical three to four-year-olds spend eight hours, 18 minutes a week online. And 12 to 15-year-olds use the net for at least 20 hours a week.

Veteran actor Om Puri passes away at 66 after cardiac arrest



(Agencies) Mumbai: Veteran actor Om Puri, who gave countless memorable performances in movies of diverse genres, died at his residence here this morning after a massive heart attack. He was 66. He passed away this morning due to a massive heart attack at his residence in suburban Andheri. It's shocking," a family source said.

From Bollywood to Hollywood, from independent to art films, the noted actor,

known for his versatility, gave several acclaimed performances. Puri featured in several Indian, Pakistani, British and Hollywood mainstream commercial films. He was awarded the Padma Shri, the country's fourth highest civilian award, in 1990. Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled Puri's demise and recalled his long career in theatre and films. Bollywood celebrities, including Akshay Kumar, Karan Johar, Anupam Kher,

Javed Akhtar and Mahesh Bhatt expressed grief over Puri's demise, calling it a huge loss to Indian cinema.

Born in Ambala, Haryana, in a Punjabi family, Puri graduated from the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune. He was also an alumnus of the 1973 class of National School of Drama, where Naseeruddin Shah was a co-student. He made his film debut in the 1976 Marathi film "Ghashiram Kotwal". Some of his most

notable films include "Bhavni Bhavai", "Sandgate", "Ardh Satya", "Mirch Masala", "Dharavi", "Aakrosh", "Ardh Satya", "Maachis", "Gupt", "Dhoop", "Yuva", "Don", "Agneepath", "Bajrangi Bhaijaan" and others. He earned international fame in many British films, such as "My Son the Fanatic", "East Is East", "The Parole Officer" and others. He also appeared in Hollywood films like "City of Joy", "Wolf", "The Ghost and the Darkness" among others.

Priyanka Chopra includes her father's song in 'Sarvann'



(Agencies) Mumbai: Bollywood star Priyanka Chopra says one of her original reasons for producing the forthcoming Punjabi film "Sarvann" was to include her late father's rendition of a 'shabad'. "My father Dr. Ashok Chopra's rendition of the famous shabad by Guru Gobind Singhji, 'Sarvann'," Priyanka tweeted on Tuesday with a link to the track. "One of my original reasons for making 'Sarvann'. Can't wait to share it with you all. Miss you dad," added the National Award winner. Priyanka said: "He had recorded the song and we meant to release it, but then he fell ill... It really feels like he's next to me when I hear it." Her father — who was a retired doctor from the Indian Army — died in 2013 after a prolonged battle with cancer. Priyanka was very close to him, and she has the words "Daddy's little girl" tattooed on her wrist.



(Agencies) Los Angeles: Singer Justin Bieber has abandoned his ailing puppy Tod, a seven-month-old Chow Chow. The "Sorry" hitmaker has come under fire after he left his puppy with his backing dancer C.J. Salvador just a few months after he adopted him, and now Salvador is desperately trying to raise as much cash as possible so that the canine can undergo lifesaving surgery on his hips, reports TMZ.com.

Salvador has now set up a GoFundMe page online, a website known for crowd funding and fundraising, in the hope of raising the

Justin Bieber abandons his puppy

money so that Tod can have the operation rather than being euthanised.

Salvador posted an image of Tod playing in the snow on his Facebook account. "Tod is a 7-month-old chow chow born with a birth defect called 'sever hip dysplasia'. Long story short, by the time he turns 1, he won't be able to walk, run, let alone play. This condition presents us with two options: 1: is to put him down (which I refuse to do) 2: let him go through a very specialized surgery.

"The surgery however, will cost around \$8000. So I am humbly asking you to donate anything. Anything would be greatly appreciated," he posted. Although the post went up only a few hours ago, the target has already been met and Salvador is planning to

use the rest of the money raised to fund Tod's rehabilitation.

"Words can't describe how amazing it is to wake up and see that we've reached the goal and then some. The extra money is actually going to go to his rehabilitation and his physical therapy, which he's going to need a lot. Thank you guys so so much for making my birthday wishes come true," he said in a video which too was posted along with the image," Salvador said.

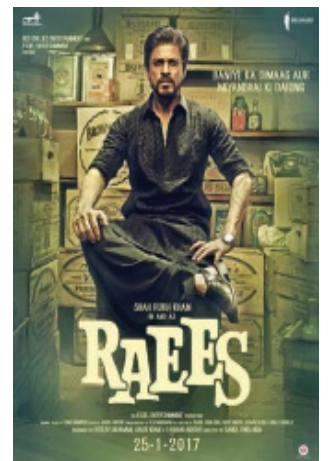
Although Bieber

reportedly made approximately \$56 million last year, Salvador didn't feel it was right to ask the pop star for money, TMZ.com reported. He wrote on his social media account that his family had "adopted" the dog and he "did not ask Justin for money because he has nothing to do with the situation". This is not the first time when Bieber has abandoned his pet. He previously took on a monkey, hamster and a snake and then dismissed them within the first few months.

RAEES

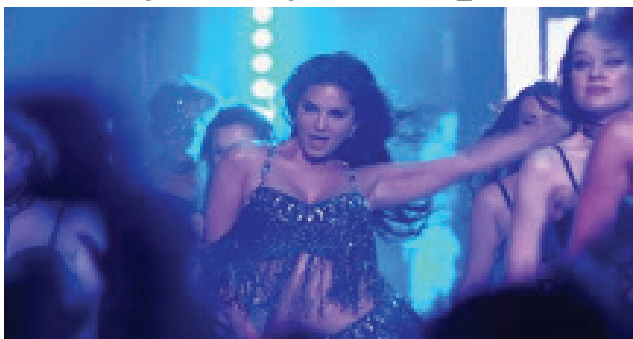
Shah Rukh Khan kicks off 2017 starring in and as RAEES which releases all across North America on Wednesday, January 25. A hot new music video from the much anticipated film has just premiered.

RAEES is the fictitious story of a man named Raees (Shah Rukh Khan), set in early 1980's to 1990's Gujarat, India. The film explores how Raees' relationships and meteoric rise helped him build an entire empire from scratch, to make him the single most powerful man in the state. Less of a gangster but more of an impresario, Raees gains popularity, a cult following and most importantly the public's trust by demonstrating entrepreneurial flair, unfettered determination to achieving his goals and ironically a heart of gold. His layered character traits encapsulate an inimitable blend of personas, making



him revered, loved and feared. Always thinking ahead of the curve and using revolutionary ideas of management which were unheard of during his time, but are now doctrines for students, Raees eliminates every opposition that comes his way. However, his downfall will be crossing paths with the no-nonsense police officer Majumdar, whose sole reason for existence is the elimination of crime. What ensues next is a tumultuous battle between the two, which forms a key defining element of the film's narrative.

"Mostly sunny" will open on iTunes/VOD on January 10, 2017



(Insider Bureau) A Film by Dilip Mehta Starring Sunny Leone with a huge following on social media, with 1,160,000 Twitter Followers, 17,780,000 Facebook Likes, 34,200,000 YouTube views, has reinvented herself as one of Bollywood's biggest stars. She has more than 100-million fans and 20 million+ followers on social media and is India's most 'Googled' celebrity for the fifth year running. This documentary tells the

remarkable story of this Canadian-born, American bred adult film star who is pursuing her dreams of Bollywood stardom. Even more astonishing is that Sunny was born into a strict Sikh family in small-town Canada before being discovered as Penthouse "Pet of Year."

It's a 'fly-on-the-wall' glimpse of an extraordinary life - one that exposes the conflict between traditional cultural values held sacrosanct by immigrant parents and the lifestyle choices being made by their children under and within the influence of

Western society. Determined to succeed as a mainstream actress in a country in the midst of its own transformation, Sunny is unapologetic as she challenges the modern notions of independence, celebrity and feminism while forcing the birthplace of the Kama Sutra to confront its paradoxical relationship with sex. Is her ambition blind or bold and how is India responding to this provocative and unabashed bombshell as she continues to take the country by storm?

'Gulabi Aankhen' recreated with an EDM spin for Sonakshi Sinha's 'Noor'

(Agencies) Remixing old melodies is the new trend in Bollywood. From 'Haseeno Ka Deewana' in 'Kaabil' to 'Hamma Hamma' in 'OK Jaanu', these upbeat numbers are making their way to party playlists. Another classic joining this growing list is 'Gulabi Aankhen' that will feature in the Sonakshi Sinha starrer 'Noor'.

Directed by Sunhil Sippy, 'Noor' is based on a novel by Pakistani author Saba Imtiaz's hit from the 1970 movie 'The Train' starring superstar Rajesh Khanna, was composed by RD Burman and sung by the mellifluous Mohammed Rafi. According to reports, Amaal Malik has hit the consoles and recreated the song with foot tapping EDM mixes. It has been reported that the 29-year-old actress has already wrapped up shooting for the song sequence.



Karan Johar, Salman Khan's film with Akshay Kumar similar to Ajay Devgn's next film?



(Agencies) If you thought the clash between Karan Johar and Ajay Devgn was done with, after Ae Dil Hai Mushkil and Shivaay released on Diwali together, we have news for you. It was earlier reported that Akshay Kumar will star in a film co-produced by Salman Khan and Karan Johar. This is a unique coupling (tripling?) as the three of them have never worked on a project together. They are also arguably the biggest names in the industry at the moment.

It was announced that the film will be ready to release in 2018, and will be directed by Anurag Singh.

However, Quint reports that this could cause major disconcert for Ajay Devgn and Randeep Hooda as they have been working on the pre-production of a film

based on the historic Battle of Saragarhi.

The report claims that Akshay Kumar has been signed on to play Havaldar Ishar Singh, a military leader of 21 Sikh soldiers who led his army to a deathly war against Afghan invaders.

The war was then titled Battle of Saragarhi.

Ajay Devgn has announced the film last year itself, with the hashtag #sonsofsardaar indicating it would be a sequel of sorts to his 2012 film, Son of Sardar.

According to this DNA report, Ajay Devgn is due to play the same character as Akshay Kumar, Ishar Singh. This is supposed to be his next film after he wraps up Baadshaho. However, with Shivaay under-performing at the box-office, it remains to be



seen what Devgn has in store for the film.

This takes the Ajay Devgn-Karan Johar fight to the next level also because Salman Khan was a part of Son of Sardar, in 2012. Also, it has to be said, Devgn's project might have much more research and information at their disposal, but Karan's project has two of the most bankable actors of the industry at the moment, Akshay Kumar and Salman Khan.

Dangal beats Sultan: Aamir Khan's film crosses 300 cr; becomes highest grosser of 2016



(Agencies) Even though Aamir Khan and Salman Khan don't seem to be competing (that we know of), both their films from 2016, Dangal and Sultan were in a race of their own for two reasons. Firstly, both films had similar backgrounds: Haryana and wrestling. Secondly, both stars are known to rake in close to 300 crores per film. The competition had begun since Dangal released on 23 December 2016.

And while the Sultan official box office collection stands at 300.45 crore at the domestic box office, Dangal has officially crossed the 300 crore mark, which officially makes it the highest grossing film of 2016, according to this Times of India report. (These are the domestic box office collections.) According to

Indian Express, Sultan had grossed about Rs 572 crore (from domestic and international markets), while Dangal has already crossed Rs 426 crore gross (Rs 300 crore net) from domestic box office and earned Rs 158.7 crore from the international box office which takes its total worldwide earning to Rs 584.7 crore gross.

Trade pundits are already predicting that Dangal will cross Rs 400 crores at the box office in India. Aamir Khan's next film will be Advait Chauhan's Secret Superstar, which also has Zaira Aslam, the girl who played a teenaged Geeta Phogat in Dangal. Salman Khan is currently working on Kabir Khan's Tubelight and the TV show Bigg Boss.

Russia Used Fake News to Influence the U.S. Election

(Agencies) Fake news was part of the Russian government's attempt to influence the U.S. presidential election, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said in a Senate hearing Thursday morning. Sen. Jack Reed, a Rhode Island Democrat, asked Clapper about allegations that Russian government-backed groups had created or propagated false news stories as part of a broader campaign

that included hacking and stealing emails. Clapper replied: Asked whether those disinformation efforts have continued in the election's wake, Clapper said "yes." He declined to elaborate on the nature of Russia's propaganda campaign in Thursday's hearing, or to speculate on what impact it might have had on the election's outcome, if any. He said there will be more detail in an

unclassified report that is scheduled to be released early next week. Fake news stories, including many written to appeal to a pro-Trump or anti-Clinton audience, circulated widely on Facebook in the months leading up to the Nov. 8 election. They included false reports that the pope had endorsed Trump and that an FBI agent suspected of leaking Clinton's emails had been murdered.

(Contd on page 25)



House GOP, Trump team hatch border wall plan



(Agencies) House Republicans and Donald Trump's team are coalescing around a multi-billion dollar plan to make good on the president-elect's campaign vows to build a wall between the United States and Mexico, according to top Republican lawmakers and aides.

Republican leaders, in tandem with Trump's transition staff, are considering using a 2006 law signed by former President George W. Bush that authorized the construction of 700 miles-plus of "physical barrier" on the southern border. The law was never fully implemented and did not include a sunset provision, allowing Trump to pick up where Bush left off — with the help of new money from Congress.

Yet the plan could potentially provoke a showdown with Democrats over government funding. Republicans are considering whether to tuck the border wall funding into a must-pass spending bill that must be enacted by the end of April. (Contd on page 26)

Why UP matters: Can India's most populous state decide the fate of Delhi ?

(Agencies) When India's most populous state votes, the rest of the country sits up and takes note. After all, many believe the road to Delhi goes through Uttar Pradesh.

No wonder then that when the BJP launched its Parivartan Rath Yatra from Saharanpur in early November, its president Amit Shah presented Prime Minister Narendra Modi as 'UP-wale' (one belonging to UP).

Though the Prime Minister is from Gujarat, Modi represents UP's Varanasi in the Lok Sabha.

Nine of India's 15 prime ministers have come from the state.

The UP elections this time have become more interesting in the backdrop of the high-voltage power struggle playing out within the first family of the state's ruling Samajwadi Party.

The family drama has pitted the young incumbent chief minister, Akhilesh Yadav, against the patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav. As the father-son battles it out for control of the party, there has been a surfeit of suspense, tension and melodrama normally associated with sitcoms.

Yadav family aside, the outcome in UP will be important for all non-BJP parties that aspire to uproot Modi from



the Centre, providing them with a reality check on his current level of popularity. He is still riding a wave, or it is dissipating? A BJP defeat would enthuse opposition leaders and galvanise their workers.

On the contrary, a victory in UP will bolster Modi's image, making him seem invincible. It will be seen as a thumbs-up to his bold demonetisation drive and provide a shot in the arm before the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

The elections will also shape the complexion of the Rajya Sabha where the BJP is anxious to increase its strength. It will play a

crucial role too in the presidential elections next year. If the BJP wins, it will comfortably see the candidate of its choice reach Rashtrapati Bhawan. The party that rode to power on the Ram Janmabhoomi issue in the early 1990s witnessed its decline in the state after the demolition of the disputed Ayodhya shrine on December 2, 1992. But the arrival of Modi from Gujarat to the state created an unprecedented frenzy of aspirations and it won 71 of the 80 seats in the last Lok Sabha polls. That frenzy has subsided but Modi remains a popular figure.

(Contd on page 24)

Scent Of The Lotus Bloom

(Agencies) Just as his government was hitting the halfway mark, Narendra Modi told the BJP Parliamentary Party that demonetisation was not the end but the beginning of a "long, deep and constant" battle against black money and corruption. Even as the desk-thumping members passed a unanimous resolution endorsing his "great crusade", the prime minister reiterated that the note-ban was no sudden move. "Hum apne patte dheere-dheere kholte hain (we open our cards gradually)," he told them on November 22. This one sentence

It's not just about dashing moves, their motive has to reach people. Modi knows it.

was an indication that the bold move was part of a larger plan and "bigger changes" were in the offing. Outlook spoke to several people in the government and the party, including ministers, MPs and bureaucrats, and got a sense that the November 8 note-ban was a calculated risk that was as much needed politically as it was to fight unethical officialdom and a parallel economy. This halftime move has brought the government

to a cusp of change from which there is no turning back. More reforms are expected in the months to come. Government circles are abuzz with talks of a "bumper budget" for 2017-18, I-T reforms, increased tax exemption limit to Rs 4 lakh and benefits for small traders and farmers. A debate is on already on the need for poll reforms to curb the use of black money.

(Contd on page 24)

