

**Serena Milan, clicked by lens-legend Dabboo Ratnani**



STORY ON page 31

# Obama edges out Trump as most-admired man



**Hillary Clinton keeps title as most-admired woman for 22nd time in annual Gallup survey.**

STORY ON page 23

## Taranjit Parmar Hit & Run Fire Department employee held



**(Sai Bureau) MINEOLA, N.Y.** — A New York Fire Department employee is being held on \$1 million bail after police say he ran over a college honors student on Long Island

after a minor accident. The bail was ordered Sunday when Daniel Coppolo pleaded not guilty in the Nov. 9 accident. Authorities said he sped away, running over 18-year-old Taranjit Parmar as she held his door, asking him to stay after the Levittown accident. Defense attorney Lawrence Carra says he hasn't seen credible evidence his client, a fire department dispatcher, was the driver. Ranjit Parmar, father of the Adelphi University honors student, told a Mineola news conference the public provided leads resulting in Coppolo's arrest."

(Contd on page 23)

# Salman Khan to the rescue for Bollywood's 2017 box office

**Salman Khan's Tiger Zinda Hai is the year's top first weekend grosser for a Hindi film.**

(Sai Bureau) Tiger is alive indeed, and it helps Bollywood roar out of a rough patch at the box office this year. It's Salman Khan to the rescue of the Hindi film industry as his December release, Tiger Zinda Hai, brought reasons to cheer and picked a few records too, earning Rs 173.07 crore within five days of its opening at the domestic market on Friday. The movie collected more than Rs 300 crore worldwide, and the figure would be much more as some cinemas abroad have yet to report their collection from the ticket windows.

(Contd on page 26)



# Indian oil cos to drop anchor in Israeli waters



(Sai Bureau) NEW DELHI: A consortium of Indian state-run oil and gas hunters led by ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) appears set to drop anchor in Israeli waters for the first time amid New Delhi's growing closeness with Tel Aviv and a widening chasm with Iran over its recalcitrance in awarding the Farzad-B gas field discovered by the same Indian grouping. Israel's energy ministry gave its preliminary nod on December 11 to the bid for one block submitted by the Indian consortium of OVL, IndianOil, Oil India Ltd and Bharat Petroleum subsidiary Bharat Petro Resources Ltd. Energean of Greece was the other bidder to have secured approval for five blocks.

(Contd on page 23)

# India tops list of migrants living abroad at 17 million: UN



Report released here.

In 2017, India was the largest country of origin of international migrants at 17 million, followed by Mexico at 13 million.

Other countries of origin with large migrant populations include the Russia at 11 million, China at 10 million, Bangladesh at 7 million, Syria at 7 million and Pakistan and Ukraine at 6 million each.

The number of migrants from India now reside in multiple destination countries, including the UAE at 3 million, the US and Saudi Arabia at 2 million each, the report said.

There are now an estimated 258 million people living in a

country other than their country of birth — an increase of 49 per cent since 2000, it added.

International migration is a critical concern for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the report said.

Reliable data and evidence are critical to combat misperceptions about migration and to inform migration policies," said Liu Zhenmin, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs's Under-Secretary-General.

"These new estimates of numbers of international migrants around the world will provide an important baseline for

Member States as they begin their negotiations on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration," Liu said.

The report shows that international migration makes an important contribution to population growth in many parts of the world and even reverses population decline in some countries or areas.

Between 2000 and 2015, migration contributed 42 per cent of the population growth in Northern America and 31 per cent in Oceania. In Europe, the size of the total population would have declined during the period 2000-2015 in the absence of migration.

(News Agencies)UNITED NATIONS: India has topped the list of people living abroad at 17 million with about 5 million Indians residing in the Gulf region alone, according to a new UN report.

Mexico, Russia, China, Bangladesh, Syria, Pakistan and Ukraine also have large migrant populations living abroad, ranging from 6 to 11 million each, according to the 2017 International Migration

## Indian-origin driver among smuggling gang jailed in UK

(News Agencies) London: An Indian-origin driver is among 10 members of a so-called "white van group" jailed for a total of 31 years for smuggling drugs and money across the UK.

Daljeet Singh Juttla from west London had been stopped by Scotland Yard officers with 90,000 pounds of drugs money couriered by one of the other gang members.

Yesterday, Liverpool Crown Court handed the 42-year-old Juttla a 20-month jail sentence, suspended for two years, and 200 hours of unpaid work for the money laundering charge.

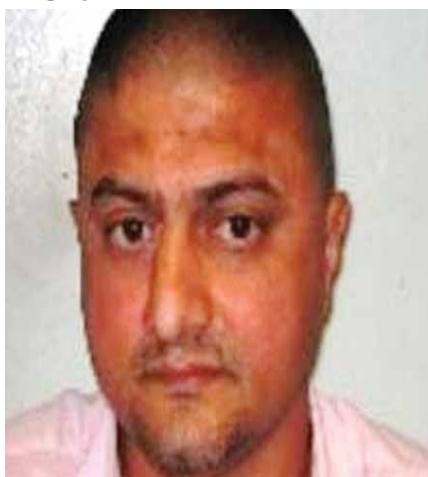
"Established trafficking routes like these present a complex and troubling threat to the UK. With well worked-out logistics a criminal group can turn its hand to anything from gun running or drug smuggling, expanding their own operations or hiring out their services to others," said Jane Lloyd, branch commander at the UK's National Crime Agency (NCA), which conducted the UK-wide investigation.

"The NCA officers are alert to the tactics criminals use to shift commodities and hide their activity and are equipped with the skills and tools needed to bring them to justice," she said.

The officers exposed the gang in an investigation that ran from October 2014 to January 2016.

Officers from the Metropolitan, Greater Manchester, Cheshire and Merseyside police provided support to the long-running operation.

The group was led by Jamie Hughes and operated out of the



north west of England.

Members delivered bulk loads of drugs to clients in locations from Scotland to London in vans with hidden compartments.

Hughes was imprisoned for five years and four months after pleading guilty to his role in the conspiracy.

Hughes, who kept a stun gun disguised as an iPhone, installed a CCTV system to monitor his driveway.

This provided NCA officers with key evidence against his network as footage showed various members of the conspiracy exchanging packages or leaving Hughes's address with parcels.

In addition to cash seizures and damning emails, evidence used against the group included traces of ketamine found in the floor concealment of a white Peugeot Partner van and a hidden compartment in the rear of a white Vauxhall Vivaro van.

Both concealments were skilfully constructed and operated by switches in the cabs, the NCA revealed.

## America Tamil Sangam honors educationist



(News Agencies) NEW YORK — America Tamil Sangam honored an eminent educationist of South India Mrs. BKK Pillai for her five decades of service to the cause of promoting Indian education and instilling moral values in the minds of children.

At a function held in Queens yesterday, Bagalakumari Kumarasamy Pillai (BKK Pillai) affectionately called by her students and parents as 'aunty' was felicitated by the Sangam and presented with a Professional Excellence Award in recognition of her tireless service to education. Mrs. Pillai, Chairperson and Correspondent of Shrine Vailankanni Group of Schools in Chennai, a fifth generation teacher has been educating children for the past 50 years.

She is the daughter of founders Panickers and has been working in the school along with her parents from the beginning. A Bharatanatyam dancer, she has served as a member of the Tamil Nadu Matriculation Board. Known for her philanthropic work, she is also the founder of Vailankanni schools in Valasarawakkam and Anna Nagar in Chennai, Tiruchi, and Pondicherry. The school never collects any capitation fee for admission but imparts free education to deserving students.

The function was also organized to welcome John Kingsly, a Tamil IAS officer of Madhya Pradesh cadre, who took over as Regional Director of Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) - Ministry of Commerce, Government of India — and posted in New York last month. Kingsly who also served as Joint Director of Enforcement Directorate was awarded President of India's award for procurement reforms that has been a case study at Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration in Missouri.

Manasa T. Pillai, Principal of Shrine Vailankanni Global School in Chennai, said the only global school in the heart of the city is on a 15,000 square feet campus with the state of the art 32 air-conditioned digital classrooms, international standard play area, and auditorium. Languages offered include Korean, French, Spanish, Hindi, and Tamil. The school caters to not just the cream of the society but to Koreans, Japanese, British, and Americans who are employed in the city, she said. John Joseph, Chairman of the Sangam praised the services of two distinguished guests and honored them with a traditional shawl as a symbol of respect. Taran Kaur, Secretary of the Sangam welcomed the guests.

# Kamala Harris calls on Trump to quit over misconduct allegations



(News Agencies) WASHINGTON: Kamala Harris, the first Indian-American senator, has called for Donald Trump's resignation, becoming the seventh lawmaker to demand it amid resurfaced allegations of sexual misconduct against the US President. The

allegations of sexual misconduct against the 71-year old Trump have received renewed attention recently after several prominent men in the worlds of politics, entertainment and media have been accused of sexual harassment, assault and rape.

"I think he should resign in the best interest of the country," the 53-year-old California Democrat told 'Politico' yesterday. Harris has joined six other Democratic senators - Kirsten Gillibrand, Cory Booker,

Bernie Sanders, Jeff Merkley, Mazie Hirono and Ron Wyden - who have called for Trump to resign. Over the past two years, about 16 women have accused Trump of making unwanted sexual advances against them prior to his assuming the presidency.

Three of the Trump's accusers at a news conference on Tuesday demanded that the US Congress investigate their allegations against the US President.

They detailed their

accounts of being groped, fondled and forcibly kissed by the businessman-turned-politician.

Harris said she believed Trump's accusers and that "there should be some inquiry into the veracity of their claims".

Asked if the country had reached a turning point on issues of sexual harassment, Harris said, "I don't think we have arrived at that point".

"There have been people saying, 'Well, this is the issue for the women of the Senate' which is ridiculous. We still have a lot of work to do on having people understand this is everyone's issue," she was quoted as saying.

Trump has repeatedly denied accusations of sexual misconduct, taking to Twitter this week to deride what he called "false accusations and fabricated stories".

"Despite thousands of hours wasted and many millions of dollars spent, the Democrats have been unable to show any collusion with Russia - so now they are moving on to the false accusations and fabricated stories of women who I don't know and/or have never met. FAKE NEWS!," Trump tweeted.

He downplayed his remarks in a video that showed him making lewd remarks as nothing more than "locker room talk" at the second presidential debate and said he has never kissed or groped women without consent.

US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley said on Monday that women who accuse a man of inappropriate sexual behaviour - including Trump - "should be heard."

Women who accuse anyone should be heard," the Indian-American top diplomat said when asked specifically about Trump's accusers.

# Indian-origin steel tycoon purchases Arcelor Mittal's US steelworks



(News Agencies) LONDON: UK-based Indian-origin metals tycoon Sanjeev Gupta's Liberty House Group has completed the purchase of the South Carolina-based Georgetown steel mill from ArcelorMittal, the company has announced.

The deal between Liberty House and NRI steel magnate Lakshmi N Mittal's US steelworks, which includes a 540,000-tonne a year electric arc furnace and 680,000-tonne a year rod mill, had been agreed earlier this year.

The sale marks the first in a series of strategic North American acquisitions and new projects targeted by Gupta-led GFG Alliance.

The 600,000-square-foot plant, serving the construction and automotive markets,

is set to re-start melting and rolling next year as the first step in GFG's investment plans for the American steel industry.

"Securing the Georgetown furnace and mill is a major milestone for us, marking our first major step in the USA. The melting and rolling facilities here give us a formidable entry to the American market and provide a strong platform for expansion," GFG Alliance and Liberty House chief Gupta said in a statement on Monday.

The steel tycoon said he wanted to apply his GreenSteel sustainable strategy to the American plants, in line with the UK and Australia.

"We've already had customers contacting us about placing orders, so we're keen to get back up and running as quickly as possible," he said.

Liberty will initially re-hire 125 former employees at Georgetown and then build the workforce to 250 in the medium-term.

The group is targeting a major share of the US market for home-produced wire rod, demand for which is projected to grow substantially during 2018.

Completion of the Georgetown deal follows successful negotiations between Liberty and several key stakeholders, including the United Steelworkers of America union, Georgetown Council and the South Carolina State Government over the past few months.

The steelworks were a pivotal part of the American state's industrial infrastructure for nearly 70 years until it was shuttered in 2015.

Liberty has said it wants to restore it to its former position of prominence and bring hundreds of skilled jobs back to the plant and to the local and state economy.

"Throughout the process, ArcelorMittal has been steadfast in our goal of maintaining the Georgetown steelmaking operation to preserve jobs and maximise the value of the property for our shareholders," said John Brett, president and CEO of ArcelorMittal USA.

"While bittersweet for ArcelorMittal, we are hopeful that today's announcement is a celebration for Liberty and GFG Alliance, the United Steelworkers and the Georgetown community," Brett said.

Under an agreement with the United Steelworkers, the company expects key roles on the furnace, casters and rolling mill to be filled by experienced former employees of the plant and it is also in discussion with Georgetown Council about training programmes to prepare a new generation of workers for the industry. Liberty House is part of the wider GFG Alliance, a global group of energy, mining, metals, engineering and financial services businesses, headquartered in London.

It has additional hubs in Dubai, Hong Kong, Singapore and Sydney with presence in around 30 countries worldwide.

The company is already in discussions regarding the acquisition of other major US steel assets and new greenfield projects, which it said it expects to announce in the coming year.

# Trump tax bill: Republican senators are putting tribal partisan loyalty above concern for US

**As President Donald Trump and a majority of Congressional Republicans attempt to pass a tax bill that benefits America's wealthiest households at the expense of everyone else, political courage on the part of those who disagree could not be more necessary. Yet such backbone is nowhere to be found.**



The fate of nations often comes down to the choices made by a handful of individuals at a particular moment in history. Today, the United States is facing just such a moment. What a handful of individual Republicans decide will shape the future not just of the country, but of democracy itself.

Modern history is littered with similarly pivotal choices, for better or worse. A century ago, the Russian Revolution came down to a showdown between the iron will of Vladimir Lenin and the indecisiveness of Alexander Kerensky, who ended up sneaking out of Saint Petersburg to escape the Bolsheviks.

Another Russian revolution – on New Year's Eve 1999, when President Vladimir Putin gained the government foothold that ultimately enabled him to rule the country to this day – also came down to a solitary selfish decision by the country's then-leader. Choosing to prioritise his own safety and that of his family over the well-being of Russia, President Boris Yeltsin named Putin, a former KGB colonel, as his successor.

On a more positive note, where would France be today, if, in June 1940, the then-relatively unknown General Charles de Gaulle had not gone into exile and delivered his passionate call for his country to resist the Nazi invaders? Where would the West be had anyone other than Winston Churchill become British prime minister that year?

The US has also had its share of such pivotal moments, several of which were described by John F. Kennedy in his book Profiles

in Courage, which he wrote before becoming president. For example, Secretary of State Daniel Webster supported the Compromise of 1850, despite his hatred of slavery, in order to save the union.

Similarly, Robert Taft denounced the Nuremberg Trials, despite his hatred of the Nazis, to defend the fundamental US legal principle that a person could not be criminally charged on the basis of a retroactive statute. Webster and Taft, like the six others that Kennedy examined, risked political and reputational ruin to take difficult decisions, because they believed themselves to be defending the best interests of their country.

Such political courage is not a thing of the past. Last week, 11 Conservative members of the British parliament balked at giving Prime Minister Theresa May's government "Henry VIII powers" – the authority to create new laws or eliminate old ones, without parliamentary approval. Led by former Attorney General Dominic Grieve, the rebel Tory MPs refused to countenance such a step, regardless of the cost. And that cost turned out to be high: Grieve received death threats, and others were sacked by the Tory leadership.

The US today is one place where such bravery and selflessness cannot be glimpsed. Yet, as President Donald Trump and a majority of Congressional Republicans attempt to pass a tax bill that would benefit America's wealthiest households at the expense of saddling the country with more than \$1 trillion in additional debt, such courage

could not be more necessary.

US Republicans have long decried any measure that increases the US budget deficit. Rob Portman of Ohio even served as Director of the White House Office of Management and Budget under President George W Bush. Yet now they support tax cuts that will cause the deficit to grow as much, if not more, than it did under President Barack Obama. (And Obama, it should be noted, was attempting to stave off another Great Depression, not to deliver big tax savings to wealthy donors.)

To be sure, seven Republican senators – Susan Collins of Maine, Robert Corker of Tennessee, Jeff Flake and John McCain of Arizona, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, and Marco Rubio of Florida – have voiced concerns about the bill. These concerns echo more fundamental fears, voiced by the same senators to varying degrees, that the Trump administration is doing serious harm to US institutions.

But even these senators now appear to have fallen into line, effectively promising to deliver Trump an important legislative victory that will help to buttress his floundering presidency, while deepening inequality in the longer term. In doing so, they are putting tribal partisan loyalty above concern for their country.

Of course, it is hard to ask for more heroism from McCain. His courage as a prisoner of war for five years in Vietnam seems to be doubted only by Trump, and the dignified way he is battling brain cancer today has only heightened the esteem in which

most Americans hold him. But the fact is that McCain is now backing away from his call, made on his return to the Senate after brain surgery, for a return to the "old way of legislating in the Senate," including thorough public committee hearings on bills.

McCain's fellow senator from Arizona is similarly failing to back word with deed. Flake, whose memoir is called *The Conscience of a Conservative*, recently delivered a searing speech on the Senate floor denouncing Trump, whom Flake sees as threatening American "principles, freedoms, and institutions," and engaging in petty and "reckless provocations." Yet Flake will support Trump's tax bill without so much as a grimace.

Murkowski and Collins played a vital role in preventing the Trump-supported repeal of the 2010 Affordable Care Act and its replacement with a much crueler health-care bill. Corker, too, has presented himself as somehow apart from the Trumpian mire. Yet, when it comes to tax cuts for the rich, these figures are as willing as any firm Trump acolyte to trade their honor for the approval of their tribe.

Years from now, some young and ambitious politician will survey the Trump presidency and, in an effort to explain the events that are unfolding before us, pen a *Kennedyesque Profiles in Cowardice* focused on Republicans' lack of personal integrity. The question is what will have become of American democracy by then.

## All 2G scam accused acquitted, but does this mean there were no irregularities?

A special court hearing what is popularly called the 2G scam has ruled that the prosecution has not proved the charges against the accused in any of the cases. The matter concerns alleged irregularities in the allotment of spectrum by the United Progressive Alliance government in 2008. The controversy blew up in 2009-10, and the first arrest was made in 2011 by the Central Bureau of Investigation.

In 2012, the Supreme Court cancelled 122 telecom licences issued by the UPA.

However, the special court's ruling does not mean the Supreme Court's reasoning or logic was flawed, as claimed by Congress MP and former telecom minister Kapil Sibal in a TV interview (to CNBC TV18) after the judgment. The Supreme Court can rule on anything, even government policies, and in the 2G case, it decided that there was enough proof to show that there were irregularities. Indeed, in some way, it was that decision that prompted the move to an auctioning regime for spectrum.

The special court was actually ruling on a combination of three cases: whether former telecom minister A Raja and others were guilty of criminal conspiracy; whether Loop Telecom was a front put up by the Essar Group to circumvent laws; and whether A Raja and others were guilty of laundering around Rs 200 crore.

The first two cases were filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation. The third was filed by the Enforcement Directorate. Its ruling just means that none of these could be proved by the prosecution. But it does not mean the Supreme Court's decision was flawed. That decision wasn't based on whether or not there was a criminal conspiracy by A Raja or others. It was based on what the court saw as irregularities in the issue of licences and spectrum – and the truth is, back then, there was a lot of ad-hocism about this.

## Gujarat election results The new govt can't afford to overlook the marginalised anymore

The 2017 Gujarat assembly elections has been a special one. For the first time, the state saw the young triumvirate of Hardik Patel, Alpesh Thakor and Jignesh Mewani, taking on the BJP, riding on the discontent and alienation of the marginalised classes. In the run up to the elections, the BJP tried to break them but the trio only emerged more ambitious and aggressive. The Congress cleverly managed to rope in Alpesh Thakor and piggy back on the other two. Together, they believed that their political mobilisation was sufficient for change. But that was not the case.

In the run-up to the elections, the BJP focused on "top down" political mobilisation, while the opposition tried "bottom up" political mobilisation by working on social and economic cleavages. The underlying reasons for such angst in voters is not difficult to seek: Along with the demonetisation and ill-informed GST implementation, the state's social indicators ---- Gujarat is at the 11th position in the human development index; there an increase in sexual harassment cases against women; the state's fractured public distribution system; and the mismatch between education and employment --- created a fertile ground for the opposition to come together.

It was Hardik Patel who cast the first stone in mid-2015, mobilising his Patidar (Patel) community, seeking reservation for them. In his speeches, he assiduously tried to ensure that his supporters vote against the BJP. The Patidars account for nearly 16% of the population, who traditionally remained with the BJP but due to Hardik's leadership most of the Patidars (particularly farmers and urban unemployed) vowed to vote against the BJP.

Alpesh tried to mobilise OBCs, SCs and STs through his OSS Ekta Manch, raising the issue of reservation. By joining the Congress and supporting Hardik, he cleared doubts of him being a prop of the BJP. Of the three, he is the one with political experience.

This election is special because Gujarat seems to be on the cusp of a transformation. Whichever party forms the government in Gujarat, it cannot afford to ignore these rights of the marginalised in their policies.

## Death penalty is a form of torture. Abolish it

At least 60 former Supreme Court judges have expressed concern over India's criminal justice system in remarkably candid interviews conducted by the National Law University in association with The Death Penalty Project. Among the issues they have flagged are the frequent use of torture, fabrication of evidence in criminal cases, a flawed legal aid system, all of which contributed to wrongful convictions.

That's not all. Delays in judicial proceedings — all too common in India — mean that undertrials often spend longer in custody than the maximum time for which they can be sentenced for the crime in question. Worryingly, despite these reservations on the state of the system, judicial support for the death penalty had not significantly dipped. There is a great deal of subjectivity in awarding the death penalty as the "rarest of rare" doctrine has been interpreted differently in different courts and by different judges.

In the words of one judge, such arbitrariness is "horrible and terrifying." It raises questions about the very legitimacy of the death penalty, which seems to often be influenced by personal prejudices and inconsistent legal procedures. At the root of this is the broken criminal justice system. The police forces in different states are stretched to breaking point, and they are not trained in new policing methods relying instead on old forms of interrogation which are often inhuman and violative of fundamental rights.

Poor evidence collection has meant that cases either drag on for ever or fall through the cracks. The Supreme Court itself has raised questions about arbitrary sentencing that have not been satisfactorily answered. In addition to the possible miscarriage of justice, there is the matter of how inhumane a long wait is to the convicted prisoner, and prisoners on death row usually wait the longest before their sentence is carried out.

As the law commission put it, "During this time, the prisoner on death row suffers from extreme agony, anxiety and debilitating fear arising out of an imminent yet uncertain execution." It also weighed in against solitary confinement and the degrading conditions that prisoners on death row live in. This in itself constitutes a form of torture. This form of punishment goes against the grain of democratic traditions which uphold the dignity and human rights of all individuals, even those thought to have committed heinous crimes. In retaining the use of the death penalty, India is in the company of Iran, China, Saudi Arabia and the US. Finally, capital punishment has not proved a deterrent to violent crime in India. To paraphrase Martin Luther King, the arc of the moral universe must bend towards a more reformatory version of justice rather than a retributive one.



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# From Gujarat To 2G, Modi's Invincibility In Doubt

**Krishan Partap Singh**

The mass appeal of Prime Minister Modi is to a considerable extent based on the twin pillars of the mythicized Gujarat story that he personifies and his assurance of zero tolerance for corruption, past and present or future. Both these pillars buckled this week, a week the PM would surely like to forget. On Monday, the BJP barely inched past the majority mark in the Gujarat election, lying stranded in double-digits at 99 seats with the Congress finishing a close second. The less said about exit polls, the better. As the voting pattern became clearer, it emerged that even though Shri Modi had campaigned as relentlessly as ever, the sturdy Modi majorities repeated since 2002 were no more. Urban Gujarat saved the BJP from defeat, but rural Gujarat gave a decisive vote of no-confidence. In seven districts of Gujarat, the BJP was completely wiped out, not winning a single seat. At one point midway through the counting, the Congress briefly nudged ahead before the BJP wrested back the lead. It was a moment of electoral mortality that the BJP is unfamiliar with in Gujarat, having won all 26 Lok Sabha seats in 2014 with a whopping 60% of the vote. Undeniably, the Modi Wave is long gone and the PM's electoral fortunes, if not popularity, have dipped even in his home state.

In his rhetoric, the PM repeatedly reaches back to his Gujarat story even now, whether it be an anecdote about his childhood or to boast of the state's

development or to voice a general sense of pride. Gujarat is the political lodestar that guided him to the Prime Minister's chair and continues to provide him sustenance. So the Gujarat election was much more than any state election, it was the Modi political brand showing weakness in the land where it was born. In the run-up to 2014, the PM conquered his party and snatched the leadership from a hapless Advani through a presumption of electoral invincibility, the belief that Modi was a winner and only he could lead the BJP to victory. That was not wrong. Despite major defeats in the Delhi and Bihar state elections in 2015, which were considered aberrations, Shri Modi never really lost his halo of electoral invincibility. The sweep in Uttar Pradesh earlier this year despite the self-inflicted demonetization fiasco only added to the perception. Ever since then, the BJP, with Amit Shah at the helm of operations, has used this electoral strength to form even more state governments by extra-constitutional means, and even the once mighty Nitish Kumar surrendered meekly.

But the PM's electoral fortress of Gujarat did almost fall and it has certainly weakened him though the repercussions may not be visible for a while. The resignation of a BJP MP from Vidarbha during the Gujarat campaign presaged possible change within the party. 10 to 12 of the BJP's Gujarat MPs will have looked at the election result and come to the realization that even the PM may

not be able to save them from defeat in 2019. And if MPs in Gujarat are insecure, you can rest assured other beneficiaries of the 2014 Modi Wave, especially in rural areas, will share those fears. Yashwant Sinha and Shatrughan Sinha have already revolted against the Modi-Shah regime. They may find more fellow travellers in the days ahead, especially if the economy continues to be sluggish.

On Wednesday, the Prime Minister is believed to have got emotional at the BJP parliamentary party meeting held to celebrate victories in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. It was a short respite, because the very next day, the 2G spectrum scam case judgement was delivered in a CBI special court and, to the surprise of just about everybody, the judge acquitted all the accused. Congress and DMK leaders were naturally overjoyed, though they overplayed their hand by demanding an apology from the BJP and claiming there was no scam altogether. I would advise them to refresh their memories by looking back at what happened on January 10, 2008, when applicants were given 45 minutes' notice to procure bank drafts for license application fees in the sum of hundreds of crores. How so many of them were able to complete this feat and meet the deadline is a mystery that still eludes most bankers to this day. If the Congress thinks they deserve an apology for such shenanigans, of which they were too many to count during its decade in power, they are living in cloud cuckoo land.

Nevertheless, the court verdict was a major political setback for the PM, the 2G scam having been front and centre in his 2014 campaign pitch. The fact that his government's former Attorney General, Mukul Rohatgi, went on every news channel to whole-heartedly welcome the verdict only made it appear that much worse. Modi voters, especially swing voters, would be justified in wondering why they voted for the BJP if Shri Modi were going to oversee the acquittal of those accused in the highest-profile scam of the UPA tenure. And today we hear that Congress leader Ashok Chavan who had to resign as Maharashtra Chief Minister in 2010 because of the Adarsh housing scam has also been cleared of wrongdoing by the Bombay High Court. A friend of mine quipped that Rahul Gandhi should have started his run of temple visits earlier, if this is the good luck that is shining on the Congress as a result! As we head into 2018, the PM is still the dominant leader of the land, though incumbency is starting to take its toll, with his main challenger Rahul Gandhi off to a good start but still with a lot of ground to make up. Important state elections in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh lie ahead and will set the political mood before the next general election. It is impossible to predict what the next year will hold, but if the last few days have taught us anything, it is that there is much truth in that old political adage: a week is a long time in politics.

## People Of UP Wish They Were Cows

**IP Bajpai**

In Uttar Pradesh, it is increasingly clear that it is better to be a cow than a human being. On Monday, while the nation watched with keen interest the Gujarat election result, the UP government keenly proceeded with this most important agenda of looking after its cows. It announced that every district would have a Gau Sanrakshan Samiti (Cow Protection Committees) consisting of the District Magistrate, the SP, the District Development Officer and two "cow lovers" chosen from cow-loving associations.

Imagine the plight of these poor officers, already burdened with maintaining law in order in unmanageably large districts, 33 of them with populations above 3 million. In fact, the biggest districts in UP have populations that exceed that of New Zealand; and the crime graph in UP is constantly moving upwards. Even RSS Chief Mohan Bhagat criticized the law and order situation in the state when he met Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in September. Now, in addition to maintaining some semblance of law and order and spearheading development programmes, these three key officers of the district will

now be additionally be burdened with protecting cows, maintaining cow shelters and marketing (!) cow produce, such as incense sticks and mosquito coils!

If this weren't poison enough, they will be subject to the constant supervision and nagging of these two "cow lovers" on the committee who will presumably soon want a car with a driver and peon and a siren and a blue light to efficiently perform their duties. After all these are jobs for the "boys" who helped the BJP come to power.

All this would be funny if it weren't so tragic. UP is amongst the poorest states in India with one third of 210 million+ people below the official poverty line (and that line is pretty low in itself). That's a whopping 70 million people (more than the population of the UK) who don't earn enough to feed and look after themselves in a manner befitting a human being and yet, they must take second place to cows!

And they are. UP, which has a huge informal sector that produces handicrafts, has already suffered huge setbacks because of demonetization and GST, putting the livelihood of millions at stake. Shouldn't the government have made

efforts to support and market those products, rather than pushing cow dung?

While the government crusades on about protecting cows, it conveniently forgets that the Indian cow is the least efficient producer of milk, and the milk it produces does not match the quality or quantity of buffalo milk. And where there are cows producing abundant milk, they are from imported or cross breeds and not that delicate India cow, which presumably is sacred because of the milk it gives us. In UP, buffaloes provide 70% of the milk, a much higher proportion than in the country as a whole. So if the government were doing something for buffaloes, at least there would be some economic reason to the move.

And talking economics, the economics of cattle-rearing and breeding also involved selling off the older stock. Now they can't, and since they can't, farmers don't want to keep cows because they don't recover their investment just by milking cows. They make money when cattle is sold. Now that owners cannot sell them, they release them, creating a huge uncared for cattle population.

The Times of India reported that as a

result, in Jaipur, the gaushalas were overwhelmed with double their capacity at 14,000, costs of Rs. 3 crore a month, and 8,000 cows died of malnutrition. That's more than Rs. 2,000 a month per cow. To put that in context, the central government's National Old Age pension Scheme provides for Rs. 200 per month. Obviously, the elderly are less important than cows in India.

It is completely ridiculous that UP, which is one of India's most backward, least developed and maladministered states, is willing to burden its already overwhelmed bureaucracy with schemes that do not benefit the electorate but meet some religious goal post. It is unacceptable for the UP government to divert scarce resources from a poverty-struck populace.

The UP, and other cow belt, state governments should carefully watch and see if milk production starts to fall as less farmers are willing to add to their cattle. If that happens, it will be a tragedy, as milk production provided marginal farmers and rural India a means of livelihood. India's white revolution should not be reversed by saffron road blocks.

# The inability to move mass leaders up the party ranks has been a problem for the Congress

**Things suddenly look a lot more challenging for the BJP. In 2018, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan will go to the polls. If rural anger was great in Gujarat, this anger is likely to be even greater in those states — where rural distress has been well-documented**

The Gujarat election was supposed to be little more than a victory parade for the BJP. Prime Minister Narendra Modi brashly declared, “I am vikas (development). I am Gujarat.” Before the election, everything seemed to be going the BJP’s way — a hugely popular prime minister from the state and a thumping victory in Uttar Pradesh, not to mention the fact that BJP has ruled Gujarat for 22 years running while never winning less than 115 out of 182 seats. Although a section of supporters will be relieved that the BJP held on to power, the party clearly expected bigger things out of Gujarat (at one point predicting that they will go above 150 seats). Instead, this election unearthed serious chinks in BJP’s armour and returned the lowest seat share for the BJP in Gujarat since 1990. A precocious Hardik Patel morphed what began as a caste movement (the Patidar agitation) into a class movement around the concerns of small traders, the working class, and the rural poor. Yes, the BJP won in Gujarat, but these class concerns promise to be a thorn in the side of the party for the next couple of years. Using data provided by Hindustan

Times (HT) data team as of 2:50pm on December 18, in which the BJP was projected to win 100 seats and the Congress 77 seats, we may characterise some of the trends observed in this election. This is a fairly substantial drop from the 115 seats won in 2012, especially when one considers that the number of seats won by the BJP have been remarkably stable since 1995 — from a maximum of 127 (2002) to a minimum of 115 (2012).

The most obvious implication of the class character of BJP’s opposition is a starker rural-urban divide. The BJP won 50 (89%) out of the 56 constituencies classified as urban by HT in 2012, and it didn’t do much worse this time around, as it was projected to win 46 (82%) of those seats. The rural constituencies saw a much greater shift. In 2012, the BJP won 65 (52%) of the 126 seats classified as urban by HT, but this dropped significantly to 54 (43%) this time around.

But this rural disenchantment was quite uneven by region. As we reported in earlier work, the rural anger did not extend to South Gujarat where the predominant crop, sugarcane, did not face the same

drops in market prices as the most prevalent crops, cotton and groundnut, in other regions. Much of the observed shift seems have occurred in the Saurashtra region, where the BJP won 30 (63%) out of the 48 seats in 2012 but only 19 (40%) this time around. Even in North Gujarat, where the Congress had purportedly gained a lot of ground, saw similar results to 2012. In 2012, the BJP won 15 (47%) of 32 seats, and it was projected to win the same number of seats this time around. One hypothesis is that Saurashtra faced severe reduction in market prices for key crops without the proximity to the most major cities such as Ahmedabad, Surat, or Vadodara to anchor BJP support.

While the Congress will take comfort from this election, it has much work to do. Over the past few years, the Congress has largely been reacting to Narendra Modi and the BJP, essentially letting their opponents set the terms of debate. This has robbed the Congress of a cogent party identity, but this election offers a big opportunity. The class anger with the BJP is very real, and it is only likely to grow unless the BJP makes changes in policy.

On the other hand, the main thrust of the mobilisation occurred through a leader, Hardik Patel, outside of the Congress. The inability to move mass leaders up the party ranks has been a chronic problem for the Congress. Ultimately, the Congress must answer some questions. Can it develop a cogent party identity to take advantage of the genuine class anger with the BJP? Furthermore, can the Congress develop the kind of mass leaders within the party to mobilise around this class anger?

Things suddenly look a lot more challenging for the BJP. In the next year, the states of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan will go to the polls. If rural anger was great in Gujarat, this anger is likely to be even greater in those states — where rural distress has been well-documented. A promise of loan waivers did little to bolster the BJP’s standing with farmers, and Prime Minister Modi is almost certainly looking for that next “big bang” reform to win the rural countryside back. As we hit the stretch run to the national election, things have become a little more interesting — 2019 may be back in play for the Congress.

## Don’t take voters for granted, Gujarat election results are a sign of things to come

**The BJP’s performance is a clear indication of the unhappiness of farmers and farm workers (on account of the agrarian crisis), and young people (on account of unemployment). The two could become significant issues in elections in some large states, including Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, next year.**

As election verdicts go, the Gujarat assembly election has thrown up an all-too-rare one: both the winner and the loser are likely to be happy with it. Better still, it could encourage all parties to pay serious attention to unemployment and farm distress, not just in Gujarat, but across the country.

The Bharatiya Janata Party won the close election fair and square, earning the right to govern the state in which it has been in power for 22 years, for five more years. It won 99 seats in the 182-member assembly to the Indian National Congress’ 77. That number was short of the 115 seats it won in the 2012 assembly elections. It was also, for the record, way short of the target of 150 the BJP and its president Amit Shah had set ahead of the elections.

Still, the BJP has reason to be happy (although it might have been happier had it at least matched its 2012

tally or crossed the psychologically significant 100 mark). It won the state. Even better from its perspective, it increased its vote share marginally to 49%. And it managed to retain its sway over urban areas in the state, winning 46 of the 56 seats, and 57.8% of the votes. In 2012, it won 50 of these seats. In some ways, its continued good performance in urban areas is a vindication of the Gujarat model.

There are more reasons for the BJP to be happy. It appears to have minimised the impact of the Patidar agitation and the subsequent partnership between the Patidar Anamat Andolan Samiti (PAAS), led by Hardik Patel, and the Congress. Neither demonetisation nor the Goods and Services Tax — the second attracted the ire of small businessmen in Gujarat’s business belt — affected its prospects in urban areas. Indeed, in the Surat region, which had seen intense

protests over GST, the BJP won 15 of 16 seats, the same number it did in 2012, although at least some of this can be attributed to the changes it made in the GST regime. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, its win, despite many factors that pointed to an uncomfortably close contest ahead of the election, is a victory for Narendra Modi, the face of the BJP campaign. Indeed, the Prime Minister seemed to hit his stride, and find the correct pitch, between the first phase and the second, and the BJP definitely did better in the second phase when compared to the first.

The Congress may have lost the election in Gujarat, but it won 77 seats, 16 more than the 61 it won in 2012 (that number was reduced even further by early 2017, thanks to desertions). Since 2014, when it was reduced to an insignificant minority in Parliament, and barring the Punjab assembly election earlier this

year, which it won, the party hadn’t got much right when it comes to elections — till Gujarat 2017. Its partnerships hadn’t worked, its star campaigner, Rahul Gandhi, had not made much of an impact (indeed, in Punjab, the campaign was led by Amarinder Singh), and when it did manage to be in a position to form the government, a strange sort of inertia seemed to settle over it — allowing the BJP to steal a march as it did in Goa and Manipur earlier this year.

Gujarat 2017 was different. Part of the BJP’s traditional electoral base, the Patidars who have been seeking reservation, Dalits catalysed into action by the attack at Una, and small businessmen hurt by demonetisation and GST, were angry. There was significant agrarian distress. It was an opportunity for the Congress. The recent history of the Congress is replete with instances of such missed opportunities.

# Don't take voters for granted, Gujarat election results are a sign of things to come

*The BJP's performance is a clear indication of the unhappiness of farmers and farm workers (on account of the agrarian crisis), and young people (on account of unemployment). The two could become significant issues in elections in some large states, including Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, next year.*

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The recent history of the Congress is replete with instances of such missed opportunities. This time, the Congress didn't miss it. The party forged an alliance with PAAS, other backward classes, and Dalits. A re-energised Rahul Gandhi hit the campaign trail. He even visited temples because it was important that he be seen doing so in a predominantly Hindu state. Gujarat was never going to go to the Congress. Not in 2017. But the party did as well as it could have.

If both the BJP and the Congress are winners, then so are voters across India. The BJP, and, for that matter, any party in power, is now unlikely to take voters for granted. The BJP's performance is a clear indication of the unhappiness of farmers and farm workers (on account of the agrarian crisis), and young people (on account of unemployment).

## 2G spectrum case verdict implications: What it means for Congress, DMK and BJP

*Congress fielded its top guns to take on political adversaries who had used the scam to paint the then-UPA regime as corrupt.*

(News Agencies) The acquittal of all the accused in the 2G scam on Thursday came as a big relief to opposition Congress, which fielded its top guns to take on political adversaries who had used the scam to paint the then-UPA regime as corrupt. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said he respected the court ruling, which put "propaganda to rest". Former telecom minister Kapil Sibal, whose zero-loss remarks regarding 2G spectrum allocation had drawn flak, said Manmohan Singh and the UPA stood vindicated. He demanded an apology from Vinod Rai, the then-comptroller and auditor general (CAG), whose report

about a presumptive loss of Rs 1.76 lakh crore in the allocation of 2G spectrum had ignited a massive political controversy, leading to the ouster of the UPA government in 2014. Many former Union ministers and senior Congress leaders such as P Chidambaram, Kamal Nath, and Ghulam Nabi Azad were also quick to target the BJP for what they called "propaganda against the UPA". Just as the CAG's conclusion had wide ramifications for the Indian polity, Thursday's court verdict is also likely to have significant implications for major political players — in Tamil Nadu as also in national politics. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK): The verdict is likely to give

a big boost to the Dravidian party that was under attack from the AIADMK and other political adversaries for the alleged involvement of Kanimozhi, daughter of party chief Karunanidhi, and A Raja, the Dalit face of the party who was the then Union telecom minister, in the alleged scam. In the immediate context, their acquittal by the Delhi court could have a bearing on the by-elections for RK Nagar assembly constituency of late Jayalalithaa on Thursday. With the AIADMK already on the back foot due to internecine fights over Jayalalithaa's legacy, the DMK's political stocks are likely to soar. The Congress: Like the Bofors scandal that haunted the grand



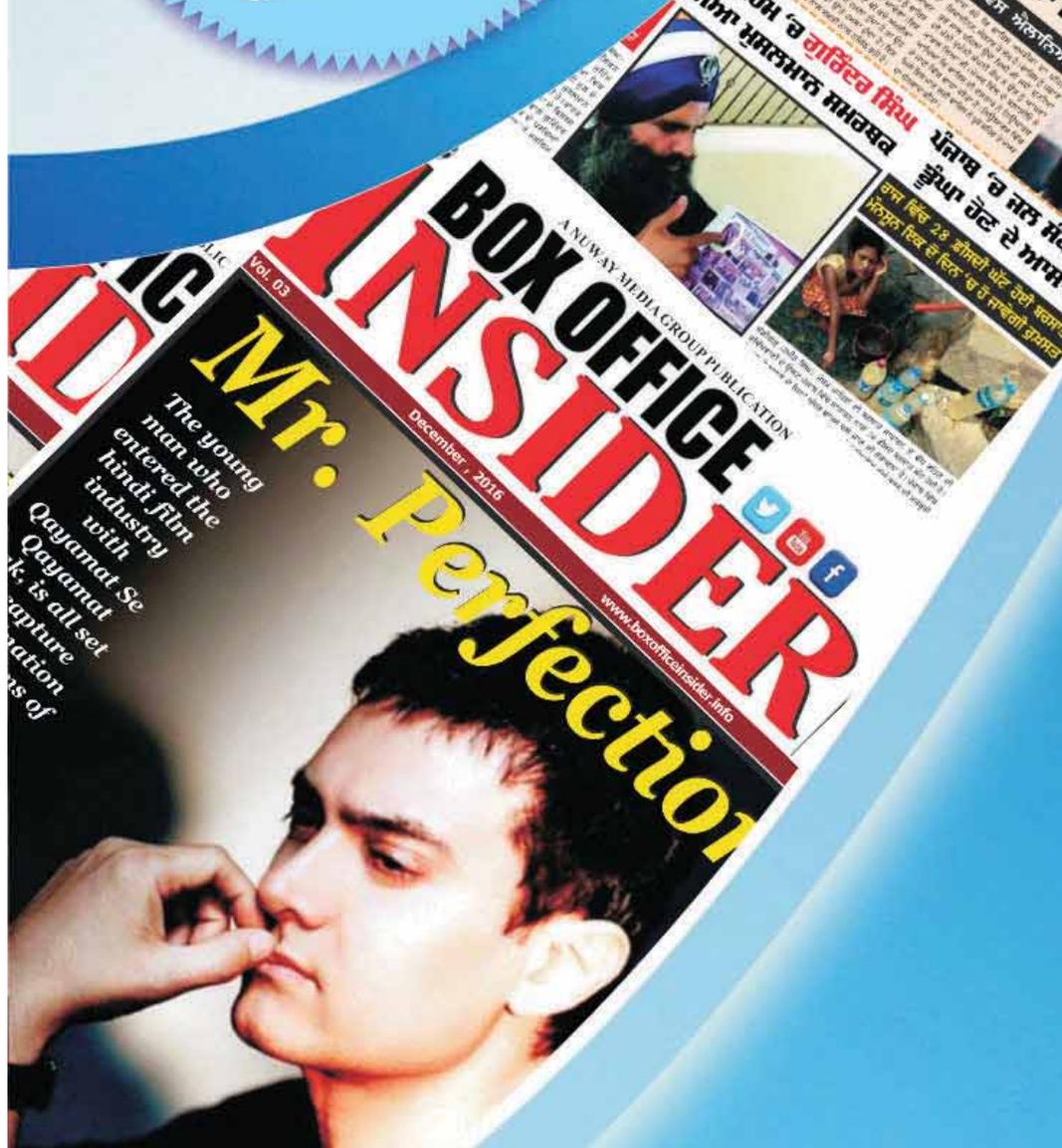
old party for decades, the alleged 2G scam had given a handle to the BJP and other political adversaries. The party was at the receiving end of a concerted campaign by its political rivals, which used the alleged scam to paint the Congress as a corrupt party. The scam had sullied the image of the UPA government and contributed to its eventual downfall in 2014. Thursday's acquittal of the then-ministers and others could give the opposition party an

opportunity to project itself as a victim of political propaganda, not only in the 2G case, but also in many other cases of alleged omissions and commissions by Congress leaders. The Bharatiya Janata Party: In the list of scams that Narendra Modi cited to project the Congress and the UPA as corrupt in the run up to the last Lok Sabha elections, 2G found special mention, given the sheer magnitude of the alleged scam.



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# Congress blames infighting, resource crunch for its debacle in Himachal



(News Agencies) Congress' The Congress party has under- tally in the 68-member house taken first-of-its-kind review to this time has come down to 21 analyse the electoral reverses it from 36 seats it had secured in suffered in the Himachal Pradesh the 2012 election. assembly polls. Majority of the

candidates termed infighting, sabotage by the local leaders and lack of resources as the reason of their defeat in election.

The meeting at the local Congress office that lasted for more than three hours was chaired by All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary in-charge Sushil Kumar Shinde in the presence of secretary Ranjeet Ranjan.

Congress' tally in the 68-member house this time has come down to 21 from 36 seats it had secured in the 2012 election.

The party candidates and legislators have strongly recom-

mended actions against local and a few top-rung leaders for marring the election. While it was learnt that Congress candidates presented as a proof the audio and video footage of local Congress leaders who 'sabotaged' the election this time, many contestants overtly and covertly blamed Virbhadra Singh for propagating local leaders who allegedly worked against their own party. Deepak Rathore, a Congress candidate from Theog, has reportedly produced audio and video clips before Shinde and Ranjan alleging that Congress leaders had backed CPI(M) can-

didate Rakesh Singha. Singha, who won in 1993 from Shimla urban seat, made it to the Vidhan Sabha this time from Theog. Due to incomplete formalities, returning officer had rejected the nomination of Congress octogenarian leader Vidya Stokes from the same segment.

Former health minister Kaul Singh Thakur has already shifted the onus of defeat on Virbhadra's loyalist Puran Thakur — vice-president of PCC — who had rebelled against him at his home turf in Darang.

# Govt backs down, says bar only on sexually explicit ads

(News Agencies) NEW DELHI: Climbing down from its earlier order to ban all condom ads between 6am and 10pm, the information and broadcasting (I&B) ministry has now clarified that the directive applies only to "sexually explicit" content.

Explaining its position in an official memorandum after it was served a notice by the Rajasthan high court, the ministry said, "It is clarified that the said advisory only pertains to sexually explicit content being used to market certain condom brands which titillate the audience from a PR perspective."

On December 11, the ministry had

issued an advisory to all television channels asking them to not telecast condom advertisements between 6am and 10pm.

The decision drew widespread criticism for being regressive and counterproductive from the civil society, and was subsequently challenged by an NGO in the Rajasthan HC, which sought to know the reasons behind the government's advisory. The ministry said in its statement, "Advertisements that do not sexually objectify women and are aimed at informing citizens regarding devices/products/medical interventions to ensure safe sex are not covered under the said advisory."



# Serena K Milan, Preeti Jhangiani shared stage on Diwali in New Jersey

*Charmed group rushed to collect Serena's autographs, pictures, after the show*



(News Agencies) (By Susmita Ghosh) New York- 'Diwali' or the 'Festival of Lights' added more brightness with the stage performance of Serena Milan, New York based professional model, fashion icon, who shared the stage with 'Mohabbatein' fame Preeti Jhangiani in New Jersey.

To bring in festive ambiance and tradition among the Indian Americans, similarly enjoyed in their own country, the Newark Avenue New Jersey City Chamber of Commerce, plans to celebrate Diwali vibrantly every year. Immensely interested about Indian culture and people, Serena never leaves behind any opportunity to enjoy Indian fiesta. Delighted group of people gathered and rushed to

Serena after her performance to collect autographs and pictures. Her popularity created huge list of admirers not only among Indian Americans but in India too after her magnificent dance performances on Sajid-Wajid show. People are eager to see her in the Bollywood, help fascinate the Indian movie enthusiasts. Preeti Jhangiani, who got her Bollywood break with 'Mohabbatein' in 2000, has acted thereafter in Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Punjabi, Bengali and Rajasthani movies.

Preeti will be seen soon playing an emotional role in an offbeat film, 'Wajood.' While passing on good wishes to everyone, she expressed, "Great to see and enjoy Diwali celebration in this part of the world, exactly like we perform back home in India."



# Ex-Intelligence Bureau official calls for law to protect undercover cops

**Former Intelligence Bureau special director Rajender Kumar, who was once charged by the CBI in the Ishrat Jahan encounter case, sought legal protection for undercover officials.**

(News Agencies) Former Intelligence Bureau (IB) special director Rajender Kumar, who was once charged by the CBI in the Ishrat Jahan encounter case, on Friday asked Union home minister Rajnath Singh for legal protection for intel-based undercover operations. Kumar put the question immediately after Singh finished his 30th IB endowment lec-

ture here wherein he spoke about various policing challenges before the country and how to meet them.

“Chief and number two officer in an investigation agency outsourced their probe to an officer who is a traitor and... (prestige) of IB was torn apart. Sensitive call records were made public. Don't you think there should

be a law to protect undercover operations of intelligence agencies?” said Kumar. As the crowd comprising top police and IB officials of the country started clapping, the home minister said the topic needs discussion. “I will discuss it with you,” Singh told Kumar. Kumar was one of the four IB officials chargesheeted by the CBI in connection with the en-



counter of 19-year-old Ishrat Jahan in Ahmedabad in 2004. But when the NDA came to power in 2014, Union home ministry decided not to give nod to the CBI to prosecute Kumar citing lack of enough evidence and thus stalling the trial against him.

## Everyone has right to celebrate festivals peacefully, says Allahabad HC



(News Agencies) While hearing a petition filed by members of the Christian community, the Allahabad high court said every citizen had the right to celebrate festivals in a peaceful manner.

The Allahabad high court on Friday said every citizen had the right to celebrate festivals in a peaceful manner and the authorities should not be reluctant in giving their consent, if permitted by law.

The bench comprising chief justice DB Bhosale and justice MK Gupta made the observation while hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by Sanjay Singh and 34 members of the Christian community from Birner village in Kaushambi.

The petitioners said the local administration had imposed Section 144 of the CrPC during the local bodies' election prohibiting assembly of more than four people in the village.

They alleged that the administration officials were not allowing them to celebrate Christmas on the pretext that prohibitory orders were still in force.

The bench said Section 144 of the CrPC was imposed for the election time only and the petitioners would not face any difficulty in Christmas celebrations.

During the course of hearing, standing counsel of the state government raised the issue of loudspeakers during Christmas celebrations to which he court asked: “If loudspeakers are being used as per norms and only till the time it is permissible in law, how can you deny permission?”

The counsel for the petitioners said their application (dated December 16) seeking permission to celebrate Christmas between December 24 and 31 was pending before the district administration.

“Since Friday is the last working day and the court will remain closed till January 1, a directive should be issued to the administration regarding grant of permission for Christmas celebrations,” the counsel said.

The court directed the authorities to consider the application filed by petitioners on or before Monday, in accordance with law.

Earlier, the Hindu Jagran Manch (HJM) had asked Christian missionary schools in Agra and Aligarh not to ‘force’ Hindu students to celebrate Christmas.

The RSS, however, distanced itself from the advisory.

## Vijay Rupani to continue as Gujarat chief minister, Nitin Patel to be his deputy



(News Agencies) NEW DELHI: Vijay Rupani will continue as the chief minister of Gujarat. Nitin Patel will retain the post of deputy chief minister. Rupani was unanimously selected as the BJP legislature party leader at a meeting of all the newly-elected BJP MLAs convened by state unit president Jitu Vaghani on Friday. The announcement was made by senior BJP leader and union minister Arun Jaitley.

“There's a procedure of consultation in the party. I asked members if there were any alternatives they wanted to name. Since there were none, the two (Rupani and Patel) were declared as unanimously elected,” Jaitley told mediapersons at a press briefing.

“We will inform you all about the swearing in soon,” he added.

The process to select the next chief minister of Gujarat was carried out under the supervision of finance minister Arun Jaitley and BJP general secre-

tary Saroj Pandey, who were appointed as observers by the party's central leadership.

Rupani, along with deputy chief minister Nitin Patel and other ministers, had handed in their resignation to Governor+ O P Kohli on Thursday, following the dissolution of the legislative assembly following the recently-concluded polls. This paves the way for election of a new CM and formation of a new cabinet .

Rupani, however, would serve as the caretaker chief minister till the formation of a new government.

In the high-stakes Gujarat polls, BJP retained power by winning 99 seats in the 182-member Assembly while the Congress claimed 77. Six seats went to others, including three Independents. While Rupani+ has been the clear favourite to continue as chief minister, speculation was rife that deputy CM Nitin Patel and Rajya Sabha MP Mansukh Mandavia were also being considered for the top job.

# Gujarat election 2017: All AAP candidates lose deposit

**The AAP planned to contest every seat in the home state of Prime Minister Narendra Modi but finally zeroed in on 29 seats.**

(Insider Bureau) The Aam Aadmi Party's dream of making it big on the national scene took another hit after all its 29 candidates fighting the Gujarat assembly polls lost their deposits.

AAP candidates failed to make any impact on the electorate in the western state. Election data reveal that on one seat, its candidate won only 282 votes, and 299 in another.

Party leaders did not campaign in the state, where polls were held in two phases in November and December. Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, his deputy Manish Sisodia and labour minister and state in-charge Gopal Rai did not canvass for votes in the run-up to the polls.

Though Kejriwal spoke about the flogging of Dalits in Una and the Patidar agitation, his remarks clearly failed to sway the voters.

The Gujarat debacle came after its equally dismal performance in Goa, when 38 of its 39 candidates had their deposits for-



feited in the state assembly elections there.

About two dozen candidates in Punjab faced a similar defeat in the Punjab elections held with the Goa polls earlier this year.

The AAP had said it planned to contest every seat in the home state of Prime Minister Narendra Modi before the results for Goa and Punjab were declared.

But AAP leaders said the

party decided to focus on Delhi after its poor performance in the two states, and the humiliating defeats in the Rajouri Garden bypoll and MCD polls in Delhi.

The plan to contest in Gujarat

was then put in cold storage, and revived only after the party won the Bawana bypoll, defeating the BJP.

Though party workers wanted the AAP to contest from many more constituencies, the leadership finally zeroed in on 29 seats.

But its vote share in the 29 seats was so low that all the contestants lost their deposits.

Candidates in assembly elections have to deposit a sum of Rs 10,000, which they lose if they secure less than one sixth of the valid votes polled in the constituency.

In an interaction with reporters at the party office last month, Rai had said the AAP could have been an alternative in Gujarat but lost six crucial months after the Punjab polls. While an AAP leader declined to comment on the performance of its candidates, suspended party MLA Kapil Mishra mocked the party on its poor show.

## BJP's foundation is based on lies: Rahul Gandhi



financial irregularities against BJP chief Amit Shah's son and the Congress charges on the Rafale aircraft deal. "One by one, BJP's lies are coming out. First: Amit Shah's son, who converted Rs 50,000 to Rs 80 crore in 3 months. PM has nothing to say about it. Second: the Rafale deal is altered, one industrialist reaps all the benefits. We asked PM Modi 3 questions, but he wasn't able to answer a single one," he said. Hailing the 2G case verdict as a vindication of the Congress party's stance, Rahul went on to say that the alleged scam surrounding the UPA-era policy was a fabrication by the NDA. "Everyone knows about 2G, the truth has come out on front of you," he declared. Rahul today chaired his first CWC meeting after being elected unopposed as the Congress chief on December 11. His mother and predecessor Sonia Gandhi was also present at the meeting taking place in New Delhi.

(Insider Bureau) NEW DELHI: much touted Modi Model as a falsehood, the Gandhi scion alleged that the saffron party was openly looting the people of Gujarat in the name of development. "The whole architecture of BJP is about lies, the whole structure is about lies. Modi Model in Gujarat was a lie. When we spoke to the people, they said there's no model, what's going on is that the BJP is stealing their resources," he charged. Rahul once again questioned PM Modi's silence on allegations of

## Banks lost nearly Rs 17,000 crore to frauds last fiscal, says minister



(Insider Bureau) NEW DELHI: Banks lost a whopping Rs 16,789 crore on account of frauds in the last fiscal, the finance ministry said in the Lok Sabha on Friday.

The Reserve Bank has informed that as per the fraud monitoring reports submitted by the scheduled commercial banks and select financial institutions, "the amount lost on account of frauds during 2016-17 was Rs 16,789 crore", said Minister of State for Finance Shiv Pratap Shukla in a written reply. He further said an inter-disciplinary standing committee on cyber security has been constituted by the RBI comprising academia, information security audit, forensic and cybersecurity experts. The committee reviews, inter alia, threats

inherent in the existing or emerging technology, and suggests appropriate policy interventions. In another reply, he said incidents of bank robbery, theft, dacoity and burglary were reported from different parts of the country during 2016-17. The amount involved in such incidents totalled about Rs 65.3 crore. Further, 393 such cases involving Rs 18.48 crore have were reported in the first half of the current fiscal. Shukla said the RBI has advised banks from time to time to enhance security arrangements at their branches and ATMS. In another reply, Minister of State for Finance P Radhakrishnan said the new fake currency (Rs 2,000 and Rs 500) seized in the recent past are scanned or photocopied notes.

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# Education loan defaults soar 47% on weak job market

(Insider Bureau) NEW DELHI: A weak job market and wilful default by even those in well-paying jobs have hit the education loan portfolio of state-run banks with non-performing assets soaring by almost 47% between March 2015 and last March, data shared in Parliament showed.

On Friday, the finance ministry told the Lok Sabha that NPAs, or bad debt, went up from Rs 3,536 crore at the end of March 2015 to Rs 5,192 crore on March 31, 2017. The surge took place in 2015-16, with the pace slowing down during the last financial year.

The problem is so acute for at least five lenders that the stock of bad loans

has more than doubled, with UCO Bank and Indian Bank leading the pack. At the same time, the increase in loan flow has also been less than 10% during this two-year period.

'Absence of guarantees makes it easy to default'

But what is even worse is that there was only 3.4% rise during 2016-17, on the back of a 5.6% growth in the previous year, indicating that either demand was tepid or banks were reluctant to lend. Bankers, however, said that they had not gone slow on education loans.

They said that defaults were rising as several students had not found good jobs,

especially when it came to those who pursued MBAs or engineering degrees.

However, there are cases where even students from good colleges who were employed by leading companies are refusing to pay.

For instance, an engineer with a global technology giant stop repaying the loan and was tracked down through social media. When confronted, he cleared the dues, said a bank executive. "The problem is the absence of security and guarantees, which makes it easy to default," he added.

The government told Parliament that to reduce the incidence of NPA

in education loans, the IBA Model Education Loan Scheme has been modified to factor in the the needs of students.

The changes include a repayment holiday or a moratorium of course period plus one year, additional moratorium to account for spells of under-employment or unemployment, and extension of the repayment period to 15 years to reduce the equated monthly instalment.

The Centre has also launched a Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme for Education Loans (CGFEL) for loans upto Rs 7.5 lakh to provide guarantee up to 75% of the default amount.

## India may soon get its first runway on a 'sea bridge'



(Insider Bureau) NEW DELHI: India may soon get its first runway on a "sea bridge". The Airports Authority of India (AAI) has got green nod to extend Lakshadweep's Agatti Airport by building an RCC platform on the beach and shallow sea.

The runway will be extended on this platform and the longer airstrip will allow bigger ATRs to operate to the island. The nod for this came after AAI was asked to drop its earlier plan of linking two adjacent islands for the purpose of extending the runway. "The island-linking plan has been changed due to environmental concerns. Now, we will get into the beach and shallow sea area, erect pillars there and build an RCC platform on that. On this extended area, we will expand the runway and terminal," a senior AAI official said. "The entire project is likely to cost about Rs 1,500 crore. Once completed, the runway will be long enough for ATR-72 to operate. At present, only smaller turboprops operate there," he said.

According to officials, the air fare (to and from Agatti) is on the higher side as the ATR-72 aircraft are running with load penalty and carry only maximum of 50 passengers with 15 kg of luggage against 65 passengers with maximum luggage of 15 kg and no provision of paid luggage.

The new improved airport will help in bringing the fares to affordable level. Agatti could be India's first runway-on-sea bridge as the same was considered for two more airports — Juhu airport in Mumbai and Kullu — but was not found suitable for those places.

## Adarsh society case HC junks Maharashtra governor's nod to prosecute Ashok Chavan

(Insider Bureau) MUMBAI: In the second breather for the Congress (after Thursday's 2G verdict) and a relief for Ashok Chavan, the Bombay high court on Friday set aside the governor's sanction granted in 2016 for criminal prosecution of the former chief minister in the Adarsh society case.

Last February, governor C Vidyasagar Rao had reversed a 2013 order by his predecessor K Shankaranarayanan refusing sanction to prosecute Chavan for cheating and criminal conspiracy. Chavan had stepped down as CM after a huge controversy over the Cuffe Parade tower, involving alleged contravention of rules and allotment of flats to families of politicians and bureaucrats. Chavan had challenged Rao's sanction in the HC last year, saying that the BJP government had a "political motive".

His counsel Amit Desai argued it was legally faulty since the governor did not have the power of review if there was no fresh material that could be used as evidence in court against Chavan.

Pronouncing the verdict, a bench of Justices Ranjit More and Sadhana Jadhav held that the governor does have the power to revise an earlier order, but it can only be done when the fresh material can amount to admissible evidence in a trial against the accused.

Law mandates that a court cannot proceed against a public servant without sanction if the offence alleged under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) is committed while discharging an official duty. Chavan has also been charged under the Prevention of Corruption Act for criminal misconduct in letting civilians join a society originally meant for de-

fence personnel.

In its verdict, the HC essentially agreed with Desai that the governor in 2016 had no valid additional material against Chavan. "Neither the extract of Justice JA Patil Commission report (which said Adarsh files were cleared by Chavan as a quid pro quo) nor a November 19, 2014, order passed by a Bombay HC judge are admissible evidence," it said, adding: "A commission's report cannot form the basis of a sanction as it is opinion and is not admissible as evidence in court."

The HC in 2014 had observed in an Adarsh case that "it cannot be coincident that two close relatives of Chavan got two flats worth crores by investing much lesser amount..." The HC said the single judge's observation was merely an opinion.

## SC to hear today plea on pictorial warnings on tobacco products

### **The Karnataka High Court had ruled that 85% pictorial warnings on tobacco products is unconstitutional.**

(Insider Bureau) The Supreme Court will hear on Friday a plea against a Karnataka High Court order reducing the pictorial warning on cigarette packets and on packaging of other tobacco products.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra said it would hear the twin pleas by the Allahabad-based senior lawyer Umesh Narain and NGO Health for Millions at 3.30pm.

The court observation came after senior counsel Anand Grover appearing for the NGO and lawyer Aishwara Bhati mentioned the matter for an early hearing.

Holding as arbitrary the 2014 regulation mandating that pictorial warning on cigarette packets and



the packaging of other tobacco products should cover 85 per cent of their space, the High Court, Bhati said, had reduced it to 40 per cent.

Bhati said that 2014 Cigarette and other Tobacco Products (Packaging and Labelling) Amendments Rules came into force from April 1, 2016.

# India's border trade with Myanmar stagnates at \$50 million as China's hits \$6 billion

*India's border trade with Myanmar takes place mainly through Moreh, in Manipur's Chandel district, which links with Tamu, located in Sagaing in northwest Myanmar.*



Myanmar has four border trading points with China, of which the one at Muse, in northern Shan state, is the biggest. Around 80% of Myanmar's formal overland trade with China passes through this post that links with Ruili, in China's Yunnan province.

While China has pumped in massive amounts of money to build modern infrastructure at Ruili and also in Yunnan province to boost connectivity with Myanmar, the infrastructure at the India-Myanmar border post, Moreh, is still inadequate. An Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Moreh has been in the works for the past 10 years and is yet to be completed.

Besides the difficult terrain and militancy that adversely affect border trade at Moreh-Tamu, India in December 2015 officially put an end to the barter system, or trading of goods without exchange of money. According to Myanmar media reports, the ending of barter trade "killed" In-

dia-Myanmar border trade.

Professor Priyoranjan Singh, an economist at Manipur University, says that since the Government of India notification ending barter trade, "the present state is that formal trade, or normal official trade, stands at zero, and informal, or illegal trade -- or head load trade -- is going on".

He told IANS that there was a "huge information gap" between the two sides, including among the traders. "Our own Indian customs agency does not know the customs duty that Myanmar imposes on Indian goods," he said.

Singh, who has expertise in the field, feels that "seriousness is not there" in India on boosting border trade, while China exhibits "huge seriousness, which is something Myanmar likes". Gautam Mukhopadhyay, former Indian envoy to Myanmar, says there are reasons for China's border trade with Myanmar being more robust than India.

"First, Yunnan is a much better connected and more productive gateway from China to Myanmar than the Northeast of India to Myanmar. Secondly, for any Northeastern state of India to match China in cross-border trade, the region has to become a net producer than consumer, and better connected to the main productive regions of India," Mukhopadhyay said. He said efforts were being made in that direction. "But it will take some time and better coordination between our development, commercial and strategic policies for us to match China." He said the government has tried to address the issue of low volumes by liberalising cross-border trade and moving to the Most Favoured Nation trade status, but there was a "need for a reliable system to determine countries of origin of goods". A lot of goods from China are available in the markets in the region.

(Insider Bureau) As India prepares to celebrate the silver jubilee of its partnership with ASEAN in a big way, a key border trade link with Myanmar, the closest neighbour of the vibrant South-east Asian bloc, continues to be hobbled by infrastructure and other issues -- 22 years after it was launched.

India's border trade with Myanmar takes place mainly through Moreh, in Manipur's Chandel district, which links with Tamu, located in Sagaing in

northwest Myanmar. There is another border trade point through Zowkhathar in Mizoram with the corresponding point Rhi in Myanmar, but Moreh is the biggest border trade point.

Though India and Myanmar signed the border trade agreement on January 21, 1994, and it was made operational the following year, the bilateral border trade figure stands at \$50 million -- a poor comparison to Myanmar's trade with China, which was around \$6 billion last year.

## Allies don't put each other on notice: Pakistan hits back after US rebuke



(Insider Bureau) NEW DELHI: Hours after US vice president Mike Pence said the Trump administration had put Pakistan "on notice" for harbouring terrorists, the Pakistan Foreign Office issued a terse statement decrying being treated as a stepchild by its long-standing ally. "Allies don't put each other on notice," the Foreign Office statement said. Earlier on Friday, Pence had rebuked Pakistan for providing a safe haven to terrorist outfits, like the Taliban, that pose a threat to the region and beyond and warned that the US will no longer allow this state of affairs to continue. "For too long

Pakistan has provided safe haven to the Taliban and many terrorist organisations, but those days are over. President Trump has put Pakistan on notice," Pence told American troops during a hush-hush visit to the Bagram airbase in Afghanistan. Trump's second-in-command further stated that while America and Pakistan have enjoyed a long and fruitful alliance, Washington will not shy away from severing ties if Islamabad does not step up its counterterrorism efforts.

"As the President said, so I say now: Pakistan has much to gain from partnering with the US, and Pakistan

has much to lose by continuing to harbour criminals and terrorists," Pence said.

Riled by the vice president's upbraiding, Pakistan countered that the practice of "externalising blame should be put on notice". It also demurred that Pence's tough stance was "at variance with the extensive conversations we (Pakistan) have had with the US Administration". Pakistan's foreign affairs secretary Tehmina Janjua rejected Pence's allegations regarding the presence of terrorists on its soil, instead demanding how the US plans to address Pakistan's regional security concerns. "Pakistan has no terrorist sanctuaries. However, if actionable intelligence is provided to us, Pakistan can conduct intelligence-based operations. The bigger question is how will the US address Pakistan's concerns? Terrorists wanted in Pakistan are hiding away in Afghanistan," Janjua claimed. She also slipped in the charge that India was using Afghan soil to destabilise Pakistan. Mike Pence's scathing remarks seemed to be a furtherance of US President Donald Trump's new National Security Strategy (NSS), which seeks a Pakistan that is not engaged in destabilising activities in its neighbouring countries, like Afghanistan and India.

## Iran detains 230 young boys and girls for drinking, dancing at parties

*In Iran, drinking alcohol and mixed parties of unrelated men and women are considered a sin under Islamic law.*



(Insider Bureau) Iran's semi-official ISNA news agency has reported that police detained 230 boys and girls at separate parties in the capital Tehran in which alcohol was involved.

Friday's report said Tehran police arrested 140 of the young partygoers in a garden on the outskirts of Tehran and 90 in the city's uptown while dancing and drinking alcohol Thursday night.

Drinking alcohol and mixed parties of unrelated men and women are illegal and considered a sin under Islamic law in Iran. The report said some participants posted an invitation to others to join on Instagram and police arrested them. ISNA also said some alcoholic beverages and psychotropic drugs were confiscated.



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# As we complete 15 Years

“Words cannot express the monumental journey that each and every person reading this has crossed through. The South Asian Insider has completed fifteen year journey, that has brought a wave of information and has amassed everyone together in this community. Few people can claim to have been a part of a tireless effort to soar through the top of the skies of the newspaper industries and be able to remark on it, 15 years later. We believe an order of gratitude is granted to all of you. To everyone who has stayed with The South Asian Insider through our path, thank you.

If it was not for each and every one of you today who have supported our endeavours to become a reliable source of information, we would not have been able to voice our appreciation today. We as a family will continue to move forward with every article printed, with every word typed and with every voice incorporated into the publication that has stood to uphold the value of information and knowledge. Because with each idea shared, we as a community continue to move forward. And to all, thank you for sharing this achievement with all of us here today, working towards a new tomorrow.”

**-Sharanjit Singh Thind  
Editor In Chief & Publisher**

# Peace talks with Pakistan only when it stops supporting terror in J-K: Army chief

**Indian Army chief General Bipin Rawat said Pakistan should stop supporting terrorists, and only then India can say that peace talks should take place.**



(Insider Bureau) Indian Army chief General Bipin Rawat said on Friday peace talks with Pakistan can take place only when the country stops supporting terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir. Given its actions, it doesn't appear that Pakistan really wants peace, the army chief said during his visit to the Thar desert in the western sector to witness the Hamesha Vijayee exercise con-

ducted by the Southern Command close to the India-Pakistan border in Rajasthan.

Rawat said Pakistan should stop supporting terrorists. "Only then can we say that peace talks should take place," he told reporters in the exercise area near Barmer.

"We also want that relations should be better but given what kind of actions there are (from their side) and terrorism is spreading in Jammu and Kashmir, it doesn't appear that they really want peace," Rawat said.

Asked about China's rising presence and influence in Pakistan through the China-Pakistan

Economic Corridor (CPEC), the army chief said India was also taking its steps while keeping security aspects in mind.

"The way they are taking steps, we are also taking our steps while keeping our security perspective in mind," he said.

Rawat said the army, paramilitary forces and the Jammu and Kashmir police have been taking actions against militants in Jammu and Kashmir successfully and the action will continue.

His comments come a day after ministry of external affairs spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said India would like good relations with Pakistan provided

Islamabad takes action against terror groups.

"It is important for Pakistan to understand our core concern, which is terrorism. We have time and again asked them to take action against terrorists who are operating from their soil. This is something they (Pakistan) will have to handle if they are serious in cultivating this friendship," Kumar said. The assertions follow Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa pledging his support for better ties. According to media reports, Bajwa said he will support any initiative of the civilian government to resolve issues with India through talks.

## Indian-American investment bankers quit jobs, start casual Indian restaurant in US



(Insider Bureau) Washington aTwo young Indian-Americans investment bankers have quit their well-paid jobs to start a fine fast casual Indian restaurant here which they aspire to take to every nook and corner of the US at an affordable price.

RASA, founded by Rahul Vinod and Sahil Rahman, serves Indian food in the Chipotle-style manner, joining a national movement of new fast-casual joints.

The name of the restaurant 'RASA' is not only a combination of the two co-founders names – Rahul and Sahil – but in Sanskrit it also translates to "essence or taste" in English.

"There is this perception that

Indian food is unhealthy or heavy, or filled with butter," says Sahil, 26, who founded Rasa with his childhood friend, Rahul, 27. "We are excited to show people that is not the case. It is very clean and healthy food. It is just in the way you prepare it." "What is awesome about Indian food and it is just so diverse. There is such a variety in flavors. People think oh it's just spicy but there's so many delicious sweet dishes. There's so much from the north to the south that you can pull from," said Rahul.

The two co-founders are sons of celebrated hospitality veterans and longtime business partners Chef K N Vinod and Surfey Rahman.

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# Mother of all Twitter comebacks: Sikh scholar in Texas gets even with racists

# Trump demands, gets apology from Washington Post reporter

(News Agencies) New York Simran Jeet Singh, a Sikh scholar of religion, has wit and his mother on his side when he deals with racists on Twitter who attack him for his turban. Singh, a professor of religion at Trinity University in San

Antonio, Texas, is followed by more than 45,000 people on Twitter. The 33-year-old is also an activist against racism and a writer. Living in New York with his wife and daughter, Singh speaks regularly in media on issues of hate violence, diversity, inclusion, civil rights and

religion. On December 5, commenting on the approval of Trump administration's travel ban on eight Muslim nations, Singh tweeted, "Last week the US President shared anti-Muslim hate videos. Today the Supreme Court approved the Muslim ban. This is how hate gets normalized. We must all resist together. #NoMuslimBanEver" After sharing his thoughts on Twitter, Singh got trolled with racial attacks. "It's right. It's constitutional. You don't like it? Leave," one of users commented on Singh's #NoMuslimBanEver tweet. Singh, however, managed to take on the hated messages without anger. The next day, Singh tweeted back to the trolls: "My mom just joined Twitter and saw all the racist messages where people tell me to 'go home' and 'go back' to where I came from. She wanted me to thank you all. She really wants me to move back to Texas." Singh's response was praised, with people sharing their support to him. His tweet was liked by over 1.5 lakh users and shared 27,000 times. "I'm with your mom, Simran. We need you home here in San Antonio. If it takes a resolution, I can get to work on that!" Mayor of San Antonio Ron Nirenberg commented on Singh's tweet. "Seriously I don't know you, I don't follow you, but you're welcome to pursue the same American dream I am pursuing. That I fought for and friends of mine died for. Those who tell you that seem to have forgotten what being American is..." user named Bryan French commented on Singh's tweet. Another user named Jessamyn West commented said: "I am sorry people are jerks.



(News Agencies) West Palm Beach : President Donald Trump has demanded and received an apology from a Washington Post reporter over a photo of Trump's Florida rally on Friday. Trump tweeted Saturday that ". @ D a v e W e i g e l @WashingtonPost put out a phony photo of an empty arena hours before I arrived @ the venue, w/ thousands of people outside, on their way in." The post included photos of the Pensacola venue as Trump spoke. "Packed house, many people unable to get in. Demand apology & retraction from FAKE NEWS WaPo!"

Trump tweeted from his Florida estate, where he was spending the weekend. Weigel apologized within minutes. "Sure thing: I apologize," Weigel tweeted. Weigel said he deleted the photo after another reporter "told me I'd gotten it wrong." Trump said in a follow-up tweet that Weigel should be fired. At Friday's rally, Trump pointed to a CNN correction and other corrections and clarifications by news organizations in the past week on stories that initially had been damaging to the president but didn't live up to the scrutiny.



Antonio, Texas, is followed by more than 45,000 people on Twitter. The 33-year-old is also an activist against racism and a writer. Living in New York with his wife and daughter, Singh speaks regularly in media on issues of hate violence, diversity, inclusion, civil rights and

Supreme Court approved the Muslim ban. This is how hate gets normalized. We must all resist together. #NoMuslimBanEver" After sharing his thoughts on Twitter, Singh got trolled with racial attacks. "It's right. It's constitutional. You don't like it? Leave," one of users



# Australia parliament passes same-sex marriage bill

(News Agencies) Sydney aGay couples will be able to legally marry in Australia after a same-sex marriage bill sailed through parliament Thursday, ending decades of political wrangling. There were loud cheers, hugs and sustained clapping in the 150-seat lower House of Representatives when all but four MPs voted in support of marriage equality, after the upper house Senate passed the bill 43-12 last week. "What a day for love, for equality, for respect! Australia has done it," Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull told the House. "Every Australian had their say and they said it is fair, get on with it!" The historic reforms will commence on Saturday, when same-sex couples can lodge a notice to

marry. They will then have to wait a month before tying the knot. Labor opposition leader Bill Shorten hailed the passing of the bill as a unifying moment for Australia, adding: "Now is the time for healing. "A time to build, a time to love, and is now at last a time for marriage equality," he said. Same-sex marriage campaigners converged outside parliament in the nation's capital Canberra to celebrate the historic occasion, which sees Australia join more than 20 other countries in recognising such unions. "We came, we saw, and love finally conquered," co-chair of the Equality Campaign Alex Greenwich told reporters. "We thank all Australians for

their support for saying yes, we thank all those who have campaigned for many years, for over 10 years, for fairness and equality." The bill was introduced in parliament by the conservative government after Australians last month endorsed the reforms in a controversial voluntary postal vote. Nearly 80 percent of eligible voters took part in the poll, and almost 62 percent of the 12.7 million people who participated chose "yes" on their ballots. The vote had been called by Turnbull, a moderate who backed gay marriage, in the face of opposition from hardliners who refused to back a national plebiscite on the issue. It was opposed by proponents of same-sex marriage, who wanted direct legislative action and argued a poll would expose gay people and their families to hate speech. Just under five million people voted "no", with conservative politicians using

their rejection as a catalyst to push for religious exemptions to be included in the bill. But after lengthy debate, both houses of parliament knocked back any religious freedom amendments. Leading "no" campaigner Lyle Shelton said it was "deeply disappointing" day. "The Australian people were promised that their freedom of speech, freedom of religion and parental rights would be protected in any same-sex marriage legislation, and this has not happened," he said. Weddings early next year The House vote took place on the last sitting day of parliament for the year, with more than 100 MPs speaking on the bill this week. Queues of people lined up to watch the debate from the public gallery, with some dancing and cheering. In moving scenes, the entire parliament burst into song after the bill passed, belting out the lyrics to the "I Am Australian" song: "We are one, but we are many; And from all the lands on earth we come; We'll share a

dream and sing with one voice; 'I am, you are, we are Australian'." Several parliamentarians who supported the changes wore rainbow-coloured socks or ties, including Warren Entsch, described in local media as a "fiercely heterosexual... crocodile-farming, bull-catching Liberal". MPs have paid tribute to Entsch over the past few weeks for his efforts, with the veteran Liberal MP speaking passionately about his "very lonely" journey in support of equal rights on the conservative side of politics. "This bill will take from no-one; it simply makes our nation a kinder and a fairer place," Entsch told parliament this week. One highly anticipated wedding will be the Liberal Party's Tim Wilson, who proposed to his partner Ryan Bolger while speaking on gay marriage on the floor of the House earlier this week. Same-sex marriage is now recognised in more than 20 countries, of which 16 are in Europe.

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# Pakistan Blocks 937 Web Addresses to Curb Terrorist Activities



**(News Agencies) Islamabad** Pakistan has blocked 937 web addresses and 10 websites run by banned organisations as part of measures to prevent the use of Internet and social media

for terrorist activities. The Ministry of Information Technology took action under the National Action Plan (NAP) adopted in early 2015 to eliminate militancy from the country after the 2014 Peshawar school attack in which nearly 150 people, mostly school children, were killed. Dawn newspaper reported that it carried out research across the country in the month of April 2017 which revealed that 41 of Pakistan's 64 banned outfits were present on Facebook in the form of hundreds of pages, groups and individual user profiles. Their

network, both interconnected and public, is a mix of Sunni and Shia sectarian or terror outfits, global terror organisations operating in Pakistan, and separatists in Balochistan and Sindh. However, there appears to have been very little overall progress in the NAP in the last three months, as figures of the implementation report released in September are only slightly different than the latest report, the paper said. The interior ministry's report showed that apart from blocking of Uniform Resource Identifiers (URLs), the

government registered 1,351 cases, arrested 2,525 people and sealed 70 shops in an effort to counter hate speech and extremist material. The government also blocked a total of 98.3 million SIMs to curb use of mobile phones in militant activities. It also introduced biometric verification system to issue SIMS cards. It dismantled communication networks of terrorists. To curb the misuse of loudspeakers by clerics, the government registered 17,616 cases, arrested 18,308 suspects and seized 7,942 pieces of equipment.

## Babies' brains at risk from toxic pollution: UN

**(News Agencies) NEW DELHI** : As New Delhi and other major cities hit new toxic smog peaks, the United Nations sounded the alarm Wednesday over the damage that pollution is doing to babies' developing brains

scientific research points to a potential new risk that air pollution poses to children's lives and futures: its impact on their developing brains," UNICEF said.

The report highlighted links found between pollution and brain functions "including verbal and

The nano-particles, which easily get into the blood stream, are highly dangerous to the brain because of their magnetic charge and have also been linked to degenerative diseases.

The author of the "Danger In The Air" report, Nicholas Rees, told AFP that toxic pollution is "impacting children's learning, their memories, linguistic and motor skills."

Delhi closed schools in early November after doctors declared a public health emergency, but quickly reopened them - provoking anger from parents who accused authorities of "playing with children's health".

The crisis saw large swathes of north India and parts of neighbouring Pakistan blanketed in acrid air - an annual phenomenon as cooler air traps particles near the ground, cause pollution levels to spike.

In China, where air pollution has cut life expectancy in the industrial north by three years, the government has imposed production curbs on industry to counter a smog crisis that rivals India's - but progress has been patchy. UNICEF urged more efforts to cut pollution, and also to reduce children's exposure to the poisonous smog which has frequently reached hazardous levels in Indian cities in recent weeks. It called for a greater use of masks, air filtration systems and for children to avoid travelling when pollution levels are at their highest. Rees said masks help "but very importantly they have to have good filters and they also have to fit children's faces well. A mask that does not fit the face well won't work."

nonverbal IQ and memory, reduced test scores, grade point averages among school children, as well as other neurological behavioural problems." "As more and more of the world urbanises, and without adequate protection and pollution reduction measures, more children will be at risk in the years to come."

The ultra-fine particles in city pollution can damage the blood-brain barrier - a delicate membrane that protects the brain from toxic substances.

Damage to the membrane has been linked to Alzheimers and Parkinson's disease in the elderly. UNICEF also highlighted the growing risk from minute particles of the iron ore magnetite which is increasingly found in urban pollution.



The UN's children's agency, UNICEF, said Asia accounts for more than 16 million of the world's 17 million infants aged under one year living in areas with severe pollution - at least six times more than safe levels.

India topped the list of countries with babies at risk, followed by China, UNICEF said in a report.

Satellite imagery used to assess pollution levels around the world found that South Asian countries accounted for 12.2 million of the total number of affected children but that there is also a growing problem in African cities. Air pollution has already been linked to asthma, bronchitis, and other long-term respiratory diseases.

"But a growing body of

## Mexican journalist shot dead at primary school holiday party



**(News Agencies) Mexico**

Attackers burst into an elementary school where a Christmas party was taking place and shot reporter Gumaro Perez to death Tuesday, making him at least the 10th journalist slain in Mexico this year in what observers have called a crisis of freedom of expression.

The Veracruz state security coordinator said in a statement that dozens of parents and children were present when the unidentified attackers shot Perez, whose own child attends the school in the city of Acayucan.

Perez, 34, covered crime for a number of local outlets, had founded the online news site La Voz del Sur and also worked for the local government in some capacity.

He was part of a state program designed to protect journalists as they carry out certain 'high-risk' coverage, separate from a federal government program known as 'the mechanism' that offers reporters measures like panic buttons on their cellphones and home security. "He belonged to the preventive program for safe coverage of this Commission since 2015, which

refers to mechanisms for reporting that diminish danger in high-risk events," the Veracruz State Commission for Attention and Protection of Journalists said in a statement. "Nevertheless, regrettably, he had not made us aware of having received any threats that could have put him at risk."

Commission president Ana Laura Vazquez said the group would monitor the investigation and urged the government of the Gulf coast state to bring his killers to justice.

Adelina Mendoza, Perez's widow, said in an interview published by the local branch of the online news outlet E-Consulta that for the last year she had begged him to leave journalism and open a restaurant with her, but he refused. She told E-Veracruz.mx that Perez arrived on time at the holiday party Tuesday and planned to keep their son company so she could leave early. While Perez remained indoors, "I went outside and my son went out of the room with his little friends," Mendoza was quoted as saying. "I hugged him, I gave him a kiss because I was leaving, and right then I heard the gunshots."

# Obama edges out Trump as most-admired man

Hillary Clinton keeps title as most-admired woman for 22nd time in annual Gallup survey.

President Donald Trump is the second-most admired man in the world among Americans, joining a small group of incumbent presidents who failed to win Gallup's top distinction while in office.

Trump's predecessor, former President Barack Obama, and vanquished general election opponent, Hillary Clinton, retain their titles as the man and woman Americans most admire, according to the Gallup poll released Wednesday morning. Obama edged out Trump, 17 percent to 14 percent, to win his 10th most-admired title. He won the year he was elected president, each year in the White House and his first year out of

office. Only former President Dwight Eisenhower has won Gallup's most-admired title more times than Obama has. (Eisenhower was so named 12 times). Clinton narrowly bested former first lady Michelle Obama, 9 percent to 7 percent, retaining her honor for the 16th consecutive year. The former senator, secretary of state and Democratic presidential nominee has won 22 times overall, the most ever. "But the likelihood that she will continue to hold that honor in future years seems less certain, with her popularity at a nadir and the percentage naming her as most-admired the lowest in 15 years," Gallup said. "She managed to win this year

because she remains arguably more prominent than other contenders. However, retaining that stature may be more challenging in coming years with her political career likely over." Gallup added that Barack Obama, like Clinton, "may fade in prominence the longer he is out office," noting that former presidents are often in the top 10, but rarely ever win. The incumbent president has won the most-admired honor 58 times out of the 71 times since 1946 that Gallup has posed the question. (Gallup didn't ask the question in 1976.) Trump joins Harry Truman (1946-1947, 1950-1952), Lyndon B. Johnson (1967-1968), Richard Nixon (1973),

Gerald Ford (1974-1975), Jimmy Carter (1980) and George W. Bush (2008) as presidents who didn't finish first despite holding America's most powerful position. Each aforementioned president had approval ratings well below 50 percent. The 2017 list of most-admired men is rounded out with Pope Francis (third); the Rev. Billy Graham, Arizona Sen. John McCain and Elon Musk (tied for fourth); and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, Bill Gates, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Jeff Bezos, the Dalai Lama and Vice President Mike Pence (tied for fifth). The roster of most-admired women includes Oprah Winfrey (third); Massachusetts Sen.

Elizabeth Warren (fourth); German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Queen Elizabeth II (tied for fifth); and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, first lady Melania Trump, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley, Duchess Kate Middleton and Beyoncé (tied for sixth). About 25 percent of Americans can't name a man or woman they admire most. Nine percent name a relative or friend as the man they admire most, while 13 percent do the same for women. The poll of 1,049 adults was conducted Dec. 4-11 via landlines and cellphones. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

## Indian oil cos to drop anchor in Israeli waters as Iran deal hangs fire

ONGC Videsh MD N K Verma confirmed the development, saying the consortium will go through certain processes before deciding on drilling for oil or gas in the block. This was the first auction of exploration licences, consisting of 24 blocks, in four years since Israel blocked foreign companies from exploration in its eastern

Mediterranean waters.

The permission to the Indian consortium comes ahead of Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu's three-day visit to India from January 14 and indicates the willingness of both governments to expand the horizon of bilateral ties from security and defence to energy security.

So far, oil and gas has not

been part of the bilateral discourse, which has been largely dominated by defence equipment and water management. The only relationship the two countries had in the oil sector was Reliance Industries Ltd, India's largest private oil company, leasing Eilat-Ashkelon Pipeline Company's petroproducts storage capacity.

The process to include oil in areas of bilateral cooperation began ahead of PM Narendra Modi's July visit to Israel. Israeli energy minister Yuval Steinitz called oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan in June to invite Indian participation in that country's exploration business, dominated by Delek Group and Isramco Negev. The two connected again earlier this month as the Indian bid was being cleared.

Israel, with major gas reserves, has emerged as a greener pasture for the Indian grouping as Iran plays truant on Farzad-B. But New Delhi's decision to allow state-run companies to bid in Israeli block auctions also packs a strong message to Iran — Israel's arch rival — as it comes in the face of global players keeping off for fear of reprisal from their Arab benefactors.

India's relations with Iran have cooled off recently over Tehran's failure to award Farzad-B to the OVL-led consortium in spite of commitments made by top leaders on both sides to see the deal through quickly. Feeling slighted, India, which had stood by Iran during western sanctions, has retaliated by reducing by a third Iranian crude imports. Tehran responded by scrapping benefits it gave to Indian refiners on crude purchase and approaching Russian companies for Farzad-

B. "India stood with Iran during its difficult days and will continue to do so in the future also. But, at the same time, we also expect our economic interests to be protected," Pradhan had said in June soon after TOI reported Iran signing preliminary deal with Russian companies for the gas field.

### Taranjit Parmar Hit & Run

Fire Department  
employee held

It makes us feel good that there were so many people involved in this investigation," Parmar said on Sunday, CBS New York reports. Coppola was charged with manslaughter, leaving the scene of an accident, tampering with physical evidence and reckless endangerment. Sources tell CBS News that Coppola is suspended without pay from the FDNY, and if convicted, he could face at least 26 years behind bars. Parmar told CBS New York that his daughter was kind and ambitious and that she wanted to open her own dental practice in Levittown. "If you're going to have a daughter, this is the one, and we've been blessed," Parmar said. The family released the following statement to the media on Sunday night: "In the holiday season, the best gift is a hug and holding your loved ones tight. We lost that moment. Please cherish it."

Salman Khan to the rescue for Bollywood's 2017 box office

## Tiger Zinda Hai earns Rs 173cr in 5 days

This is Khan's 12th consecutive Rs 100-crore spinner and at Rs 114.93 crore, the highest any of his films had earned in three days of release.

Also, Tiger Zinda Hai is the year's top first weekend grosser for a Hindi film. Blockbuster Baahubali 2, released in four languages, earned more but it's essentially a Telugu movie.

Trade analyst Taran Adarsh hopes the Tiger will roar beyond 2017.

"It has been a dull year for Bollywood. It was only post-Diwali that the industry saw some hits. Even then, Golmaal Again, the top Hindi grosser of 2017, collected only Rs 205 crore," he said.

Adarsh called Tiger Zinda Hai a much-needed shot in the arm for

the industry. "In just four days, it collected over Rs 170 crore. So, we can expect a good run because there are no major releases over the next few weeks.

Hopefully, this will spill over to next year as well," he said.

Superstar Khan began the year with Tubelight in which he plays a Forrest Gumpesque character, but the movie tanked and could gross only a little over Rs 119 crore.

Fellow superstar Shah Rukh Khan disappointed too at the box office with his Jab Harry Met Sejal. The two actors co-produced their films and reimbursed distributors for the losses.

"A star in India needs to stay true to his fan base. Salman's fans can believe he moves mountains,

but he can't do it just with his thoughts like in Tubelight. With Tiger Zinda Hai, he is truly in his zone," distributor Akshaye Rathi said.

Directed by Ali Abbas Zafar, Tiger Zinda Hai is a masala entertainer, the likes of which propelled Khan to stardom. "It has well choreographed action sequences, Khan and Katrina Kaif in form, and a lot of emotion. It is just the kind of film our audience wants," Adarsh said.

The fans couldn't have asked for more and they responded in this order: Opening day earning Rs 34.10 crore; Rs 35.30 crore on Saturday; Rs 45.53 crore on Sunday; Rs 36.54 crore on Christmas; and Rs 21.60 crore on Tuesday, despite being a working day.

# Once a Cash Cow, Venezuela's Oil Company Now Verges on Collapse



a coup.

Luis Giusti, who ran Pdvsa before President Hugo Chávez came to power in 1999, said Mr. Maduro's purge was "more of a political campaign to see if they can have some breathing room because everything is going down the drain."

"They have been managing the corporation for 18 years and then all of a sudden they are saying now they are going to rescue the corporation," he added. "Rescue from whom?"

For generations, Pdvsa delivered mightily on the promises of Venezuela's oil reserves, funding the nation's socialist-inspired revolution and making it one of the wealthiest countries in Latin America. But production in recent years has plummeted so far that Pdvsa is no longer able to meet domestic demand for diesel and gasoline, forcing the country to import increasing amounts of both, including from the United States.

The company's crude exports have also fallen drastically. Shipments to the United States, Pdvsa's top foreign market, plunged by a third over the last year. Mr. Maduro has threatened to cut crude exports to the United States entirely and sell more to China and India. But crude exports to China have also fallen — by nearly 15 percent over the last year — as the quality of its oil has declined and China has increased its purchases from the United States.

Pdvsa is also sagging under the burden of immense debt. It has been effectively in default on its \$26.5 billion in unsecured bonds since early November, and it owes roughly \$60 billion more to its service companies that drill and maintain its fields. The Maduro administration

has insisted that it intends to continue to make payments on its debts, and investors have been largely tolerant of payment delays. But Pdvsa's financial health has become so perilous that Cuba, Venezuela's closest ally, recently took the company's 49 percent share in a Cuban refinery as payment for outstanding debts.

This company's struggles are particularly evident in the two sprawling refineries that bracket this small city and form part of the Paraguana Refining Center, one of the largest refinery complexes in the world.

As recently as 2015, the center, with a capacity of nearly a million barrels a day, was processing about 587,000 barrels a day, according to Pdvsa's website. The crude was converted into a range of products, including gasoline, jet fuel, asphalts and lubricants.

But the refineries, like most of the company's facilities around the country, have fallen into grave disrepair. The situation has forced severe cutbacks in operations, leading to layoffs and an increase in accidents and injuries, workers and union leaders said.

The refineries have been recently plagued by a series of mishaps.

In late October, some 200,000 gallons of gasoline and other products spilled from a slop tank in one of the refineries, Amuay, into the adjacent bay. The spill killed wildlife and forced local fishermen to suspend fishing for weeks.

Then an overworked pump in the same refinery failed, leaving operational only two of five distillation units, a key part of the refining process, workers and union leaders said.

Days later, a fire broke out in a separate refinery, Cardón, leaving only one of five distillation units functioning. Workers reported that the emergency crew that responded could do little more than to watch the fire burn out on its own. They had run out of firefighting foam.

In the midst of it all, production came to a near-standstill, dropping to just 13 percent of capacity in early-December before rebounding slightly, Mr. Freitas said. Three of Amuay's distillation units and two at Cardón were functioning this week, the union leader said on Wednesday, but he added that another fire had broken out in Cardón on Tuesday causing injuries. The disintegration of the refineries has left many workers dispirited. Employees have lost all interest, said Emilio, a worker in the Cardón refinery who asked that his last name be withheld because he feared punishment by the authorities for criticizing the company. He said they were simply punching the clock.

Wage increases have lagged far behind soaring inflation and workers have seen their purchasing power drop markedly and benefits reduced sharply. Some employees have been forced to sell their gloves and helmets to put food on their family's dinner table, workers said. Pride of association with Pdvsa has evaporated.

Before, people would be devastated if they lost a job at Pdvsa, said José, a worker in the Amuay refinery who also asked that his last name be withheld because he feared retribution from his bosses for speaking publicly about the company. Now, he said, many dread going to work and are looking for jobs elsewhere.

PUNTO FIJO, Venezuela — A general with no energy experience has been installed as the head of the state oil company. Arrests, firings and desperate emigration have gutted top talent. Oil facilities are crumbling, while production is plummeting.

As the rest of the oil-producing world recovers on the back of stronger energy prices, Venezuela is getting worse, the result of dysfunctional management, rampant corruption and the country's crippling economic crisis. The deepening troubles at the state oil company, the country's economic mainstay, threaten to further destabilize a nation and government facing a dire recession, soaring inflation and unbridled crime, as well as food and medicine shortages.

When energy prices started to crater several years ago, Venezuela and other oil-dependent nations suffered in tandem. Now, prices are rising and others in the oil patch are on the mend.

Saudi Arabia's government is slashing its deficits and reaping increased revenue. Even dysfunctional Libya and Iraq have been pumping and exporting like mad.

Not Venezuela, the country with the largest proven reserves in the world. The state-owned oil company, *Petróleos de Venezuela*, known as Pdvsa, teeters on the brink of collapse, its failures at once a symptom and a cause of the nation's downward economic spiral.

The reasons can be clearly seen at the sprawling oil refining complex here on the Caribbean coast. Once the crown jewel of Venezuela's oil industry, it not only fueled the country's booming economy but also produced an abundance of lucrative gasoline and diesel for export. Today, the complex is in severe decay. A lack of investment compounded by cash flow problems and chronic shortages of spare parts have

crippled operations, critics say.

It is closing out the year operating at only 20 percent capacity, with 76 of 84 plants paralyzed, said Iván Freitas, a union leader and outspoken government critic. The complex does not have the computer software to diagnose its production problems, nor the money to fix them if they did.

"It's like a slow death," Mr. Freitas said.

With facilities around the country in disrepair, Venezuela has been unable to take advantage of rising prices by pumping out more oil and ramping up refinery operations. Production is falling 20,000 barrels to 50,000 barrels a day month after month and is now at its lowest level in nearly three decades.

As it sells less oil, Pdvsa is falling behind on its debt payments. It is quickly turning into a liability that could force the country into default.

"With production going down and down, there is a spiral of less cash and less investment and less production," said Francisco J. Monaldi, a Venezuelan oil expert at Rice University in Houston. "I don't think there has ever been such a collapse in cash flow of any national oil company."

Pdvsa's production problems have been exacerbated by the turbulence in its leadership. In the last few months, the government of President Nicolás Maduro arrested scores of managers on corruption charges. Mr. Maduro says the prosecutions are an effort to clean up the company. But critics view the sweep as a political purge by the Mr. Maduro to consolidate power ahead of presidential elections next year.

And last month, the president appointed Major General Manuel Quevedo to run both Pdvsa and the oil ministry — though he had no known experience in the energy sector. Critics viewed the move as a transparent effort by Mr. Maduro to safeguard against



# The enigma of departure

## Sonia Gandhi leaves behind a rich legacy

*A fiercely protective mother, a street smart politician, a people manager extraordinaire, a Nehruvian socialist: These are a few ways we remember the outgoing Congress president*

Ill fortune has pursued the powerful Gandhi family as relentlessly as the Furies in a Greek tragedy. A prime minister often called the Empress of India felled by her own bodyguards. A handsome young former prime minister on a comeback trail blown to bits by an assassin. Close to the epicentre of these cataclysmic events that changed the course of politics in India and devastated by them was the woman who would one day come to control the fortunes of the 132-year-old Congress party and eventually India. Sonia Gandhi may have been a reluctant entrant into politics, pushed to the pinnacle by a party which has never been able to function without the glue of the Gandhi family. When she stepped down as party president earlier this month, the transformation of the political ingénue to consummate politician had become the stuff of legend. The fact that she is still there behind the scenes can only be of comfort to her son as he begins his innings as president after a somewhat chequered career now salvaged by the good showing in Gujarat. It will also be of comfort to her partymen and the millions who support the grand old party.

Many people forget the circumstances under which she stepped into politics. She resisted the entreaties of Congressmen for six years after the death of her husband, an indication of how reluctant she was to join a world which claimed the lives of those closest to her. But once she agreed to become president of the party in 1998, the shy hesitation vanished and she became the unchallenged primus inter pares of the party. Those who challenged her were soon vanquished



and excommunicated by a party which tried to prove itself more loyal than the queen. When she renounced power after the Congress roared back to centrestage in 2004, in one fell swoop, she ascended a rare pedestal in Indian politics. She turned down the prime ministership. There is nothing that Indians love as much as the ascetic who shuns power when it could have been hers for the asking. But behind this decision was a shrewd pragmatic understanding that she would have been constantly assailed by her detractors, among them a then powerful Sharad Pawar, who would constantly question her foreign origin. The choice of the scholarly Dr Manmohan Singh was a masterstroke, seemingly giving her power without responsibility. It is then that she did not play her cards too well. Her National Advisory Council, full of latter-day Nehruvian socialists and what many referred to dismissively as bleeding heart liberals seemed to overwhelm the economist prime minister's

governance, pushing through giant social welfare schemes many of which went against the grain of the liberalisation and competitiveness that Dr Singh espoused.

The Sonia mystique remains intact even as she moves away from the spotlight. This has perhaps been nurtured by a great degree of inaccessibility to the media. Yet, with crowds in remote villages and towns, she was the caring matriarch, listening intently to their problems. But even her deft political footwork could not save a party crumbling from inertia and sloth, unable to face an aggressive BJP and the masterly oratory of Narendra Modi. The downhill slide has been on in full force since 2013. The party's improved performance in defeat in Gujarat could mark the beginning of a revival, though, and is perhaps a fitting parting gift to Sonia.

When learned articles are written on women political leaders in South Asia and Asia, Sonia's name features prominently. But unlike, say

Sheikh Hasina, Benazir Bhutto, Megawati Sukarnoputri, Chandrika Kumaratunga or even her mother-in-law Indira Gandhi, she was not born into a political family where the mantle of power would one day fall on her. She was a rank outsider, the daughter of working class father, an object of some derision in Delhi's notoriously elitist society who dismissed her as the au pair girl who caught the fancy of the prime minister's son. It cannot have been easy for the young Italian girl to marry into the patrician Gandhi family and become part of a household which has never been out of the limelight in independent India. But helped by a doting mother-in-law, she grew into the role using all she had learnt from the mercurial Indira when she herself entered the muscular world of politics. She walked like her, dressed like her and eventually displayed the sharp skills that earned Indira the title of India's most powerful politician.

For a person so obsessed with legacy, she leaves her son a

desperately difficult task of rebuilding the shattered party. But if he has learnt from Sonia's ability to forge fortuitous alliances, project an inclusive and secular front, accept that sometimes the party has to play second fiddle to powerful regional parties, then he certainly has a fighting chance. As she moves away from centrestage in her party's politics, we realise that after all these years, we know so little about Sonia as a person, her quirks, her likes. We only know her as a fiercely protective mother, a street smart politician, a people manager extraordinaire, a Nehruvian socialist. That is as far as she will let the public into her private world and that is how she intends to keep it. What's her favourite dish? What does she read? Does she watch movies? Which are her favourite holiday destinations? As long as we don't know the answers, we will remain endlessly fascinated by this enigmatic woman even as she steps off the contemporary political arena.



# 6 Best Things to Do in Paris

*Paris is a dream destination of many people and if you can celebrate Christmas in Paris this year you're truly a lucky person! Paris is always among the top travel destinations. The capital city of France will charm you regardless of the season, but it looks especially alluring in winter. Once you're in Paris you will fall in love with the atmosphere of happiness, festivity and magic in the air! However, if it's the first time that you're in Paris, you may find it difficult to figure out what to see and to do in the city. Here are 7 great things you should do when you're in Paris at Christmas.*

## 1. Look for Christmas markets



Obviously, Christmas markets in Paris cannot compete with those in Austria, Belgium or Germany, but they're still very popular and worth visiting. Christmas markets attract thousands of visitors and tourists each year. Markets are so widespread and popular in Paris that you can easily find a few Christmas markets nearby your hotel or any place you stay. The most popular markets include Montmartre, Gare Saint Lazare, Place de la Republique, Place des Abbesses and Place de la Bourse. I bet you'll get a lot of great emotions and memories while visiting these places!

## 2. Go to a skating rink



Skating rinks are becoming more and more popular Christmas entertainment in different countries. Indeed, what can be more Christmassy than putting on a pair of skates and gliding to cheerful holiday songs under the stars? There are many of outdoor skating rinks in Paris, which are available from December till January and even February. If you want to admire the Eiffel Tower while skating, you should go to the rink at the Trocadero. Some skating rinks offer free entrance if you bring your own skates! So put on your gloves and earmuffs and head to the skating rink if you're in Paris.

## 3. Admire the lights around the city



When you're in Paris, one of the most awesome things that you can do is to admire the myriads of lights that are everywhere around the city. The breathtaking Christmas Illuminations are the event that both Parisians and tourists look forward to. The colored bulbs, luminous arches, show windows and sparkling garlands deck out the streets of Paris in holiday radiance and Christmas cheer. Go to Place Vendôme, Avenue Montaigne, Forum des Halles or Bercy Village. All these places are imbued with festive cheerful atmosphere. Walk along the streets and admire beautifully decorated trees that change their color every half hour.

## 4. Amusement for children



If you're going to Paris with your kids you should think up some interesting ways to keep your little ones entertained during the trip. Disneyland is definitely one of the best places to visit, where your children will enjoy the fairy-tale atmosphere with numerous performances, shows and roundabouts. You shouldn't overlook Paris gardens and parks that offer puppet shows and pony rides for children and the opportunity to relax for their parents. Visiting the Big Wheel with your kids is another great idea to consider. You'll have the opportunity to enjoy the most picturesque scenes of the French capital.

## 5. Nativity scenes



Every year people around the world look forward to the opportunity to enjoy nativity scenes. When you're in Paris during Christmas season you can enjoy them in Parisian churches. Most big churches prepare installations that are either animated, or inspired by local history or even contemporary. When you come to any church you'll be amazed at the beauty and greatness of the nativity scenes. The figures may vary from small to life-size, which are more appealing and exciting. Try to visit several different churches to enjoy modern, traditional and baroque installations.

## 6. Don't miss a show



Paris is the cultural center of France, so when it comes to the holiday season, Paris is full of evening and night entertainments for guests of the city and Parisians. Lights, shopping and amusement parks aren't everything that the city can offer. When you're in Paris you should definitely visit Moulin Rouge and Opera Bastille. Circus will also be a great entertainment either you're with kids or not. Do you know that Paris holds an annual Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain to find new talents? Circus is an integral part of holiday time in France and it's already become a great tradition to visit circus at Christmas.

# 10 Superfoods for Men to Have a Great Time in Bed

*It has been proved that making love tops the list of things men usually think about. But with hectic schedules and tiring routines, you hardly get the time or have the inclination to even hold your wife's hand, let alone make love! But physical intimacy is vital to keep the flames of passion burning. If you are one of those men who struggle to get the "magic" back under the sheets, we have an easy remedy for you- raid your kitchen. Yes, you can both enjoy these yummy treats and get in the mood for "some love" as well.*



## Vanilla

The smell of vanilla itself does a lot of things to the body, doesn't it? That apart, it is any woman's favourite fragrance. Its aroma has therapeutic, relaxing effects that help you soothe down the tired body and get into the naughty



**Easy tip:** Order a large tub of vanilla ice cream or gift her a vanilla fragrance, and be ready for

## Oysters

The high levels of zinc in oysters work on the hormones for both men and women, which increase the lovemaking desire dramatically!



**Easy tip:** Take her out for a fancy dinner and order some oysters. Gulp them down and be ready for a wild night!

## Chocolates

A delicious way to be great in bed is to have a chunk of dark chocolate. It has chemicals that not only work on the stress and relax the mind, but also improves the feelings of pleasure and



**Easy tip:** Pick your favourite chocolate while you get back from work. Need we say more?

## Pomegranate

This fruit is full of antioxidants and improves the blood circulation to the sexual organs, making them more sensitive to touch.



**Easy tip:** Have a bowl of pomegranate for dessert tonight!

## 5. Red wine

Often called the ladies' drink, this one will work wonders for your girl. The chemicals in red wine help in working on the oestrogen (female hormone) levels, increasing the pleasure in women. But this one works for men too; you can enjoy the heated benefits as well!



**Easy tip:** Find a reason to celebrate tonight, and get home a bottle of red wine.

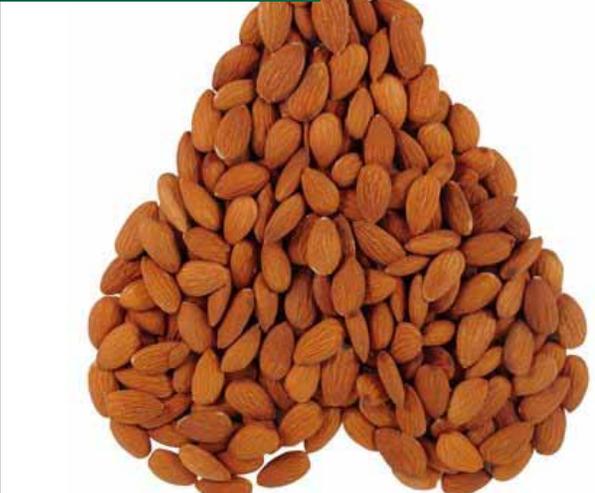
## 6. Bananas

Bananas are a must for the production of sex hormones. Having this fruit everyday provides the body with minerals that can encourage pleasure and excitement.



**Easy tip:** How about enjoying some bananas after dinner, while watching a movie maybe?

## 7. Almonds



This is probably the oldest known aphrodisiac (mentioned even in the Bible!). Have a handful of almonds everyday and see how its works towards a mindblowing performance! The fragrance of almonds is also known to boost the desire for intimacy.

**Easy tip:** Apart from munching on some almonds, how about an almond oil massage session?

## 8. Caffeine



Any foods or drinks that have caffeine in them, like tea or coffee, can improve the blood circulation in the body including to the genital organs. But don't overdo this, as it can have side effects like restlessness.

**Easy Tip:** Relax with some black coffee with your sweetheart before bedtime.

## 9. Chillies



The spicier your food, the more excited you feel! Chillies release endorphins when you start feeling the heat, thus working great for your physical desires.

**Easy tip:** Have a spicy, hot chilli chutney or pickle

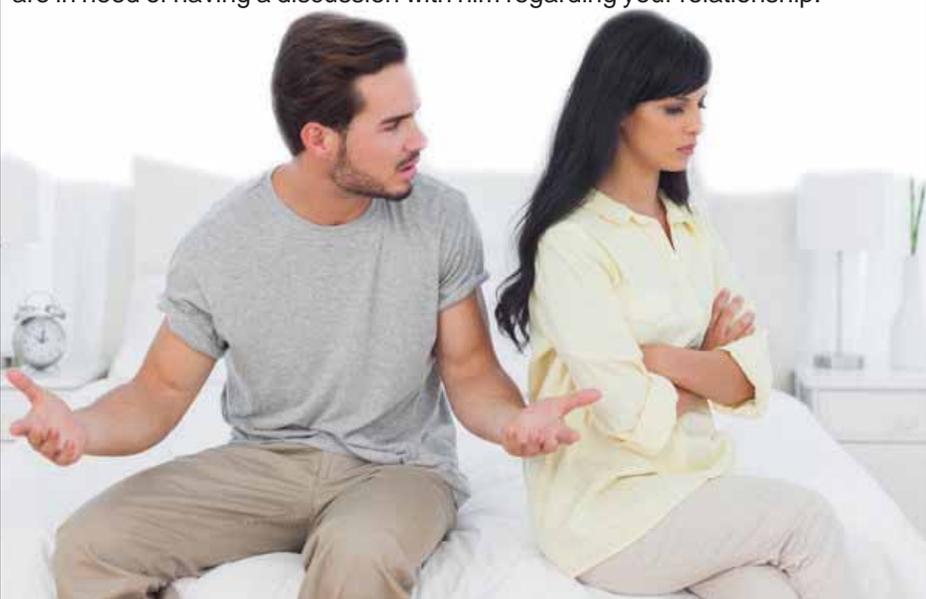
# 7 Signs Your Relationship Needs Rebuilding



*A lifelong relationship is based on a strong emotional attachment. When two people are on the same emotional level, no matter what happens, they will never be short of love for each other. A relationship takes a wrong turn when either of the partners stops being emotionally available for the other one. Unlike physical intimacy, the absence of emotional attachment is hard to discover. If you also feel that your relationship has come to a still point where you feel a weird emotional void, perhaps you need to have a reality check. Well, here are some of the signs that can tell you if your man is emotionally attached to you or not? Read on:*

## Not available when you need him

There have been the times when you needed him the most, but he always came up with a bevy of excuses. Well, if you have had many such experiences, then beware! Notice whether he comes up with excuses for just one incident, or everytime you need him. If latter happens to you quite frequently, then you probably are in need of having a discussion with him regarding your relationship.



## Nothing to share

He knows that there is something bothering you. Or, you know there is something constantly going on in his mind. Yet, he is not bothered to communicate with you and clear up the matter, even when you try and initiate a conversation. He prefers to keep his thoughts to himself, whether it is about your feelings or his own. This might be an indicator of his lack of interest, and in some cases, even trust, in you as well as the relationship.



## Your love life is mechanical

The difference between sex and lovemaking lies in the emotions with which you do the act. Like they say, lovemaking is 'the sex done with emotions'. A man who is not emotionally available for you will not make you feel loved in bed. The act is going to be mechanical, even perfect perhaps, but devoid of love



## Distracted

Does your guy always seem distracted when he spends time with you? For instance, when you are on a date, is he busy on his phone? Or, when you are watching television together, is he busy going through his emails? Agreed that guys usually do not prefer to hear the every day gossip of what others are upto. But, paying no heed even to the things that concern you, could be an indication of something being seriously wrong between the two of you.

## He feels like a stranger

The ultimate sign that he is not emotionally attached to you is your own feeling. Does your man feel like a stranger sometimes?

Is he someone you still do not know about and cannot connect with? Your heart is often true in such matters. If your heart says that there is

an unseen wall between the both of you, it is simply the time to take some action.



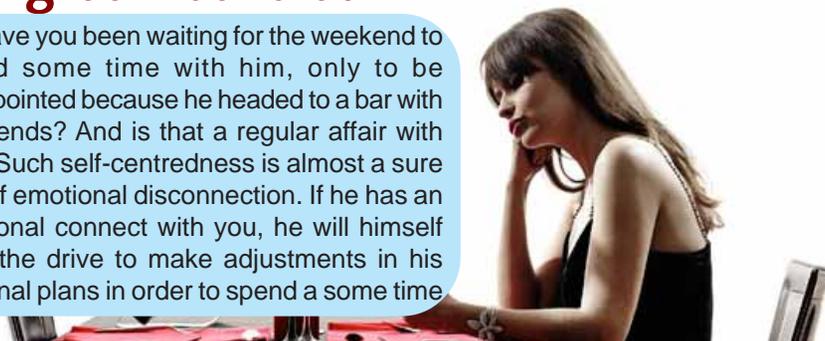
## Not bothering to return calls

Yes, he might be a busy man and might not be able to take your calls at times. But any courteous and caring partner will call back whenever he gets some time. If you realise that he does not call back at all and you end up calling him repeatedly, you need to start reading signs of a looming emotional disconnect between the both of



## Being self-centred

Have you been waiting for the weekend to spend some time with him, only to be disappointed because he headed to a bar with his friends? And is that a regular affair with you? Such self-centredness is almost a sure sign of emotional disconnection. If he has an emotional connect with you, he will himself have the drive to make adjustments in his personal plans in order to spend a some time



# 7 Super Romantic Things That Husbands Do Unknowingly

Guys, if you think that your woman is tough to please, think again. Because, the reality is far from it. The big news is that your women actually are pleased by simple, everyday gestures. Shocked? Don't be! It, in fact, is true. For women, romance is not just limited to red roses, chocolates, candle light dinners and gifts. Romance means something much more to them. It can be anything from simple words of praise to helping her in the kitchen. Find out what more that you usually do, or can do, to make your lady feel special.



## Making the bed

This is something that she probably expects the least from you! After managing her office, household chores and the kids, she is obviously exhausted. So, when she finds the bed all done and tidied, ready to snuggle in the already laid sheets, her joy knows no bounds! This is something that she will find most thoughtful and romantic.

## Spending time with the kids

Looking after the kids, helping them in their school projects and studies, reading them bedtime stories, and other such simple things convince your wife that no one can be more lovable and caring than you. You definitely earn a lot of brownie points there!



## Few words of praise

"My wife is wonderful," "My wife takes care of everything," "She is an excellent homemaker," and many such simple words, especially when said in front of friends and family, make her feel very special. To know that you value and respect what she does for you, makes her love you even more.



## Helping in kitchen

Women know that men usually don't like to work in kitchen. But when they see you right next to them in the kitchen peeling potatoes, doing dishes, or even mixing salad, they go all "aww..." in their hearts! In fact, they find this gesture so endearing that they actually fall head over heels in love with you all over again.

## Accompanying her for shopping

It need not be for some pricey dress or shoes. Just notice the smile and the sparkle in her eyes when you accompany her even for household shopping. And, in the store, if she finds you holding her hand unexpectedly, then the "love hormones" are in for a sudden shoot-up, trust us.



## Taking care of her when she is unwell

Those times, when you take leave from your office to look after your wife when she is ill, makes you nothing less than an angel. A woman loves it when her partner takes charge of the house when she is not well. She also loves when you remember her medicines, her meals and tucking her in bed, or just sitting beside her, holding her hand. She feels blessed, and thanks you silently for everything.



## An unexpected hug

That sudden hug, which you give her while she is doing her household chores just sways her away. Women find such gestures romantic as they make her feel special and cared for.

# Serena Milan, clicked by lens-legend Dabboo Ratnani on her India visit



**Higher strata of Bollywood elite hardly gets this chance occasionally**



(By Susmita Ghosh) New York- New York based professional model, fashion icon, Serena Milan's dance performances at recently held live show in New York enabled her to charm Indian movie devotees. Evidently, on her recent visit to India Dabboo Ratnani, the well-known celebrity fashion photographer in India took out time to meet and perform real shoot capturing some of her amazing pictures.

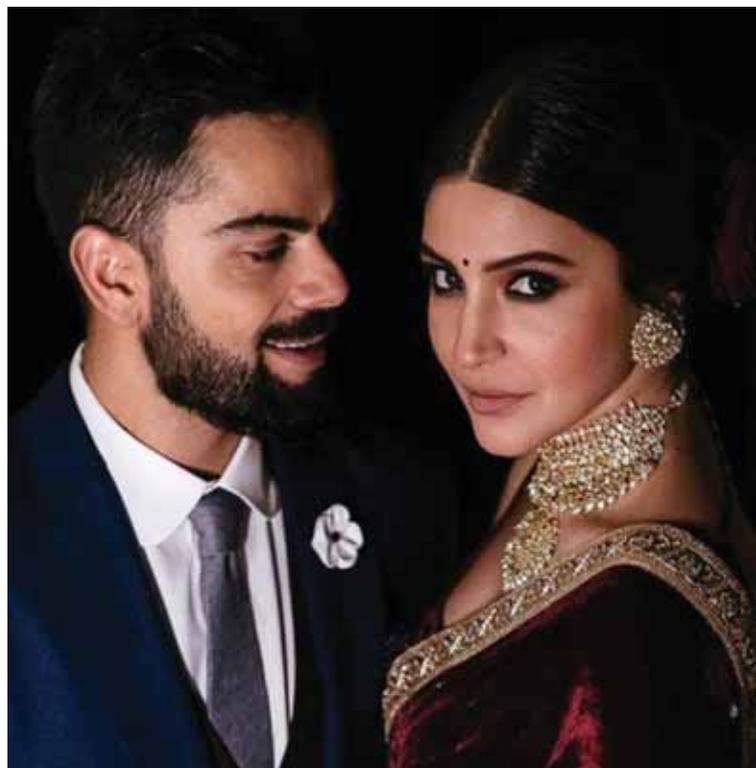
Celebrities like Mr Bachchan, Sachin Tendulkar, Late Michael Jackson, Boris Becker Sanjay Dutt, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, to name a few, frequently refuse to shoot with anyone besides Dabboo Ratnani. Next to impossible it becomes for the celebrities at times to get an appointment with the photographer, forget about real shoot! Fortunate enough, Serena to get such exceptional opportunity, proves her accomplishment at length. Dabboo's annual calendar, a collector's item, eagerly awaited by the Bollywood fraternity. Known to capture stars in their most beautiful yet unconventional moments, Dabboo has an ability of getting his pictures despite the odds. He has captured some amazing pictures of B-town celebs at the 2017 calendar photoshoot.

"The calendar has a shelf value of a year, hence very important for the image to tell a story within itself," he confides. Serena, being professional Model, dancer, Fashionista and winner of many pageants, the multi-talented personality may suffice factors and feel privileged to be a part of the calendar anytime soon.

In a world where everything has a price, the actors feel advantaged to do this calendar for free, their love for it, always remain the same.

# Anushka Sharma's wedding jewellery

## Brides, see all her bling before you buy yours



When it comes to bridal jewellery, bigger is always better. And that was certainly the case for our favourite bride of 2017 — Anushka Sharma. The actor opted for statement-making jewellery after statement-making festivities. The actor married cricketer Virat Kohli on December 11 in Tuscany, Italy.

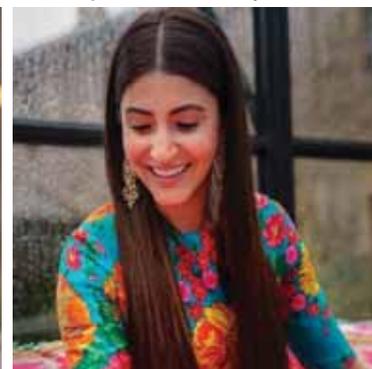
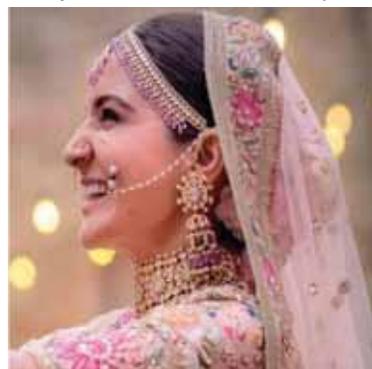
Ladies, if you've picked out your wedding dress, your shoes,

and even your bridal hair and make-up, and haven't locked in your jewellery yet or are confused whether you should opt for bold pieces or wear delicate additions, you've come to the right place. We've gathered all the jaw-dropping jewellery pieces Anushka dazzled in at her wedding to inspire you to take your special day outfit to the next level by adding some

Sabyasachi Mukherjee-

approved bling to your wardrobe. All of Anushka's pieces were from the designer's jewellery collections.

Whether you're a bride — or her mother, sister, bestie, or a guest — these show-stopping jewellery pieces will have you wanting to step up your jewel game. Some are truly traditional, others a bit whimsical, and few completely unexpected. Soak up the inspiration when you scroll.



# have you heard?

**TITLE TATTLE** The tightly under wraps title of Aanand L Rai's upcoming film starring Shah Rukh Khan, Katrina Kaif and Anushka Sharma, is likely to be unveiled on January 1. SRK plays a dwarf in the 2018 Christmas release

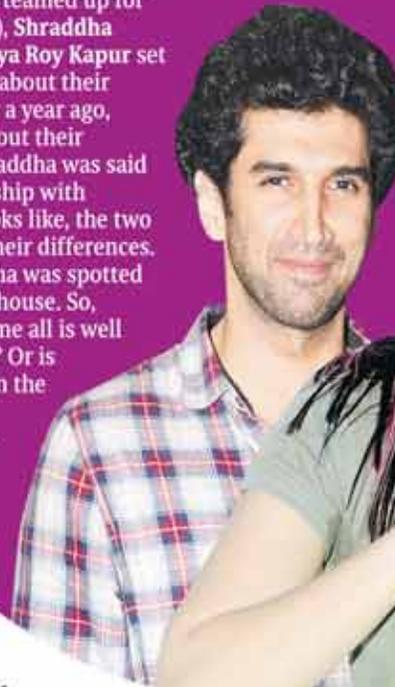
## Personal world



**Gauhar Khan** has ventured into the digital space with her YouTube channel. The first video gives a sneak peek into the actor's personal life. Last seen in the Vidya Balan-starrer *Begum Jaan*, she was keen to try something new. She feels, this is the best way to interact with fans.

## Rekindling the flames?

Ever since they teamed up for *Aashiqui 2* (2013), **Shraddha Kapoor** and **Aditya Roy Kapur** set tongues wagging about their relationship. Over a year ago, there was buzz about their breakup, after Shraddha was said to be in a relationship with another actor. Looks like, the two have ironed out their differences. Recently, Shraddha was spotted outside Aditya's house. So, should we assume all is well between them? Or is there a film on the cards? Your guess is as good as ours.



## Superman Salman ke fans



Members of a fan group from **Salman Khan's** hometown, Indore, have not missed a single film of the actor over the past 14 years. They have made certain to catch the first day, first show of every Khan starrer. The New Bombay Gym Group, also a bunch of fitness freaks like their screen idol, began watching Khan's films since 2003. *Tere Naam* marked the onset of this trend for them. The group also apparently extends a helping hand to children from the marginalised sections of society, under his name. Khan was born in Indore, before shifting to Mumbai. Some of his family members still live there.



## Cake-cutting spree

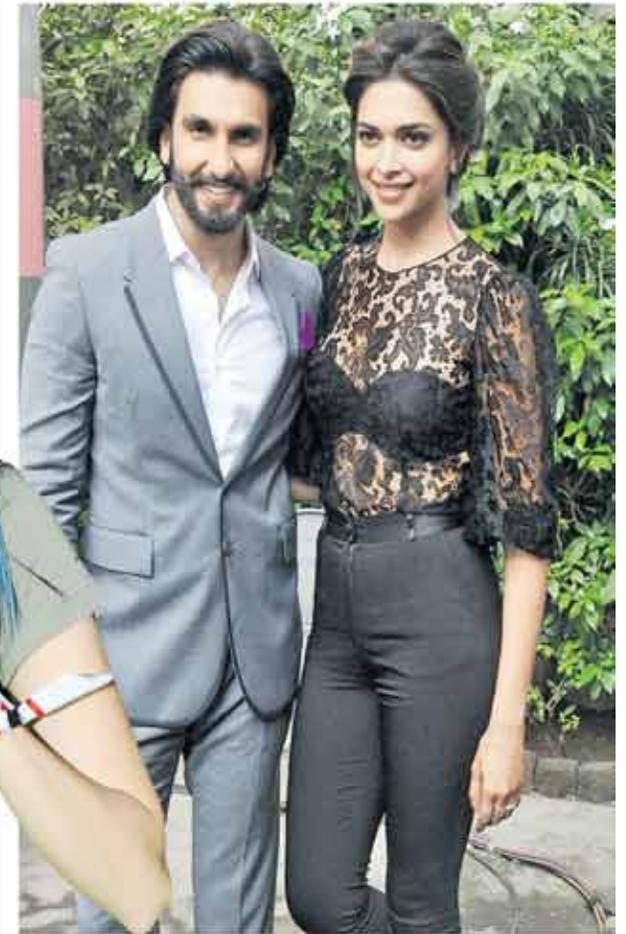
**Twinkle Khanna** celebrates her 43rd birthday today. She is in Cape Town, holidaying with hubby Akshay Kumar and kids — Nitara and Aarav. The Kumars love South Africa — they were in Cape Town last year too, to ring in Twinkle's big day. The actor-turned-writer has lots to celebrate as she turned producer this year with *Padman*. It is also her late dad, Rajesh Khanna's 75th birth anniversary today.



## TELLY TATTLE

### Dual talk

**Hrishikesh Pandey** says he's lucky to bag a double role in *Porus*. The small screen, he says, doesn't offer such opportunities to actors often. He plays a pirate and a warrior in the historical. "When I am playing a warrior, the moustache is up, and when I am playing a pirate, the moustache is down," he says. Genius!



## To the land of elephants

Although they missed Virat Kohli and Anushka Sharma's star-studded Mumbai reception, **Ranveer Singh** and **Deepika Padukone** never miss an opportunity to pack in a holiday together. If the grapevine is to be believed, the love birds are set to ring in the New Year together in 2018. While Singh was spotted in Sri Lanka yesterday, where he was shooting for a commercial, Padukone will apparently join him soon. A source close to Singh says that the duo intends to stealing some time, and get away from the prying eyes of the paps to go snorkeling.

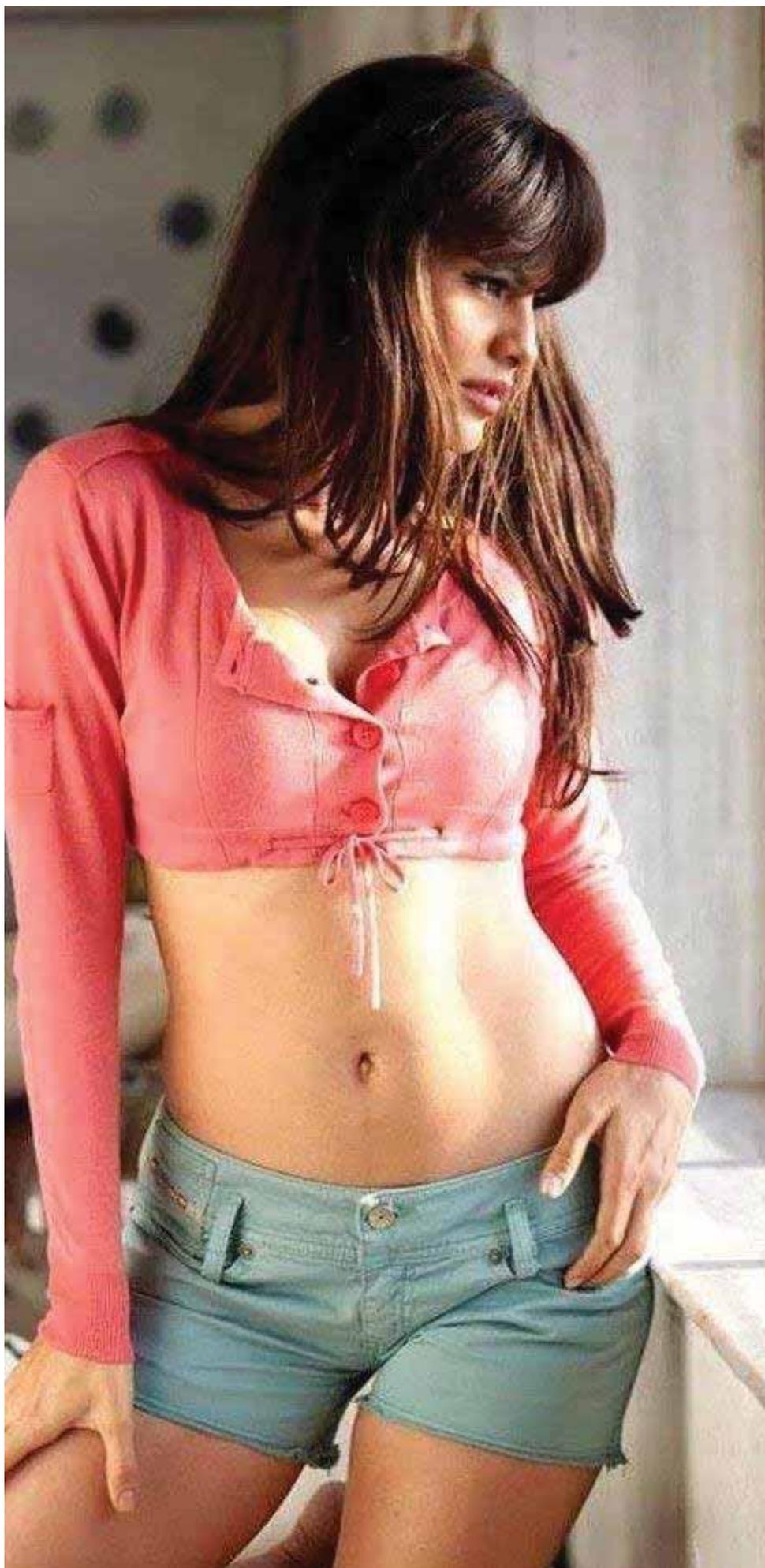
## Friends no more?

There was a time when **Sara Ali Khan** and **Rhea Chakraborty** were inseparable. They would be spotted together at the gym, salon and even at late-night parties. But, it's been a while since the two have been seen together. Sara may be tied up with *Kedarnath*, while Rhea, with her commitments. But, is their busy schedule the only reason behind their distance, or is there more to it than meets the eye?



## Katrina Kaif To Join Salman Khan For Dabangg Reloaded Tour?

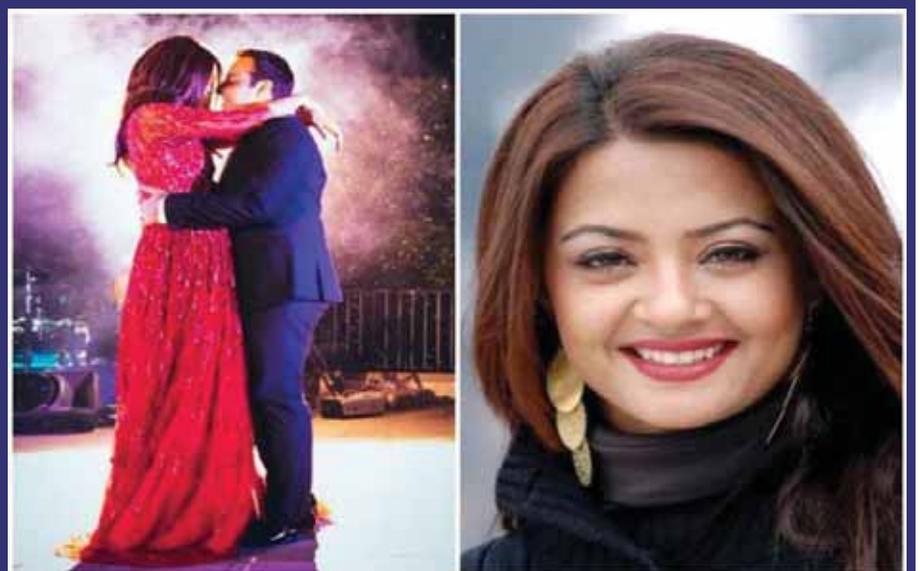
(News Agencies) As we all know Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif are riding high on the success of Tiger Zinda Hai. The movie has broken records and is earning well at the box office. Now, according to a recent report in Bollywood Hungama, Katrina will join Salman for the Dabangg Reloaded Tour. The tour is in USA, Canada in June- July 2018. An international promoter informed the daily, "The onscreen Chemistry Salman & Katrina Share is unmatched, and giving this opportunity to their fans to see them on stage together, would be a treat. So we felt adding Katrina, completed this package and surely made it Reloaded," said Bhavesh Patel. Bhavesh also spoke about the amazing line up for the show Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif, Jacqueline Fernandez, Sonakshi Sinha, Prabhu Dheva, Manish Paul and Daisy Shah. Well, the tour had created a lot of buzz in the industry.



## Jacqueline Fernandez connects with franchises

(News Agencies) Jacqueline Fernandez connects with franchises. Actress Jacqueline Fernandez, who has featured in franchise films like "Housefull", "Murder", "Judwaa" and "Race", says she really connects with them. Asked about her being a franchise favourite, Jacqueline told IANS over phone from Mumbai: "It has been crazy. From 'Housefull', 'Race' to 'Judwaa'... There have been so many franchises that there have been. I really connect with it." Jacqueline Fernandez connects with franchises It is also very cool to continue being a part of a franchise... It feels really good." Jacqueline, who has been roped in to be a part of the third installment of the "Race" franchise starring Salman Khan, says it is a huge deal for her to feature opposite the superstar after "Kick". "At the same time, I am kind of getting together again with Remo D'Souza and Ramesh Taurani. Jacqueline Fernandez connects with franchises There are so many familiar faces, and so it's great. The entire team is very rocking and we are having a great time. We are very psyched about the action we will be doing and the twists and turns in the film," she added. Jacqueline will also be seen with Sushant Singh Rajput in "Drive", and it has been a joyride, she says.

## Surveen Chawla tied the knot secretly, shares pic with husband on Twitter



(News Agencies) Surveen Chawla tied the knot secretly, shares pic with husband on Twitter. After Virat Kohli and Anushka Sharma secret fairytale wedding in Italy now Surveen Chawla, has just revealed about her marriage along with an adorable picture with her husband Akshay Thakker on her Twitter page. Surveen Chawla took to her social media accounts to reveal the secret of her marriage and in the image, the actress can be seen donning a red flowy outfit that is simply dazzling. Surveen Chawla tied the knot secretly, shares pic with husband on Twitter Surveen Chawla is film actress and dancer who works in Bollywood and Pollywood films. She started her career through the television soap operas in the earlier days and ended up in appearing in the films. She is known for her portrayals in the movies and serials like Hate Story 2 (2014), Ugly (2013), Parched (2015) and 24 (season 2) (2016) etc. along with many others.

# 2018

**Wishing our readers and patrons  
Happy & Prosperous New Year 2018  
Entire Team of  
The South Asian Insider Weekly**

January							
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