

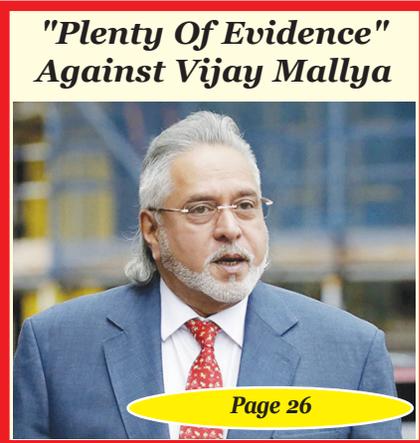


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Trump vs. Bloomberg Fortunes collide in pricey knife fight



Charges Fly at Billionaire Bloomberg at Fiery Democratic Presidential Debate in Nevada
Bloomberg bombs in debate debut

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Popularity of Trump on rise in India but some of his policies not-so-welcome: Pew survey

(News Agencies)-The popularity of US President Donald Trump in India is on the rise but some of his policies and trade attitudes do not garner the same warm reception, a latest Pew Research survey said on Thursday ahead of his maiden presidential trip to the country.

President Trump will pay a state visit to India on February 24 and 25 at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He would be accompanied by First Lady Melania Trump.

Based on face-to-face interviews, 2019 Global Attitudes Survey of 2,476 respondents conducted from June 24-October 2, 2019 in India, Pew said that the majority of Indians have confidence in Trump to do the right thing when it comes to the world affairs.



"And while Trump himself receives positive marks from the Indian populace, Indian public opinion toward some of his specific policies and trade attitudes in general do not garner the same warm reception," Pew Research said in a survey report released on Thursday. According to the report, Trump's image in India has gained favour since his candidacy in 2016, jumping from 14 per cent confidence to 56 per cent over three years. Much of this movement is accompanied by more people

now offering an opinion about the US president, it added.

"These latest numbers resemble those of Trump's predecessor: Before Barack Obama left office, 58 per cent of Indians had confidence in him in world affairs, while nine per cent had no confidence and 33 per cent did not offer an opinion," Pew said.

Those who associate more with the BJP are more likely than supporters of the Indian National Congress opposition party to voice confidence in Trump, it said.

However, when asked about their views of Trump's policy on increasing tariffs or fees on imported goods from other countries, about half

of Indians (48 per cent) say they disapprove. A quarter approve, and roughly another quarter do not offer an opinion. Those who most identify with the BJP are just as likely as the Congress supporters to disapprove of this measure and less likely to provide an answer, Pew said. The Pew Research Center is a non-partisan American think-tank based in Washington. It provides information on social issues, public opinion, and demographic trends shaping the US and the world.

Over 7,000 Indian-origin people held in 2019 for trying to enter US illegally



(News Agencies)-As many as 7,720 Indian-origin people including 272 women and 591 minors were apprehended in 2019 for trying to enter the US illegally, according to official figures. A total of 851,508 people were apprehended in the fiscal 2019 (October 2018-September 2019), a 115 per cent increase from the previous fiscal year and the highest total in 12 years, North American Punjabi Association (NAPA) executive director Satnam Singh Chahal said on Thursday.

US Border and Custom protection apprehended 7,720 Indian-origin people including 272 women and 591 juveniles during the fiscal 2019, NAPA said based

on the figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

In 2017, as many as 4,620 Indians were apprehended. It was 1,663 in 2014, 3,091 in 2015 and 3,544 in 2016.

"It is a matter of grave concern that a large number of juveniles of Indian-origin are being apprehended at the US Borders for their illegal entry into the United States," Chahal said.

There are 48 US-Mexico border crossings, with 330 ports of entry and at these points of entry, people trying to get into the US are required to open their bags for inspection. Border crossings take place by roads, pedestrian walkways, railroads and ferries.

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Ex-diplomat Hardeep Puri will be US President Donald Trump's minister in waiting

(News Agencies)- Hardeep Puri, the career diplomat before he made the switch to politics, will be the minister in waiting for US President Donald Trump's visit to India next week. The job means that the 68-year-old civil aviation minister will accompany the presidential delegation to all of their official engagements in India. The US president and First Lady Melania Trump will be on a two-

day visit to India starting from February 24. Piyush Goel was the minister-in-waiting to the visiting US President in 2015 Barack Obama. The designated minister in waiting, a ceremonial facet of any head of state visit, accompanies the visiting dignitary to all important events. "It is mainly just to accompany and escort the state guest," said former diplomat BS Prakash, calling the protocol to designate



a minister as a "custom and courtesy extended to a visiting dignitary". He added that it was a

prestigious gig because in many cases, it means that the Prime Minister has handpicked the person and offers him, or her, an opportunity to interact with the visiting dignitary. Another diplomat told Hindustan Times that it is a fairly straightforward assignment that required someone who wasn't going to make any 'gaffes'. Puri, having served as envoy to the UK, Japan and other countries and the United Nations, certainly can

be counted on for his tact. It is unclear if there will be another minister who is assigned to the first lady, Melania Trump who is accompanying the President. Puri has not responded to HT's queries yet. External Affairs ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar told a news conference that it was not the government's practice to announce the name of the minister in waiting.



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How coronavirus is stalling China's military modernisation plans

The epidemic has hit the PLA's recruitment drive, and stalled production at weapons manufacturing institutes

The coronavirus epidemic erupted when the slowdown of the Chinese economy had already accelerated because of the trade war with the United States. China's economy has now been further adversely affected, with economists assessing that the growth rate will need to be revised downward to 5%. The country's services sector is estimated to be losing \$114 billion a week. At least 22 Chinese provinces and regions, including Beijing, Guangdong, Zhejiang, Henan, Hainan and Fujian, have already set lower growth targets this year compared to the last. This combined stress on China's economy is poised to dilute the strategic geo-economic Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a prestige project of the Chinese President Xi Jinping. Investment in BRI has already dipped. This will dent, if not damage,

the credibility of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and President Xi who promised to realise the "China Dream" by 2021. The adverse impact of the coronavirus epidemic on China's military modernisation became visible earlier this month. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) announced, on February 7, that it was suspending its military recruitment programme for the current year. The new recruitment programme, announced by the PLA in January and scheduled to begin this year, would have had two recruitment cycles. The first phase was to commence in mid-February and continue till the end of March, with the second recruitment cycle running from mid-August to the end of September. The new programme also provided that military personnel will retire twice a year. This revised programme was described

as being "of great significance for recruiting more high-quality soldiers". China's ministry of national defence said it "is of great significance for improving the quality and training of enlistees and enhancing the military's combat capability". While Li Daguang, professor at the PLA National Defense University in Beijing, said the postponement "should not have much effect on the number or quality of the eventual recruits", the decision to suspend recruitment will undoubtedly upset long-term plans and training programmes. It will additionally defer employment, especially for the rural youth, at a time when unemployment has been rising steadily for the last two years. Equally impactful is the decision of certain vital military centres to slow down production. Early this month, the Jiangnan Shipyard in Shanghai,



which is building China's third aircraft carrier, asked employees, who travelled to other cities since the virus outbreak, not to return to work until further notice, or quarantine themselves at home for the stipulated period. This will delay the construction of the new aircraft carrier and could have further knock-on effects. The impact of the virus in Wuhan, where it originated, will affect China's defence production. Wuhan is home to many Chinese weapons and equipment design and manufacturing institutes, such as the Wuchang Shipbuilding Industry Group, which builds submarines, and the

Naval University of Engineering, which is developing advanced naval technologies such as the electromagnetic catapult, rail gun, full electric propulsion, and submarine-related technologies. The research and development headquarters of most Chinese hi-technology companies are also located in Wuhan. China's production of carrier-based aircraft has also been adversely impacted, with the Shenyang Aircraft Corporation in Liaoning Province deciding to suspend production. Like other enterprises, it has informed its workers who travelled to other cities not to return till further notice,

or quarantine themselves at home for the required period. The Shenyang Aircraft Corporation manufactures the J-15 carrier-based fighter jet, which is presently the only jet fighter available to the PLA Navy (PLAN)'s carrier fleet and its mainstay. There is currently a shortfall in the number of J-15 fighter jets available to the PLAN, which wants 36 aircraft on each aircraft carrier, but can provide a maximum of only 24 aircraft. There is also a severe shortage of navy aviation pilots and efforts have been underway to train more pilots and accelerate production of the J-15 aircraft.

In Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena's political dilemma

It wants to maintain its Hindutva identity. It also wants to remain in power with 'secular' parties. This isn't easy

When the Shiv Sena snapped ties with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to form the government in Maharashtra with the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), it was evident that this would be an uneasy alliance. The Sena's political worldview revolved around Hindutva, placing it at odds with the "secular" political agenda of the Congress and the NCP. Three months later, this tension is now out in the open, with its clearest manifestation in the differing positions of the coalition partners on the Bhima-Koregaon and Elgar Parishad cases. It has its

roots in chief minister and Sena chief, Uddhav Thackeray, giving his consent to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to probe the Elgar Parishad case. The NCP, which holds the home department, is upset at the decision, and the Congress has also struck a note of dissent. But what is driving this difference in approach? The answer lies in the alleged involvement of fringe Hindutva groups in the Bhima-Koregaon violence. On December 31, 2017, allegedly inflammatory speeches were given at the Elgar Parishad at Shaniwarwada in Pune.

The conclave commemorated the battle of Bhima-Koregaon on January 1, 1818, where a small detachment of the British army, comprised largely of Dalits, held off a larger force of the Brahmin Peshwas. A day after the violence against Dalits, there was the Bhima-Koregaon war memorial in lakhs to pay their respects. The Pune police booked and arrested Left-wing and civil society activists, who were accused of waging war against the State, and being involved in a plot to assassinate Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

This sparked counter-accusations. Prakash Ambedkar, the chief of the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA), and NCP leaders, blamed leaders of Hindutva outfits, Milind Ekbote and Sambhajirao Bhide "Guruji" for the Bhima-Koregaon violence. Ekbote, who heads the Samasta Hindu Aghadi, comes from a family affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). He also contested the 2014 assembly elections from Pune as a Sena candidate. Ekbote was arrested for the violence and later released on bail. However, it is Bhide and his



group, Shivprathistan Hindustan, which present a bigger predicament for the Sena. As party leaders acknowledge in private, it is not possible for them to take a position against Bhide or any Hindutva activists, for it will be seen as a dilution of the Sena's commitment to Hindutva. This is despite the pressure from the NCP, which is keen to expand its base among Buddhist

Dalits. Shivprathistan, which has a strong base in parts of Western Maharashtra, is among the most influential fringe Hindutva groups in the state. The group's popularity and outreach has been built around the personality of former RSS activist, Bhide "Guruji", whose austere lifestyle has stuck an emotional chord with a section of young Hindus.

Fix the issues that plague the Indian housing market

It outlined how an obsession with home ownership in the West has driven up home prices, and undermined growth. It rightly placed the blame on supply side constraints, and on underlying political economy issues. Similar issues plague the Indian housing market, and are tied to the questions plaguing Indian growth - jobs, productivity, inequality. Housing is a means to access opportunities such as employment or education, most of which are concentrated in cities. Cities are labour markets, where high productivity jobs are created due to economies of scale, scope and agglomeration. Urban agglomerations provide easy access to markets and jobs, lowering search costs, offering reasonable commute times, and enabling exchange of ideas, all of which fuel productivity growth and innovation. This simple fact is unappreciated by the Indian political establishment. Instead, an inordinate amount of time has been spent trying to keep people out of cities.

To do so, several tools are deployed by Indian planners, the most egregious of which are restrictions on floor space. The Floor Space Index (FSI) prescribes the ratio of floor space that can be built on a plot of land. For instance, an FSI of 1.33 on a 100 square metre plot allows a builder to build 133 square metres of floor space, as single or multiple floors. Where land costs are high, or land supply limited, higher FSI reduces the cost of land per unit. Most successful cities have done exactly this. Singapore, for instance, allows an FSI of 25 in the business

district. The instinct to cap FSI is premised on two conceptual fallacies. The first is that policymakers can limit the number of people in an area by limiting the amount of floor space. The second is that FSI must be tied to existing infrastructure availability. On both fronts, reality proves otherwise. As productive cities such as Mumbai and Bangalore created jobs, people were willing to cram into less space to access work opportunities. Since the formal real estate market was stifled by FSI restrictions, slums proliferated. Prices skyrocketed, and space per person fell. Infrastructure - drainage and roads - crumbled under the strain of higher occupancy.

This reinforces fears about density, justifying continued caps.

FSI restrictions conflate the density of people with density of physical space. Density of people is determined by the desirability of a location. The density of space is the amount that can be built in an area. The former cannot be controlled in a democracy, while the latter is a matter of regulation. To illustrate, for the worst fears around density to be realised, doubling FSI should be accompanied by a doubling of population. For example, doubling Mumbai's FSI to 2.6, will only make things worse if the population doubles to 40 million, or it just increases space per person.

Moreover, city building is a dynamic process. Whether Hong Kong or New York, cities have increased the carrying capacity of their infrastructure as the population grows.

India's quest for high growth

The National Statistical Office (NSO) will release GDP numbers for the December quarter at the end of this month. The official position, also reflected in the first advanced estimates for the overall performance in fiscal year 2019-20, has been that the economy bottomed out in the September quarter. The GDP growth in the September quarter was 4.5%, the lowest since March 2013. Unless there is a sustained acceleration in economic activity, the economy's midterm challenges will only increase. The best way to understand the importance of high growth is to use the example International Monetary Fund (IMF's) first deputy managing director, David Lipton, gave in his CD Deshmukh Memorial Lecture last week. Mr Lipton cited IMF calculations on how long it would take India's per capita GDP to reach half of the level of the United States. The answer depends on growth rates. "At an average of 9% growth a year, it would take 15 years. At

7%, that would be 19 years. But at 5% growth - just a bit over last year's fourth quarter growth-it would be 23 years", Mr Lipton said. Clearly, India must do all it can to ensure that our long-term growth remains as high as it can. However, in a globalised economy, external factors also influence a country's growth performance. And India is no exception. The global economy has not been able to regain its mojo even a decade after the 2008 financial crisis. Protectionism in developed countries, manifested in things such as United States-China trade war and Brexit, is threatening to weaken tailwinds to economies of the global south from advanced country markets. Reconciling with effects of climate change and sharing costs of mitigating these effects is another big area of conflict. Even as the world is struggling to come to terms with such structural challenges, there have been unanticipated disruptions.

India's trade challenge

The absence of a deal with the US points to a larger problem



One structural challenge in Indian foreign policy continues with the present government - the inability to seal trade agreements. In three months, New Delhi has failed to conclude two deals, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and a trade deal with the United States. Undeterred, India has reopened trade talks with the European Union and has several bilateral trade agreements in its sights. But whether these talks will indeed translate into pacts is unclear. India, initially out of design and now increasingly out of incoherence, has not finalised a trade deal for over a half-a-decade. The failure to bring the US trade deal to closure is particularly telling. By trade standards, it was a relatively small deal, worth a few billion dollars. Both sides wanted to arrive at a deal because of larger strategic concerns and the pressure of a pending presidential visit. Nonetheless, negotiators failed to make it to the finish line. Irrespective of whether India was right to stick to its "redlines" with the US on the trade deal, there is a larger, disturbing pattern. India's inability to finalise trade deals is undermining its

claim that it will uphold the crumbling World Trade Organisation. Its Act East and Neighbourhood First policies are effectively running on one leg because of the absence of a trade element. India is experiencing a slow but steady loss of export earnings, as other countries negotiate to take away the overseas market share of Indian firms. While foreign investment continues to flow into the country, very little is oriented towards manufacturing and sectors which are tied to global supply chains. In contrast, exports are driving Bangladesh and Vietnam to grow at enviable rates.

The failure to put together trade agreements shows up other flaws in India's approach to trade. One, the commerce ministry lacks the authority to override the numerous industry and labour lobbies who favour protectionism. Institutionalising a structure that handles these forces is needed. Two, the future of international trade will revolve around technology standards and digital policies. The undercurrent of technology nationalism that defines this government's policies will mean an inevitable and potentially dangerous conflict with the US. Washington has called for a broad dialogue on these issues with New Delhi. There is little reason for India not to accept this. Three, if the international trading regime is fragmenting into a mosaic of plurilateral and bilateral agreements, India, which lacks such back-up agreements, will suffer the most.



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How Trump Visit Could Leverage CAA And Kashmir Against PM Modi



As India rolls out the red carpet to receive US President Donald Trump next week, rough spots that have arisen in the wake of the Modi government's decisions on Kashmir and the subsequent passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act will need diplomatic resolution. The Modi government's sudden dilution of the provisions of Article 370 in Kashmir in August 2019, and the move to deny persecuted Muslims from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan the right to seek asylum in India, have not only led to protests at home,

but also to disruptions in India's diplomatic ties abroad, especially with the United States. Even though India has relied on global support for its fight against Pakistan-sponsored cross-border terrorism to defend its move on Article 370, Indian diplomats have found themselves playing defense in world capitals, as Pakistan (through China) has used every opportunity and forum to seek international censure against India.

In the last six months, India has firmly rejected two offers by Donald Trump to mediate

between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, dismissed as ill-informed and motivated two hearings on Capitol Hill that raised concerns over human rights in the Kashmir valley; now, just days before Trump's arrival in Delhi, there are bad optics over a letter by four senior Senators to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo seeking an assessment on Kashmir and the Citizenship Amendment Act. At a time of partisan politics and ideological polarisation in both countries, Delhi's response to hearings and resolutions on Capitol Hill, led largely by legislators from the Democratic Party, was dismissive. However, the fact that one of the signatories to this latest letter includes senior Republican Senator Lindsey Graham (also known to be close to Trump) could indicate that concerns over human rights in India are now becoming bipartisan in a re-election year for Donald Trump.

At last week's Munich

Security Conference, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar pointedly rebuffed Senator Graham's concerns at a panel they attended together, but the repeated statements from Washington, in the face of a structural economic decline in India and floundering trade ties begs the question of whether the US is using the articulation of such concerns as a bargaining tool to 'get more' from India during the Trump visit. For the last two years, President Trump's 'Make America Great Again' and Prime Minister Modi's 'Make in India' campaigns have been at odds with each other. As the Indian economy continues to reel under the impact of demonetization and a poorly implemented GST regime, tension between Washington and Delhi over trade has mounted. Retaliatory tariffs have led to America filing a dispute complaint against India at the World Trade Organisation, and to India now

having the dubious honor of being declared a 'developed' country by the United States Trade Representative (USTR). Under Trump, the US has consistently accused both India and China of wrongfully claiming benefits reserved for 'truly' developing countries and sought to renegotiate trade deals. India had seen nearly 2,000 goods exempted from US trade tariffs until 2019, when it was stripped of its status under the Generalised System of Preferences or GSP. These obstacles come against the backdrop of two decades of strengthening ties that saw four presidential visits to India, a nuclear trade deal, a surge in bilateral trade of goods and services from 16 billion dollars in 1999 shooting up to 142 billion in 2018 (18 billion in defense, at last count), and a strategic re-alignment of the Indo-Pacific which placed India squarely as America's preferred strategic partner in Asia.

Donald Trump and his pardon triangle



President Donald Trump on Tuesday picked a handful of corrupt former officials and corrupt wealthy influence peddlers and granted them clemency, just days after his administration's latest controversy: accusations that he was tipping the scales of justice in favor of his friend Roger Stone (which he keeps saying he has every right to do, but denies doing). Who'd he pick? If there's a theme, it's corruption. Rod Blagojevich, the jailed former Illinois governor, who tried to sell the Senate seat vacated by President-elect Barack Obama back in 2009. (Committed eight years into a 14-year sentence) Bernard Kerik, the corrupt former

New York City police commissioner and former Rudy Giuliani bodyguard whose nomination to be homeland security secretary under former President George W. Bush uncovered his inappropriate relationship with city contractors. He did time for lying to officials and tax fraud. (Pardoned) Eddie DeBartolo Jr., the corrupt former owner of the San Francisco 49ers, who was convicted of a felony for his role in a bribery scheme involving Edwin Edwards, the former governor of Louisiana. Edwards went to prison. DeBartolo Jr., lost the 49ers. (Pardoned) Michael Milken, the king of junk bonds, whose name is

synonymous with insider trading, but who spent his time since jail rehabbing his image with donations for cancer research and more. (Pardoned) Friends of Trump

It sure seems like the key to getting clemency from Trump is having friends who are close to him. And, barring that, appearing on Fox News -- as Blagojevich's wife did in 2019, expressly asking Trump to pardon her husband.

But that's nothing compared to this. Follow this circle all the way around:

Trump's lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, who is under criminal investigation, asked for Kerik's pardon, according to the White House.

Kerik actively sought Trump's help on behalf of Eddie Gallagher, the Navy SEAL accused of war crimes.

Got that? Trump pardoned one guy who actively worked on behalf of another guy Trump pardoned.

Gallagher, the SEAL who beat those murder and war crimes charges with Trump's help, is mentioned as one of the distinguished individuals who in turn lobbied for Kerik's pardon.

James Carafano: Trump's war on sanctuary cities is about more than politics

It's about to get real for America's so-called "sanctuary cities," local governments that refuse to cooperate with those who enforce federal immigration laws. The Trump administration is deploying 100 tactical Border Patrol officers to help Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials take illegal immigrants in those cities into custody. The move should put to rest any questions about the administration's commitment to enforcing the rule of immigration law. It's the immigration equivalent of storming the beaches of Normandy. Indeed, targeting sanctuary cities, counties and states is just one part of what appears to be a systematic campaign to combat illegal immigration. Other elements of that plan already in place include reviving the "public charge" regulation, replacing "catch and release" with "catch and return," (sending asylum seekers back to Mexico to await their hearings), denying asylum claims for those who passed through other countries without seeking asylum in them, and ending the Obama-era practice of family

separation. Clearly, the administration has expanded from its original, nearly singular focus on "the wall," to action on almost every front on illegal immigration. Why is this all happening within the last year? Cynics would chalk it up to pure politics. As the campaign season has progressed, the left has run further and further left, embracing open border policies. President Trump's immigration moves, they say, are being made because he wants to draw a sharp contrast in the minds of voters. That's likely not it, although Trump did campaign in 2016 with the promise of cracking down on illegal immigration, and keeping campaign promises is always a positive for politicians. There are other reasons that explain the momentum. First, there's the matter of having the right people in place. The tide of the Civil War didn't turn in favor of the Union until Lincoln found his general. Similarly, Trump seems to have finally found a leadership team at the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Justice who are unabashedly willing to take on the task.

A tale of two development models, writes Madhav Gadgil



All political parties today claim to be committed to developing India. Obviously, people desire development (vikas). The original meaning of "vikas" is blooming of a flower. Jain philosophers gave it the connotation of development. According to them, vikas is when the world is moving from great sadness to great happiness, avanati or regression is when it is moving in the reverse. Development is when the majority of people are moving from sorrow towards joy.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has now won for the third time. After

winning the assembly elections, the party attributed its success to its development achievements, especially in education and health care. But its rivals also claim to be vigorously promoting development. Wherein, then, is the difference? I sought to understand what is going on by understanding people's perceptions. So, after the AAP's second victory, I contacted a party volunteer, a little-educated young man looking for employment. He stayed with his wholesale fruit vendor uncle in a poor locality. I went there, and

for four hours, listened to the conversations in the shop.

The customers were those selling fruit on handcarts or by the roadside. They mostly talked politics. Most had voted for the AAP, and narrated that before the party came on to the scene, all political leaders arrived in fancy cars, sat on chairs while people sat down on the ground, never asked citizens what they wanted, but merely lectured them, and left. On the contrary, the AAP's leaders sit with the people on ground, ask them what they want, and what the party can do for them. The AAP, they said,

Delhi under the AAP, and Goa under successive governments, offer two contrasting stories

engages in caring development; others pursue their own agenda with arrogance.

It would appear that the AAP has delivered on its promises. Government schools have registered a pass percentage of 94.24% in Class 12 Central Board of Secondary Education examination, 3.5 percentage points higher than private schools. Many citizens of Delhi now prefer the efficient mohalla clinic to the "long waits for overpriced doctor consultations" at private hospitals. In stark contrast is the arrogance of development in Goa. In 2010, I was appointed to the Goa Golden Jubilee Development Council, which was charged with suggesting appropriate directions for development in the coming years. In the first meeting, officials assured us that there were no problems with the mining sector. Distrustful of such statements, I went on field visits. There were reports of agitation against mining by residents of

Caurem village in south Goa. So I began with Caurem, which is known for a picturesque waterfall. I bathed there, and then talked with locals, who narrated their woes. I then climbed to the mine on the hilltop. Every mine has to submit an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that is scrutinised, and if accepted, the mine can operate under certain conditions. This mine's EIA claimed that it would affect no water sources. It was required to keep intact the vegetation on the streamsides, and not block the water sources. In reality, several streams originating at the mine site were blocked and streamside vegetation destroyed. When I requested the manager to explain, I received an astonishing response. He stated that there were no blue lines in the geological map, and I was obviously under some illusion. When anger against such mismanagement could not be ignored, the Justice AP Shah Commission was appointed.

The states are financially squeezed

The Centre's budget arithmetic and delays in fund transfers are pushing them towards a fiscal crisis

Missing in the analysis of the Union Budget has been any serious debate on the impact of the Government of India's precarious fiscal math on state finances. Yet, when it comes to government expenditure, India's states and their fiscal health matter a great deal. Taken together, state expenditure as a share of GDP is today in the range of about 17%, while the Union government's share of expenditure is about 13.2% of GDP (2019-20 estimates). While state governments are big spenders, they depend significantly on New Delhi for revenue receipts. Between 2015 and 2020 (the period of the 14th finance commission), 47% of state's revenue receipts came from central transfers. Thus, changes in the fiscal math in the Union? Budget have an inevitable impact on state finances.

The headline figure that most post-budget analysis has

focused on has been the inevitable shortfall in tax devolution, amounting to 0.75% of GDP to states when compared with the July 2020 budget, and a consequent overall fall of 0.5% GDP of total central transfers to states from 2018-19. This was perhaps inevitable, given the unrealistic revenue targets in the July budget, and the expected shortfalls in revenue receipts due to cuts in corporate taxes. But it is worth noting that in our fiscal federal architecture, critical taxation decisions like corporate tax cuts, which inevitably impact state finances given their dependence on central tax transfers, can be taken with minimal consultation with state governments. In the absence of effective consultation mechanisms, topped up by poor budget arithmetic and unrealistic revenue targets, and, let's not forget, lower than expected

compensation, effective budget management becomes near impossible. How can states plan and spend if there is uncertainty over nearly half their total revenue receipts?

But beyond headline figures, the full impact of the Union government's precarious fiscal math on State spending is only revealed through a closer look at the actual process of fund transfers and payments made through the financial year. Central transfers to state governments are made up of a combination of different fiscal transfers instruments - tax devolution, finance commission grants and central schemes. Of these, the central schemes are significant, amounting to nearly 2% of GDP in the current financial year. All the flagship schemes that readers would be familiar with - Swachh Bharat, Ayushman Bharat, PM-Kisan and Mahatma Gandhi National



Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) - account for this 2% of GDP. State governments are expected to top up these transfers with an additional 40% contribution to scheme budgets. The real impact of the Centre's expenditure compression is hidden in these transfers.

The full extent of expenditure compression is only revealed through an analysis of the actual release of funds from New Delhi to states. Data analysed by the Centre for Policy Research's Accountability Initiative across flagship central schemes

present a dismal picture for the current fiscal. The Centre has delayed moving money for most flagship schemes. Here are some examples - Samgra Shiksha, released only 58% of its total allocation by November 2019. The funds released for Jal Jeevan Mission were at 51%, PM Kisan at 57%, Ayushman Bharat at 32%, and the Poshan Abiyan at 31% of the total allocations by November/December 2019. These delays inevitably mean that total schemes transfers would see a significant reduction in the revised estimates.

The anarchy in the Congress

The party's rank and file cannot see a road map for the future



In the wake of the Congress' second consecutive rout in the Delhi assembly election - it failed to win a single seat, slumped to its lowest vote share to just a little over 4%, and did not get the highest number of votes in even 1% of the booths - there is a war of words that has broken out within the party. From former finance minister P Chidambaram celebrating the defeat of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to Sharmistha Mukherjee (Delhi Congress leader and daughter of former president Pranab Mukherjee) asking him whether the Congress had outsourced the task of defeating the BJP to regional parties; from (former Delhi in-charge) P C Chacko implicitly blaming the loss on the late Sheila Dikshit to her aide and spokesperson Pawan Khara pointing out how the party had never fared as poorly under her; from former Mumbai unit chief Milind Deora praising the Aam Aadmi Party's governance to

former Delhi unit chief Ajay Maken suggesting that Mr Deora should leave the party, the battle is both public and bitter. This is extending to factionalism within other state units, with young leaders, in particular, expressing unhappiness. There is also a lack of coherence on policy issues with, for instance, Shashi Tharoor criticising the government for denying entry to a British Member of Parliament, and Abhishek Manu Singhvi supporting it. The party's advocates may suggest this is a sign of internal democracy. But political parties work on the basis of a degree of coherence and discipline. Dissent is expressed within party forums. If there are grievances, the onus then rests on the leadership. What is happening in the Congress appears like anarchy.

There are two causes of this crisis. The first is the absence of an honest, introspective, internal review after its loss in the Lok Sabha

elections. In its absence, the party is struggling to mount a united challenge, on a common ideological platform, against the BJP. The second is the weakness and the churn in the top leadership. Sonia Gandhi remains deeply respected, but has been unwilling or unable to assert her authority. The fact that she has made it clear that her presidency is only an interim arrangement leads to uncertainty. Rahul Gandhi's decision to quit as president, his frequent absences, and his sporadic intervention in party affairs is not helping either - for there is a lack of clarity on whether he is going to return as president or has decided to narrow his role to merely that of an MP. All of this has caused anxieties among the party's rank and file, which does not see a road map for the future. The party owes it to the over 110 million voters who reposed faith in it last year, as well as to Indian democracy, to get its act together.

India should prepare for extreme weather events



The State needs a robust plan to tackle large scale climate-induced migration

One extreme weather event happened almost every month in India in 2018 and 2019, according to the State of India's Environment 2020 report, released by the Centre for Science and Environment and Down To Earth, last week. In terms of deaths, 48% of the deaths in Asia due to extreme weather events happened in India (2018-19). In 2019, there were more deaths in India, even though the number of such events was fewer: 2,038 people died in 2019 due to extreme weather events, compared to 1,396 in 2018. While such events have always occurred, the report

added, their character is changing, and there is now a clear imprint of global warming on them.

While the impact of the climate crisis is being seen across sectors - affecting health, education, livelihoods - several studies point out that a clear link is emerging between the climate crisis and social instability. A 2018 study, Climate Change and Violent Conflict: Sparse Evidence from South Asia and Southeast Asia, by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute said that as the effects of climate crisis on livelihoods become more pronounced, support for rebel groups is likely to shoot up. In India, climate migration is leading to a complicated and challenging situation. There is growing nativism and competition for resources on one hand, which has led to an anti-migrant sentiment, even when it comes to citizens from elsewhere in the country. But on the other, the climate crisis is leading to greater migration and mobility. These two parallel developments can lead to a crisis unless handled with care.

Donald Trump's India visit

Multi-tiered security arrangement of Delhi Police, US Secret Service to be put in place



(News Agencies)- A multi-tier security arrangement comprising the Delhi Police, US Secret Service and other agencies will be in place in the National Capital, including at the ITC Maurya hotel where US president Donald Trump is likely to stay when he visits India next week, officials said on Wednesday. "In connection with the US president's visit, the Delhi

Police is making all necessary arrangements. Security unit will be duly assisted by the district police and the traffic unit.

"Police will make elaborate arrangements at the place of stay and all venues where he is likely to pay a visit," Police Commissioner Amulya Patnaik told PTI. Patnaik said other sister agencies are also involved in the task and necessary tie-up has

been made with the US Secret Service. "It will be a multi-layered security arrangement with due assistance from the central armed police forces," the police chief added. At the ITC Maurya, a three-layer security will be in place, another senior police officer said. The officer said that the hotel, located in Diplomatic Enclave in Chanakyapuri, has 438 rooms and every floor of the

hotel will have policemen in plainclothes. The Delhi Police's security wing personnel will form part of the inner cordon that will work in close coordination with the United States Secret Service. The security wing of the Delhi Police is a specialised unit tasked with the security of VIPs and visiting foreign dignitaries.

"The second layer of security will be deployed around the lobby

area, parking, lawn area and the pool area, while the third one will comprise police personnel from the district police," another officer added. There is a large stretch of green ridge area opposite the hotel and security personnel will be deployed there as well.

Snipers of the Delhi Police and National Security Guards will be stationed atop high-rise buildings near the hotel. In 2015, the then-US president Barack Obama had come to India on a three-day visit, during which he was also the chief guest at the Republic Day event. Trump, who is scheduled to visit India on 24 and 25 February, will be accompanied by a high-level delegation. Prime Minister Modi will host a lunch for Trump, while President Ram Nath Kovind will host a banquet in honour of the visiting dignitary.

Government Doesn't Acknowledge Slowdown, So Can't Fix It: Manmohan Singh



(News Agencies)- Attacking the Modi government on the state of the economy, former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh on Wednesday said the current dispensation does not acknowledge the word "slowdown" and the real danger is that if problems are not recognised, then finding credible answers to take corrective action is unlikely. Addressing a gathering at the launch of Montek Singh Ahluwalia's book "Backstage", Dr Singh said the former planning commission deputy chairman has written about the good as well as the weak points of the UPA government. "I think these issues will be debated and should be debated because we have today

a government that does not acknowledge that there is such a word as slowdown. I think this is not good for our country," the former prime minister said.

"If you do not recognise the problems that you face, you are not likely to find credible answers to take corrective action. That is the real danger," he said, attacking the government on the state of the economy.

The book will be of great help to the future growth of the country, Dr Singh said.

"Montek has also pointed out that contrary to what the ruling group may say, today the \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25 is wishful thinking. Also there is no reason to expect that farmers income will be doubled in a three-year period," he said.

Ayodhya Ram Temple Trust Names Chief, Key Role For Former Aide To PM Modi

Another top member of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, vice president Champak Rai, will be the General Secretary.

(News Agencies)- Nriya Gopal Das -- chief of Vishwa Hindu Parishad's Ram Janambhoomi Nyas and accused in the Babri Masjid demolition case -- will head the trust that will be in charge of building a Ram temple in Ayodhya. Another top member of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, vice president Champak Rai, will be the General Secretary.

At a meeting on Wednesday evening, the office bearers of the trust were formally named. A key role will be played by Nripendra Mishra, a former aide of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was named the chairman of the temple construction committee.

PM Modi had announced the formation of the 15-member trust in Parliament on February 5, following the orders of the Supreme Court. He had named nine members, leaving the rest of the posts vacant.

The trust, which held its first meeting on Wednesday, was also expected to finalise the date for the beginning of construction of the Ram Temple. Vishwa Prasanna Teerth Swami of the Ram Janambhoomi Trust told NDTV that the temple construction committee would meet next month to take a call on the date.

Mahant Dharamdas of Hanumangarhi criticised the constitution of the Trust. "This is disregard of the Supreme Court's order. Instead of people with ability, they have picked 80 and 90-year-olds.

In a landmark judgment in November, a five-judge constitution bench of the Supreme Court had awarded the disputed 2.77 acre land in Ayodhya for a temple. The court said a government-run trust will



be responsible for the construction. The Muslims would be given a five-acre "suitable" plot in the town, the Supreme Court had announced. After Wednesday's meeting the Trust thanked "all constitutional authorities in the country for their role in maintaining law and order after the verdict". It also expressed condolence for everyone who "laid down their lives for the Ram Janambhoomi between 1528 and 1984".

Rakesh Maria says 26/11 would have been blamed on 'Hindu terrorists'; here's what Kasab said in confession

In his confession, Mohammed Ajmal Kasab had spoken of why they were given the fake identity cards. In its chargesheet, the Mumbai Police had listed the documents obtained from the terrorists who were killed.

(News Agencies)- Former Mumbai Police Commissioner Rakesh Maria caused a flutter after he said in his autobiography that the November 2008 Mumbai terror attacks might have been blamed on Hindu terrorists. Official documents from the trial of Mohammed Ajmal Kasab, the only one of ten terrorists involved in the terror attacks to be captured alive, had revealed that the documents were given to the Pakistani terrorists to deceive investigators. Kasab was hanged in November 2012.

What Maria wrote "If everything went according to plan, Kasab would have died as Chaudhari and the media would have blamed 'Hindu terrorists' for the attack," Maria wrote in his autobiography titled 'Let Me Say It Now'. Maria was heading the Mumbai Police crime branch when it was tasked with probing the 26/11 attack.

Maria also blamed the release of Kasab's photograph after the terror attack on central agencies. "The Mumbai Police tried hard to not disclose any details to media fearing for the security," he wrote. In the photograph, Kasab was seen wearing a red thread on his right wrist, which is believed to

be a sacred Hindu thread. In official documents related to the trial of Kasab, there is mention of the fake ID cards that were given to those involved in the attacks.

What the Mumbai Police said in its chargesheet In its chargesheet that is available on the South Asia Terrorism Portal, the Mumbai Police had said that during their investigations it had been revealed that the men involved in the attacks that killed 166 and injured over 300 had carried "fake duplicate identity cards of Indian colleges to mislead the

investigating agencies as to their true identities and nationality".

"The investigating agency has been successful in recovering some of these from the terrorists," the chargesheet noted. In a table, the Mumbai Police then listed all the identity cards that had been found. While Kasab was listed as Bengaluru resident Samir Choudhary studying in one "Arunodaya Degree And P.G. College", most of the others were listed as Hyderabad residents. One of the other terrorists was listed as a resident of Navi Delhi, and another was listed as a resident of



Ahmedabad. Bengaluru resident Usha Shreyas who owned the property which was listed as Kasab's address even appeared before the trial court in 2009 to confirm that the plot was vacant at the time and the college didn't exist. What Mohammed Ajmal Kasab said in his confession In the Supreme Court judgment

sentencing Kasab to death, the court quotes from the Pakistani gunman's confession made before a Mumbai magistrate soon after his arrest. In the confession, in which Kasab spoke about how they were chosen for the mission, training and more, he is said to have spoken about receiving the fake identity cards.

India To Switch To World's Cleanest Petrol, Diesel From April 1

India will join the select league of nations using petrol and diesel containing just 10 parts per million of sulphur as it looks to cut vehicular emissions that are said to be one of the reasons for the choking pollution in major cities.

(News Agencies)- India will switch to the world's cleanest petrol and diesel from April 1 as it leapfrogs straight to Euro-VI emission compliant fuels from Euro-IV grades now - a feat achieved in just three years and not seen in any of the large economies around the globe.

India will join the select league of nations using petrol and diesel containing just 10 parts per million of sulphur as it looks to cut vehicular emissions that are said



to be one of the reasons for the

choking pollution in major cities. Sanjiv Singh, Chairman of Indian Oil Corp (IOC) - the firm that controls roughly half of the country's fuel market, said almost all refineries began producing ultra-low sulphur BS-VI (equivalent to Euro-VI grade) petrol and diesel by the end of 2019 and oil companies have now undertaken the tedious task of replacing every drop of fuel in the country with the new one. "We are absolutely on track for supplying BS-VI fuel from April 1. Almost all refineries have begun supplying BS-VI fuel and the same has reached storage depots across the country," he said.

From storage depots, the fuel has started travelling to petrol pumps and in the next few weeks all of them will only have BS-VI grade petrol and diesel, he said. "We are 100 per cent confident that fuel that will flow from

nozzles at all the petrol pumps in the country on April 1 will be BS-VI emission compliant fuel." India adopted Euro-III equivalent (or Bharat Stage-III) fuel with a sulphur content of 350 ppm in 2010 and then took seven years to move to BS-IV that had a sulphur content of 50 ppm. From BS-IV to BS-VI it took just three years.

"It was a conscious decision to leapfrog to BS-VI as first upgrading to BS-V and then shifting to BS-VI would have prolonged the journey to 4 to 6 years. Besides, oil refineries, as well as automobile manufacturers, would have had to make investments twice - first to producing BS-V grade fuel and engines and then BS-VI ones," he said.

State-owned oil refineries spent about Rs 35,000 crore to upgrade plants that could produce ultra-low sulphur fuel. This investment is on top of Rs 60,000 crore they spent on refinery upgrades in the previous switch overs. BS-VI has a sulphur content of just 10 ppm and emission standards are as good as CNG. Originally, Delhi and its adjoining towns were to have BS-VI fuel supplies by April 2019 and the rest of the country was to get same supplies from April 2020.

Uttar Pradesh BJP MLA Ravindra Nath Tripathi, six others booked for raping a woman repeatedly over one month



(News Agencies)- An FIR was lodged against BJP MLA Ravindra Nath Tripathi and six others in Bhadohi on Wednesday for allegedly raping

a woman repeatedly for a month in 2017, police said. The woman, 40, lodged a complaint on 10 February, they said.

The complainant has alleged

that in 2017, Tripathi, the MLA from Bhadohi, and his six accomplices kept her at a hotel for a month and repeatedly raped her, Superintendent of Police (SP) Ram Badan Singh said.

She also claimed that she got pregnant and was forced to undergo abortion, he said.

A probe in this regard was handed over to Assistant Superintendent of Police Ravindra Verma. After he submitted his report, an FIR was registered against the seven men at the city police station, the officer added.

Singh said the woman's statement will be recorded before a magistrate and further action will be taken in the matter as per law.

'Can't save those who want to die': Yogi Adityanath's remark on CAA violence sparks row

His comments came in the context of the opposition parties raising the issue of 24 people dying in anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protests in the state in December.

(News Agencies)-Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath created a controversy on Wednesday in the Uttar Pradesh assembly by saying that not much could be done to save someone who was intent on dying. His comments came in the context of the opposition parties raising the issue of 24 people dying in anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protests in the state in December.

"Agar koi marne ke liye aa raha hai to woh zinda kahan se ho jayega [If someone is coming with the intention to die, then how will that person remain alive]," he said. He also repeated an initial

claim the state's police has since walked away from -- that none of the protestors died from police firing.

"When someone comes out on the street with the intention to shoot people, then he dies or the policeman dies," the chief minister said, speaking on the motion of thanks to governor Anandiben Patel's joint address to the legislative assembly and legislative council.

Leader of Samajwadi Party legislature party Ram Govind Chaudhary said, under democracy people have rights to organize protest and demonstration on the public

issues. The Samajwadi Party has raised the issue of police atrocities on the protestors on the floor of the assembly. Instead of ordering inquiry and taking action against the policemen the Chief Minister is provoking them to suppress the agitation, he said.

Leader of Bahujan Samaj Party, Lalji Verma said, Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath statement against the anti-CAA protest on the floor of the legislative assembly was irresponsible. It clearly shows that state government is functioning in authoritarian manner. Rather than holding



talks with the protestors the state government is threatening to suppress them. The Allahabad High Court has issued notice to the state government over the police atrocities as well, he said.

Alleging that people involved in violence during the anti-CAA

protest enjoyed political protection, he said children of a senior opposition leader also joined the mob that raised anti-India slogans. His reference was to Samajwadi Party chief Akilesh Yadav's daughter's presence at an anti-CAA rally in Lucknow.

'No country adequately protecting children's health and future'

No single country is adequately protecting children's health, their environment and their futures. Among 180 countries surveyed, India ranks 131, mainly because of high infant mortality and poor child health.



(News Agencies)- Predatory marketing of junk food, sugary beverages, alcohol and tobacco products preys on children and must be regulated, said A Future for the World's Children report by a commission of 40 global child and adolescent health experts by the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and The Lancet.

No single country is adequately protecting children's health, their environment and their futures. Among 180 countries surveyed, India ranks 131, mainly because of high infant mortality and poor child health. The ranking is based on the ability of a child to survive and thrive, and includes performances on health, education, and nutrition;

sustainability, with a proxy for greenhouse gas emissions, and equity, or income gaps, among others. "Evidence suggests that children in some countries see as many as 30,000 advertisements on television alone in a single year, while youth exposure to vaping (e-cigarettes) advertisements increased by more than 250% in the USA over two years, reaching more than 24 million young people," the report reads. Anthony Costello, one of the commission's authors, says that industry self-regulation had failed. "Studies in Australia, Canada, Mexico, New Zealand and the USA - among many

others - have shown that self-regulation has not hampered commercial ability to advertise to children. For example, despite industry signing up to self-regulation in Australia, children and adolescent viewers were still exposed to 51 million alcohol ads during just one year of televised football, cricket and rugby. And the reality could be much worse still: we have few facts and figures about the huge expansion of social media advertising and algorithms aimed at our children," said Costello in a statement. Dr Rajesh Sagar, professor, psychiatry, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi, said,

"It does play a role in enticing children the way an ad is designed. All ads meant to target children use attractive props, cartoon characters, bright colours that entice young and impressionable minds. These are quite detrimental for children." Children's exposure to commercial marketing of junk food and sugary beverages is associated with eating unhealthy foods, which leads to them being overweight and obese. According to the report, the number of obese children and adolescents increased from 11 million in 1975 to 124 million in 2016, an 11-fold increase.

Court asks CBI why Rakesh Asthana was not put to polygraph test

(News Agencies)- A Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) special court in Delhi on Wednesday hauled up the agency for not conducting a lie detector or psychological test on its former special director Rakesh Asthana in a 2018 corruption case in which he was cleared by the CBI earlier this month.

CBI special Judge Sanjeev Aggarwal also directed that the first Investigating Officer of the case, Ajay Kumar Bassi, to be present during the next hearing on February 28 to explain the

case diary.

Bassi was shunted out to Port Blair by interim CBI director M Nageswara Rao on October 23, 2018 - a week after the controversial first information report (FIR) was registered against Asthana. Bassi is yet to join work in Port Blair. Aggarwal said advocate Sunil Mittal, to whom an alleged bribe of ~1.95 crore was paid, as alleged in the FIR, "seems like a fictional character emerging from Mission Impossible and James Bond movies".

Asthana was accused in a

bribery case that was filed against him by the then CBI director Alok Kumar Verma in October 2018. He was booked on allegations of criminal conspiracy, corruption and criminal misconduct under relevant sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act (PC Act) on a complaint filed by Hyderabad-based businessman Sathish Babu Sana.

Asthana has maintained that the complaint was fabricated at Verma's behest. The agency said there was no evidence which shows that Asthana ever



demanding or paid bribe to save Sathish Sana Babu in the case related to meat exporter Moin Qureshi.

On Wednesday, the court asked the CBI whether there was a telephonic conversation recording of Asthana, which the

agency denied. "What about calls made to him via WhatsApp? The complainant, Sana Satish Babu, has said this in his statement recorded before a magistrate ... Evidence cannot be disregarded at filing of charge sheet," the court said.

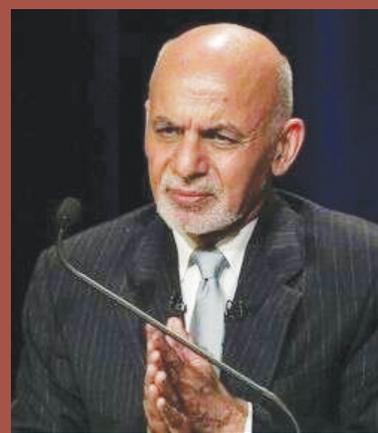
Incumbent Afghan president Ashraf Ghani named victor five months after polls; country stares at another political crisis

(News Agencies)- President Ashraf Ghani on Tuesday was declared the winner of Afghanistan's presidential vote after five months of delayed results and bitter dispute. But the announcement threatened to tip the country into a full-blown political crisis on the cusp of a US peace deal with the Taliban. Just hours after the announcement, Ghani's leading challenger, Abdullah Abdullah - who accuses Afghanistan's election commission of favoring the incumbent - also declared himself the winner and said that he would form a government of his own. The dispute over the

election result comes just after a breakthrough in the negotiations between the US and the Taliban, with the two sides arriving at a tightly choreographed peace plan expected to be rolled out in a matter of days. The plan calls first for a test period of "violence reduction," which would lead to the Taliban and Washington signing a deal. Soon after that, the two Afghan sides would sit down to discuss the political future of the country. But western diplomats have long feared that a political crisis in Kabul would weaken the Afghan government's hand in the negotiations and affect the overall peace plan.

The timing of the election conflict means Ghani's government will be challenged, and distracted, during the tight window of days when the details of the "violence reduction" need to be determined.

In a news conference announcing the election result after an audit of about 15 percent of the total vote, the chief of Afghanistan's election commission, Hawa Alam Nuristani, said that Ghani had won with the narrowest of margins - 50.64 percent of the vote, just surpassing the 50 percent minimum required for an outright victory with no runoff.



Abdullah received 39.5 percent. The win puts Ghani in position for another five-year term as president.

"This is not just an election victory," he said, flanked by his running mates, after the result

was announced. "This is the victory of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. This is the victory of the people's wishes."

Hours later, however, Abdullah appeared in a televised address surrounded by his own supporters.

"I asked those who believe in democracy, in a healthy future for this country, in citizens' rights to stand up to fraud and to not accept this fraudulent result," Abdullah said. "We are the winners based on clean votes, and we declare our victory. We will form the inclusive government."

Neighbours' mind games: India, Pakistan must initiate dialogue between nuclear experts

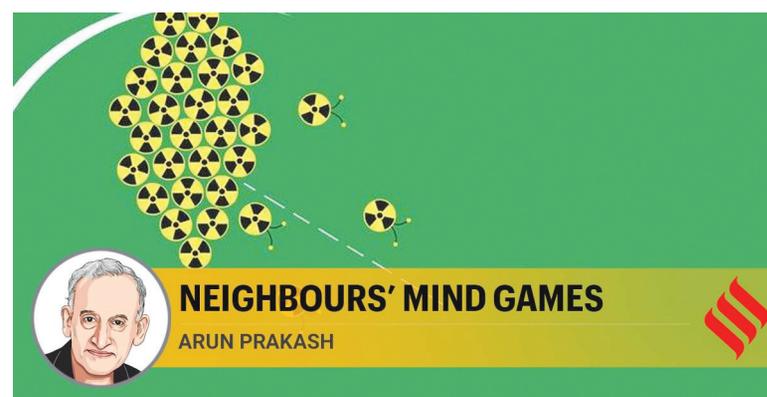
The establishment of credible mutual deterrence between two nuclear rivals, by diminishing the possibility of a surprise nuclear attack, forms the basis of what is termed "strategic stability".

(News Agencies)- Even as thorny issues of force-modernisation, budget-prioritisation and joint command structures engage the attention of our newly anointed Chief of Defence Staff, he will, sooner than later, in his capacity as the first-ever Military Adviser to the National Command Authority (NCA), have to address India's nuclear deterrent. When he does so, he might ponder over US strategist Bernard Brodie's prescription for preventing a nuclear conflict: "Thus far, the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars. From now on its chief

purpose must be to avert them." Just as "beauty" is said to lie in the "eye of the beholder", the credibility of nuclear deterrence lies in the "adversary's mind". He must never be permitted to entertain an iota of doubt that a nuclear first strike will invite a devastating nuclear response. The establishment of credible mutual deterrence between two nuclear rivals, by diminishing the possibility of a surprise nuclear attack, forms the basis of what is termed "strategic stability". So, when retired Pakistani Lt General Khalid Kidwai blames India for South Asia's endemic strategic instability, we must

take note.

Speaking at a recent workshop organised by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Kidwai claimed that the onus of maintaining strategic stability in South Asia fell on Pakistan's shoulders since "India's insatiable drive for regional domination, especially given its current irrational, unstable and belligerent internal and external policies" could lead to catastrophic consequences. Kidwai, as the Director-General of the Strategic Plans Division (SPD) for 14 years, was at the heart of Pakistan's National Command Authority (NCA),



overseeing the operationalisation of its nuclear deterrent and evolution of its doctrines and strategies. Although his pronouncements are for public consumption, given the historic absence of a formal Indo-Pak nuclear dialogue, they should provide some food for thought. Kidwai's discourse attempts to upend conventional wisdom in an

effort to show that it is India, not Pakistan, which is a revisionist power bent on destabilising the Subcontinent. His description of "major destabilising strategic steps" initiated by India provides an interesting glimpse of the Pakistani capacity for self-delusion and the visceral hostility underpinning its paranoia about an "existential threat" from India.

Nepali Editors Condemn Chinese Embassy for Statement Criticising Newspaper



(News Agencies)- After the Chinese Embassy in Nepal issued a statement criticising The Kathmandu Post newspaper for publishing a report with "malicious intent" to "deliberately smear" the Chinese government and people in their efforts to fight the coronavirus, more than a

dozen prominent Nepali editors have registered their protest. On Tuesday, the newspaper published an op-ed, titled 'China's secrecy has made coronavirus crisis much worse' by Ivo Daalder, which was originally published by The Chicago Tribune. The story had an image that portrayed Mao

The Chinese Embassy in Nepal criticised the Kathmandu Post for publishing an op-ed on the coronavirus, accusing the country's government of failing to act quickly.

Zedong in a mask. The article criticised China for failing to report the virus to the World Health Organisation sooner. "Official communications stressed that there was no reason to believe the disease could be spread among humans, and the authorities cracked down hard on any medical warnings that appeared on social media," the op-ed, by Ivo Daalder, former US ambassador to NATO, notes. Responding to the article, Chinese ambassador to Nepal Hou Yanqi issued a statement.

"The Kathmandu Post published an article which, with a picture of malicious intention, deliberately smeared the efforts of the Chinese government and people fighting against the new coronavirus pneumonia and even viciously attacked the political system of China. We hereby express our strong dissatisfaction and firm protest to it," the statement says. The statement adds that China is "ready to accept any meaningful suggestions on how to control the spread of the epidemic as soon as possible" but that it firmly opposes "any ulterior motives and

even malicious attacks on the political systems". The statement also accused the chief editor of The Kathmandu Post, Anup Kaphle, of being "biased" on China-related issues. "It is regrettable that Mr. Anup Kaphle, Chief Editor of The Kathmandu Post has always been biased on China-related issues. This time he went as far as disregarding the facts and becoming a parrot of some anti-China forces and, therefore, his ulterior purpose is destined to failure.

After Quarantine, Officials Clear 406 Indians Evacuated From Wuhan of Coronavirus



(News Agencies)- On Monday, 406 Indians who had been evacuated by the government from Wuhan, the capital city of China's Hubei province and epicentre of the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak, and subsequently quarantined at a special camp in Delhi for two weeks, were allowed to return home after doctors confirmed none of them had acquired the infection. The evacuees were composed of 186 women, 209 men and 11 children; the adults were mostly medical students

from Hubei University of Medicine in Shiyan, about 450 km northwest of Wuhan. As the situation in China deteriorated, the students had contacted the Indian Embassy for help. "They told us to prepare a list of all people. We gave passport numbers, emails and other details they asked for," Ahmed, one of the evacuees, told Indian Express. "They made a WeChat group in which they sent specific directions. It was well-planned. They told us that buses will come from Wuhan to pick us up."

"We [conducted] two [types of] tests," A.P. Joshi, the doctor in charge of the facility, told the Indian Express. "On day 2-3 after they arrived, we sampled their nasopharyngeal swabs and sent them to ICMR-AIIMS-National Institute of Virology. They gave us the reports after 24-48 hours. We [repeated] the same exercise on February 13-14 at the end of the quarantine, and the results were negative." The students were in all praise of the facility, especially for its round-the-clock medical supervision and regular check-ups.

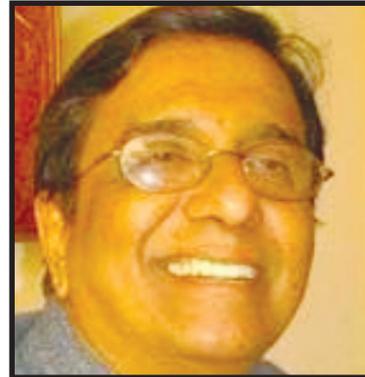
After Erdogan Supports Pakistan on Kashmir, India Asks Turkey Not to Interfere



(News Agencies)- After the Turkish president's visit to Pakistan led to Recep Tayyip Erdogan reiterating his opposition to India's steps in Kashmir, New Delhi on Saturday stated that Turkey should "develop proper understanding of the facts" and stop interfering in internal affairs of other countries. During Erdogan's visit to Islamabad, a joint declaration of the Pakistan-Turkey high-level strategic cooperation council made a specific reference to Kashmir. "The two sides underscored need for resolution of all outstanding disputes between Pakistan and India, including the core issue of Jammu and Kashmir through a sustained dialogue process and

in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. In this regard, Pakistan expresses its deep appreciation for Turkey's principled stance on the issue as well as its offer for mediation," it stated. In his speech to the joint sitting of the Pakistani parliament, Erdogan had asserted that sufferings of Kashmiris had been aggravated by India's steps taken in recent months, referring to the removal of constitutional autonomy and restrictions on communications. "This approach, which aggravates the current situation and revokes the freedom and ... rights of the Kashmiri people, does not bring any benefit to anyone," said the Turkish president.

Bangladesh: 'Prothom Alo' Editor Matiur Rahman Gets Bail in Electrocution Case



(News Agencies)- A local court in Dhaka has granted bail to Matiur Rahman, a prominent newspaper editor of Bangladesh, in a case filed against him and five of his colleagues over the death of a schoolchild due to electrocution at an event in November, 2019. Rahman is the editor of Prothom Alo, Bangladesh's largest newspaper in terms of circulation, and was granted anticipatory bail for four weeks starting on January 20 by the Dhaka high court in the case, which expired on February 16. Rahman's counsel Ehsanul Haque Shamaji filed a bail petition on his behalf on February

17. "Considering Matiur's age and his position as an editor of a renowned newspaper, the court granted him bail on the condition that he would have to appear before court on hearing days," a report in The Dhaka Tribune quoted the court as having said in its order. On November 1, 2019, Nayeemul Abrar, a student of Class 9 at the Dhaka Residential Model College, was reportedly electrocuted by a power generator during an event held in the premises by Kishor Alo, a popular youth magazine published by Prothom Alo. According to the news report, Nayeemul's father Mohammad Mojibur Rahman filed a case against the organisers, accusing them of negligence. Aside from alleging that Kishor Alo and the school authorities concealed information about his son's death, Mojibur Rahman also complaint of negligence against the organisers for taking his son to a hospital far from the school rather than to the one closest to it.

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Trump vs. Bloomberg: Fortunes collide in pricey knife fight

They are circling each other like wary boxers, with taunts on Twitter, snarky asides and belittling descriptions. They rose to prominence in Manhattan on parallel tracks, amassed wealth real and perceived and displayed a penchant for putting their names on things.

That's where the similarities end. President Donald Trump and Michael Bloomberg could hardly be more different as people, but now they both want the same job: Trump's.

Bloomberg is making the case that he is many things that Trump is not: a builder of a financial data and media company that employs 20,000 people, a billionaire whose worth Forbes estimates at \$60 billion, a problem-solver with a steady temperament who was elected three times as mayor of the nation's largest city, one of the world's leading philanthropists.

"Bloomberg is someone Trump would have liked to have been: to have invented something everyone uses, to have real wealth, to be seen as a creative person. Trump had to create an image for himself," said George Arzt, onetime press secretary to former New York Mayor Ed Koch. Arzt knows both men professionally and personally. He said Bloomberg is someone who likes to solve problems, who likes to be hands-on, even including the design of new Department of Sanitation trucks, while Trump is "basically a showman." Arzt added that Trump always sought the limelight while Bloomberg shied away from it until he ran for mayor.

Trump, who said he once considered Bloomberg a friend, had a brutal assessment of his now-rival during a CNBC interview this week: "He's spending a fortune. He's making a lot of broadcasters wealthy. And he's getting nowhere."

Howard Wolfson, Bloomberg's senior adviser, jabs right back: "Mike hired Donald Trump to run a golf course in the Bronx but would not hire him for any other job. And the president knows that."

Bloomberg is running for the Democratic nomination for president on a path no serious candidate in the party has ever taken, forgoing early primary states and debates while spending hundreds of millions of dollars on ads in larger Super



Tuesday states, almost all of which take a hard shot at Trump. He doesn't accept any campaign donations.

Trump has responded by calling Bloomberg "Mini Mike" on Twitter, trying to ridicule his 5-foot-8-inch stature. Bloomberg has hit Trump in another way that might hurt more. In Texas, when asked whether the country wanted a race between two New York billionaires, he replied, "Who's the other one?"

Bloomberg has said that even if he fails to win the Democratic nomination, he is prepared to spend hundreds of millions of dollars, perhaps more, to deny Trump reelection.

On Thursday, he started running a new nationwide ad that condemns Trump's treatment of decorated military leaders, and his campaign manager, Kevin Sheekey, went on Fox News to highlight it.

Their fight will be a test of the power of television and digital ads versus the impact of Twitter and

the megaphone of the presidency. A key question is whether Bloomberg's attacks on Trump will do damage to an incumbent who does not have a serious primary challenger.

The president and his campaign team have been warily watching Bloomberg's spending spree since the former mayor's late entry into the presidential race.

Trump's campaign manager, Brad Parscale, recently told staffers he would not worry about Bloomberg until he cracked double digits (Bloomberg had 9% support in a Monmouth poll this week) while mocking the amount of money the former mayor was spending, according to two Republicans close to the White House who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations. But others in the president's orbit have not been so sanguine about Bloomberg - including Trump himself.

Trump, who has been fixated on the Democratic race even in the face of an impeachment trial, was

initially irked by Bloomberg's entry and has noted to confidants in recent weeks that the mayor has steadily picked up support.

Trump has also complained that Bloomberg has benefited from a disproportionate amount of positive news stories.

And he has avoided the counsel from aides, including senior adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner, to ignore Bloomberg and thus avoid elevating him in a Democratic field that remains unsettled.

But Trump has been unable to do so, delivering several Twitter broadsides while obsessing in private over Bloomberg's wealth. Bloomberg has spent money at a rate of about \$100 million a month and has trained his focus not on those with whom he is competing for his adopted party's nomination, but on the president as if in a general election.

Trump's campaign advisers have acknowledged that the impact of Bloomberg's spending is impossible to model and are paying close attention to the president's approval numbers in the swing states Bloomberg is blanketing with ads. And while the Trump campaign's own formidable bank account could be overwhelmed by Bloomberg's, the president's team has tried to fight fire with fire, buying their own \$10 million Super Bowl ad just after

Bloomberg did likewise.

Bloomberg's fortune dwarfs Trump's wealth and has played into a number of insecurities Trump has long held about the former mayor, according to two presidential confidants who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations. Not only is Bloomberg vastly richer than Trump, but he has also had an easy entry into the most elite Manhattan social circles, the same ones that looked down on Trump as a tabloid creation and reality TV star.

The two men, for a time, enjoyed friendly relations, though they never were close. By the time Bloomberg became mayor in 2002, Trump had largely transitioned from real estate development to licensing and television, so the pair did not butt heads at City Hall in the way Trump did with some of Bloomberg's predecessors.

The two occasionally would rub shoulders at golf tournaments and charity events, and both attended one of Rudy Giuliani's weddings, with Trump as a guest and Bloomberg officiating. They also crossed paths at Yankees games and when Bloomberg hosted the International Olympic Committee at his Upper East Side townhouse.

They would even sometimes praise each other. At a 2007 charity golf club event, Trump said it was "my really terrific

New Florida 2020 Poll Shows Trump in Trouble against Bloomberg, Biden, Sanders and Warren

A new poll shows that President Donald Trump is either behind or in dead heat with four of his Democratic challengers in Florida.

The results of the University of North Florida/First Coast News poll, which came from interviews with 725 Florida voters between February 16 and 18, were published Wednesday, according to First Coast News. The margin of error was plus or minus 3.6 percent.

Among other questions, pollsters asked respondents whom they would vote for if the general election were that day and they had to decide between Trump and one of the Democratic candidates.

The poll revealed that businessman and former New

York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg would fare best against Trump in the Sunshine State if he was the Democratic nominee and the election was on the day the poll was taken. Fifty percent of all respondents said they would vote for Bloomberg, while 44 percent would support Trump's reelection and 6 percent were undecided.

Former Vice President Joe Biden performed only slightly better than Trump. The poll showed that 49 percent of respondents said they would vote for Biden, while 48 percent would support Trump and 3 percent were not sure. The president and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who narrowly lost to former South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg in Iowa's

delegate count but won the New Hampshire primary, had equal support among poll respondents. Forty-eight percent of respondents said they would vote for Sanders if he was the nominee and the election were held that day, and 48 percent said they would support Trump. Meanwhile, 4 percent of respondents said they were undecided.

Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren also showed the same amount of support as Trump. Forty-seven percent would vote for her if she was the nominee, with 47 percent supporting the president. Six percent of respondents in this matchup were unsure about whom they would vote for.

Two Democratic contenders,

Buttigieg and Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar, had less support than Trump showed among the poll respondents.

Forty-nine percent said they would vote for Trump if the Democratic nominee was Buttigieg, while 45 percent would vote for the former Indiana mayor and 7 percent were undecided.

As for Klobuchar, 44 percent said they would vote for her if she were the nominee, while 48 percent would vote for Trump and 8 percent could not decide.

Florida is the nation's fourth-most populous state, with slightly more than 19 million residents and 29 electoral votes. Trump won the state in 2016 with 48.6 percent of the vote to Hillary Clinton's 47.4 percent, according to The New York Times.

Bloomberg bombs in debate debut

He rolled his eyes when Elizabeth Warren pressed him to release women at his company from nondisclosure agreements related to alleged mistreatment.

He suggested he can't simply use TurboTax, like many Americans, to crunch his billions to speed up the release of his tax returns.

He pouted when moderators didn't return to him on health care, muttering, "What am I, chicken liver?"

Mike Bloomberg spent the

past 10 weeks flooding the airwaves with ads, racking up endorsements and climbing into contention ahead of his Super Tuesday debut. And in two hours Wednesday night, he risked losing those swift gains as he stumbled through his first nationally televised primary debate.

He was rusty. He was testy. He was out of touch. And, for a candidate often shielded by the scripted one-liners of killer campaign advisers, he was on his own - unable to hide his peevish demeanor and

unable to portray himself, as his campaign has tried to do, as the clear choice to stop Bernie Sanders and beat Donald Trump.

Bloomberg emerged so diminished that the other billionaire Democrat in the race - who failed to qualify for Wednesday's debate stage - stepped in wielding a platinum dagger.

"One lesson from tonight," Tom Steyer concluded of the evening, "looks like Mike Bloomberg might be running in the wrong primary."

During Bloomberg's debut

on the Democratic debate stage, the former New York mayor fielded attacks from every candidate over his past embrace of Republicans, ardent defense of capitalism and stop-and-frisk policing tactics.

In one particularly tense exchange, Warren grilled him over the corporate culture at his Manhattan-based company, Bloomberg L.P., in light of allegations he made derogatory remarks toward women who are now barred from discussing

the comments by what his defense was. "I've been nice to some women." That just doesn't cut it," Warren said in response. "The mayor has to stand on his record. And what we need to know is exactly what's lurking out there."

She demanded he say whether he would "release all of those women from those nondisclosure agreements, so we can hear their side of the story" and repeatedly asked him how many such agreements exist.

"I hope you heard

Charges Fly at Billionaire Bloomberg at Fiery Democratic Presidential Debate in Nevada

Michael Bloomberg faced a barrage of attacks at his first Democratic presidential debate on Wednesday, as his rivals assailed the free-spending and fast-rising billionaire over his record on race, history of sexist comments and the use of his massive fortune to muscle his way into the contest. In a rough debate debut that gave voters their first unscripted look at the media mogul and self-funding former New York mayor, Bloomberg seemed uncomfortable and hesitant as he defended his record

and argued that he is Democrats' best chance of beating Republican President Donald Trump in November. Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Amy Klobuchar, Joe Biden, and Pete Buttigieg all lined up to go after Bloomberg, who has surged in polls helped by an unprecedented advertising blitz. But they also heaped personal attacks on one another in the most contentious of the nine Democratic White House debates. All of the contenders on the Las Vegas debate stage accused Bloomberg of

trying to buy his way into the White House and said his record as mayor and businessman was not good enough to beat Trump.

"We're running against a billionaire who calls women fat broads and horse-faced lesbians," said Warren, a senator from Massachusetts. "And, no, I'm not talking about Donald Trump, I'm talking about Mayor Bloomberg."

"Democrats take a huge risk if we just substitute one arrogant billionaire for another," she added.

Bloomberg has been accused over the years of

many sexist and misogynistic comments, and several lawsuits have been filed alleging that women were discriminated against at his media company. He did not respond to Warren's comments about his alleged remarks about women, taken from a booklet given to him in 1990 that was said to be a compilation of his sayings over the years. A campaign spokesman has said Bloomberg "simply did not say the things somebody wrote in this gag gift."

Bloomberg, who entered the race in November and is skipping the first four early-voting states in February to focus on later nominating contests in March, has risen to No. 2 among Democrats behind Sanders, according to a Reuters/Ipsos national poll released on Tuesday. Bloomberg said at the debate that he was using his money for an important cause. "I'm spending that money to get rid of Donald Trump - the worst president we've ever had. And if I can get that

done, it will be a great contribution to America and to my kids," he said. Trump was happy to inject himself into the debate pile-on of Bloomberg, telling supporters at a rally in Phoenix: "I hear he's getting pounded tonight." Scorching exchanges The debate came at a pivotal time, three days before Nevada's presidential caucuses, the third contest in the state-by-state race to find a challenger to Trump in the Nov. 3 election.

Bloomberg quietly plotting brokered convention strategy

Mike Bloomberg is privately lobbying Democratic Party officials and donors allied with his moderate opponents to flip their allegiance to him - and block Bernie Sanders - in the event of a brokered national convention.

The effort, largely executed by Bloomberg's senior state-level advisers in recent weeks, attempts to prime Bloomberg for a second-ballot contest at the Democratic National Convention in July by poaching supporters of Joe Biden and other moderate Democrats, according to two Democratic strategists familiar with the talks and unaffiliated with Bloomberg.

The outreach has involved meetings and telephone

calls with supporters of Biden and Pete Buttigieg - as well as uncommitted DNC members - in Virginia, Texas, Florida, Oklahoma and North Carolina, according to one of the strategists who participated in meetings and calls.

With Sanders' emergence as the frontrunner in the presidential primary, Democrats in those states have recently raised the prospect that the democratic socialist could be a top-of-the-ticket liability.

"There's a whole operation going on, which is genius," said one of the strategists, who is unaffiliated with any campaign. "And it's going to help them win on the second ballot ... They're

telling them that's their strategy."

It's a presumptuous play for a candidate who hasn't yet won a delegate or even appeared on a ballot. And it could also bring havoc to the convention, raising the prospect of party insiders delivering the nomination to a billionaire over a progressive populist.

Other candidates have quietly been in contact for months with superdelegates - the DNC members, members of Congress and other party officials who cannot vote on the first ballot at a contested national convention - but none have showcased it as a feature of their campaign, as Hillary Clinton did in 2016. Asked about Bloomberg's

efforts, spokeswoman Julie Wood said Thursday, "We have an enormous apparatus that is constantly reaching out to all types of people for support and to explain why we think Mike is the best candidate to take on Donald Trump."

The rule prohibiting superdelegates, or automatic delegates, from voting on the first ballot of a contested convention was instituted only after the last convention, which followed a primary in which superdelegates overwhelmingly sided against Sanders and with the establishment-oriented Clinton. The reduction of those delegates' power was a major victory for the Democratic Party's left

flank, while many Democrats, regardless of ideology, believed it could help broaden the party's appeal to young voters skeptical of centralized party power. Earlier this year, when a small group of DNC members began gauging support for a potential policy reversal to allow superdelegates to vote on the first ballot, DNC officials quickly dismissed the idea, and even proponents of a change acknowledged they could not get traction for it.

If Sanders secures a plurality of delegates but loses the nomination on a second ballot, many moderate and progressive Democrats alike predict the national convention in Milwaukee would devolve

into chaos. Bloomberg's effort comes as the prospect of a contested convention becomes less and less remote. That development is in part because of Bloomberg's own late entry into the race. The billionaire former New York City mayor's deluge of spending on television advertisements and campaign infrastructure put him into contention, while further muddling the Democratic primary field. Many moderates, including Bloomberg's supporters, fear that the centrist vote may be divided, allowing Sanders, the more progressive senator from Vermont, to reach the convention with more delegates than any of them.

In Prez Trump's remarks on India visit, a hint about the 'big trade deal'

last week after Robert Lighthizer, the top US trade negotiator, informed his Indian counterpart Piyush Goyal that he was unable to travel to India for the pre-scheduled end-stage discussions, as first reported by Hindustan Times. "Well we can have a trade deal with India but I'm really saving the big deal for later on," President Trump told reporters, referring perhaps to the longer-term deal that the two sides had planned to tackle at a later date, after getting out of the way a limited and simpler near-term agreement. "We're doing a very big trade deal with India. We'll have it. I don't know if it will be done before the election, but we'll have a very big deal with India." It could not be immediately ascertained if the President was signaling a change of plans: to negotiate just one agreement now, that would

include both the short and long-term deals. The continued uncertainty about the limited agreement is playing poorly in the United States.

"The inability to ink even a modest trade pact would be a setback, dampening hopes for progress until after the presidential elections," said Atman Trivedi, a former commerce department official, on talks that were underway before Lighthizer's cancelled visit.

India and the United States were discussing a limited trade deal for now, leaving the more intractable issues to a future date, along with an ambitious Free Trade Agreement. India would buy \$6.5 billion worth of US goods under this short-term deal and grant US companies more access to its markets in return for restoration of benefits under a preferential US trade

scheme called the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). There was no response from the USTR's office to questions, sent before President Trump's remarks, about Lighthizer's plans to travel to India and the fate of the deal, which in many quarters is being presumed to be dead, because of his cancelled visit. Questions are being asked if the USTR wants a deal at all now, or later in the year. Speaking to reporters about the India visit, the president had aired his old grievances about high tariffs and the lack of level playing field for American business. "We're not treated very well by India," he said. "But I happen to like Prime Minister Modi a lot and he's hoping we'll have 7 million people in the airports."

The president was referring to crowds he expects to see, as assured to him, he has said, by

Prime Minister Modi, of millions of people from the airport to the Motera stadium where he will address a rally with the Indian leader, something like the Howdy Modi event in Houston, Texas last September.

In Ahmedabad, the first stop, the president is expected to visit Mahatma Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram and then address a rally at Motera stadium, which is the world's largest; the president is expecting an audience of "millions", and has seemed most excited about addressing such a large crowd.

Indians remain optimistic about a deal, though, and have indicated that the possibility of a trade deal being rustled up in the final dash to the visit cannot be ruled out yet. "It's 50-50," one of them said. But the failure to clinch a deal is likely to impact ties..

Trump is reaching Ahmedabad on February 24 to start a two-day visit with First Lady Melania Trump. They will be accompanied by some key members of his cabinet - Energy

Secretary Dan Brouillette and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross - and possibly his daughter and adviser Ivanka Trump or her husband and senior adviser Jared Kushner, according to people familiar with the plans.

It will be Ivanka Trump's second visit to India after her father's election, if she is going - she last visited India in 2017 end, as head of the US delegation to the Global Entrepreneurship Summit in Hyderabad. And it will be Kushner's first, if he is on the trip. The president will head for New Delhi the same day with a brief stop over in Agra. They will leave for home after a state banquet on August 25, wrapping up a two-day stand alone visit. The president's delegation, which will be announced closer to the trip, will not, however, include the senior-most members, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who has to stay back for a conference of heads of US missions, and Defense Secretary Mark Esper, who will be traveling to India in March.

Reliance Industries to consolidate media, distribution businesses; TV18 Broadcast, Hathway Cable, DEN Networks to merge under Network18

(News Agencies)- Reliance Industries is consolidating its all media and distribution businesses under one umbrella brand 'Network18'. Under the scheme of the arrangement, TV18 Broadcast, Hathway Cable & Datacom and DEN Networks will merge into Network18 Media & Investments, which will be an integrated media and distribution company with a revenue of Rs 8,000 crore. The restructuring will create

yoqWwmMFsAw The board of directors of the respective companies approved the scheme of amalgamation and arrangement at their meetings held on Monday, it added. "The broadcasting business will be housed in Network18 and the cable and ISP (Internet Service Provider) businesses in two separate wholly-owned subsidiaries of Network18," it added.

share change ratio, according to a PTI report.

According to the scheme, for every 100 shares of TV18, Hathway and DEN, their shareholders would get 92, 78 and 191 shares, respectively, of Network18.

"The aggregation of a content powerhouse across news and entertainment (both linear and digital) and the country's largest cable distribution network under the same umbrella shall boost efficiency and exploit synergies, creating value for all stakeholders," it added.

The reorganisation furthers the group strategy of "building a media powerhouse that is agnostic across pipes, platforms and screens".

Besides, the consolidation of cable businesses of DEN and Hathway in one entity will leverage the "combined strength of 27,000 local cable operator (LCO) partners who act as the touchpoints to 15 million households in India," it added. The combined broadband entity will also serve one million wireline broadband subscribers across the country. Besides, shareholders of all the four companies will also benefit from streamlining of operations and strategy, focused management, and reduction of risk through consolidation, it added. This would be done through a



value-chain integration and render substantial economies of scale. It also simplifies the corporate structure of the group by reducing the number of listed entities, said a statement by TV18 Broadcast Ltd. "Reliance Industries announced a consolidation of its media and distribution businesses spread across multiple entities into Network18," the statement said. This will scale up Network18 "as one of the largest listed players in the sector", it added. "The appointed date for the merger shall be February 1, 2020," it said.

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Sen. Tom Cotton stands by startling theory on coronavirus origins: 'We need to be open to all possibilities'

"questions" surrounding the biosafety level 4 "super laboratory" in Wuhan, the city where the virus is believed to have originated. "We know it didn't originate in the Wuhan food market based on the study of Chinese scientists ... I'm not saying where it started, I don't know. We don't know because the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) won't open up to international experts," Cotton said. "That's what we need to do so they can get to the bottom of where the virus originated and hopefully can effect a diagnostic test and vaccine for it." Cotton also pushed back against critics, specifically Rutgers University chemical biology professor Richard Ebright, who said he found no indication in the genome sequence of the virus to indicate it was engineered. "Let's take the professor," Cotton said. "He was ...in fact today cited in the Asia Times saying that it was quite possible that it was a laboratory incident." "That's not saying this is a bioweapon," Cotton clarified, "but we do know they were investigating and researching coronavirus in that laboratory. It could've been an accidental breach, it could've been a worker that was infected." "My point is that we don't know," Cotton said, adding that "until we get all the evidence from the Chinese Communist Party, it is only responsible, not irresponsible, to keep an open mind about the hypotheses." Cotton also mentioned reports earlier Tuesday that the State Department has designated five Chinese media outlets as "foreign missions," calling them, in essence, state-sponsored propaganda agents of the CCP. MacCallum told Cotton that the State Department's designation "does go to the point that you are making that the information we are getting is very difficult to verify," but Cotton turned his focus to The Washington Post and The New York Times, which have both published articles criticizing Cotton since his initial remarks and claimed he suggested the virus was the result of a Chinese bioweapon. "It tells you the Chinese Communist Party, just like any communist party, has a widespread propaganda effort and regrettably The Washington Post and New York Times have taken millions and millions of dollars from something called 'China Daily' to run so-called inserts that purport to be news but in reality are Chinese propaganda," Cotton claimed. China Daily Distribution Corporation is among the five media outlets designated foreign missions. "They ought not be doing that," Cotton added. The senator said he "hoped" such contracts would be terminated and revealed that he had personally raised the matter in a letter to the Justice Department and Attorney General William Barr.

Wine vs. weed in Napa Valley

agricultural economy as millennials shy away from wine drinking.

Because the price of agricultural land in Napa is so high, growers say that cannabis is the only crop that makes economic sense to plant. Commodity crops like strawberries or lettuce simply wouldn't offer the necessary return on the investment. Among those forming partnerships with cannabis companies: film director and winemaker Francis Ford Coppola and the heirs of Robert Mondavi, one of Napa wine's founding fathers.

"What happens as our current consumers start aging and we're not appealing to the new consumer?" said Stephanie Honig, owner of Honig Vineyard and Winery and president of the Napa Valley Cannabis Association. "If we can create a very small, prestigious Napa-like cannabis cultivation industry here, then we're really appealing to those discerning buyers, the buyers that are coming here and drinking \$300 bottles of cabernet."

Local entrepreneur Eric Sklar is trying to force the issue. Sklar started Alpha Omega Winery in Napa, but now owns a cannabis cultivation and delivery company called Fumé just north in neighboring Lake County.

He commissioned polling last year that found a cultivation initiative would pass in Napa and collected enough signatures to place it on the March ballot. But he held off in hopes that the Napa County Board of Supervisors will write its own rules.

"We've rewritten it in a way that we think should pass, but it's still my hope that the supervisors do their job and pass an ordinance," Sklar said. "A ballot measure is not the ideal way to do this."

Local cannabis fights have unfolded across California since voters legalized recreational marijuana through a statewide ballot initiative in 2016. Because Proposition 64 let local leaders decide whether to allow marijuana cultivation and sales - and most have been slow to welcome the industry - statewide agricultural and wine advocacy groups haven't had much of a role. A number of organizations and lawmakers in Sacramento have said they've avoided engaging in Napa's regional tussle.

"Truly, the way that we choose to regulate cannabis in California gives a great deal of latitude to each county," said Tim Schmelzer, vice president of California state relations for the Wine Institute. With 49 of California's 58 counties growing wine grapes, "every one could possibly be different," he said. "We're just not in a position to get involved." While the cannabis industry and local governments have battled over dispensaries since 2016, the debate over cultivation has reached a tipping point as the cannabis industry seeks to expand beyond the Emerald Triangle of Humboldt, Mendocino and Trinity counties. Just south in Napa, the county initiative is now hanging as a nudge to force supervisors to act. A county report on the measure identifies a host of risks that

could accompany cultivation, including odor from nearby grows and competition for water supplies.

The report cites marijuana's water demand - it estimates an acre of cannabis uses 1.1 million gallons per year, compared to 65,000-162,000 gallons per acre of wine grapes - and warns that a proposed 500-foot setback from private residences and 1,000-foot setback from schools "may not suffice to avoid adverse odors and nuisance issues."

At a recent forum sponsored by Napa Valley Vintners, all four candidates running for District 4 supervisor expressed misgivings about cannabis cultivation. "Protections for the Napa name and protections on what it means to be an agricultural commodity from Napa are of paramount importance in this discussion," incumbent Supervisor Belia Ramos said in an interview. Beyond tarnishing the brand, officials and winemakers worry cannabis cultivation will physically hurt wine grape crops through a number of ecological impacts: water use, increased traffic and smell tainting.

They look at what's happened in Santa Barbara County, on the state's Central Coast, as a cautionary tale. Santa Barbara County has thousands of acres of cannabis, including some close to towns and schools, and they've concerned growers beyond vintners. Avocado growers there worry about getting sued for letting their pesticides drift over the cannabis, which by state law can have no residue, unlike other crops.

"I haven't done a poll, but everybody I've talked to is against the marijuana growers trading on the reputation of the Napa Valley," said Dario Sattui, owner of the V. Sattui and Castello di Amorosa wineries, who recently visited Santa Barbara to observe cannabis farms and speak with local winegrowers.

When Santa Barbara County officials approved cannabis cultivation in 2018, they didn't limit the size or number of grows allowed. The process for starting a new marijuana farm was also among the most relaxed in the state, merely requiring cultivators to sign an affidavit stating that they'd been growing medical marijuana in the county prior to 2016. The result was an explosion in large-scale operations dotting the coast from Carpinteria to Santa Maria. Santa Barbara quickly became home to the two largest cultivation sites in the world - a 147-acre complex in the Santa Rita Hills and an 83-acre facility just two miles away. The overwhelming cannabis odors led to a fierce backlash among winegrowers and residents across the county who complained about children coming home from school smelling of marijuana and tourists being chased away from tasting rooms. "Tasting wine is 80 percent olfactory," said Blair Pence, owner of Pence Vineyards in the Santa Ynez Valley. "You wipe that out when you've got marijuana permeating the air. You've just wiped out wine tasting." Pence said he's challenging three newly

proposed cannabis farms that would be located across the street from his property. He's also aware of a nuclear option: planting hemp, which would render nearby marijuana impotent by pollinating it.

"There have been some discussions about going into the hemp business," he said. "I don't know of anybody who's done it, but I know it's been discussed. But then you've got the smell again, too. It's an interesting thought, I'll leave it at that."

Since authorizing cannabis grows, the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors has required some existing farms to install odor-control systems and has ordered new growers to demonstrate they have odors under control at the time they apply for permits. The experience has left winemakers further north warier than before. Sklar called the comparisons of a potential Napa cannabis industry to Santa Barbara "disingenuous," pointing to recent revisions to the proposed Napa ordinance that cap cultivation at 100 acres, include nuisance regulations for cannabis odor and liability exemptions for existing grape growers for pesticide drift.

"We all looked at what they did and how they operate and we corrected for it," he said. Both sides in Napa are looking to a series of public workshops scheduled late next month to press their case. Napa County is planning to conduct more polling this year, while Sklar and the cannabis association plan to keep the pressure up on local officials.

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Trump announces a blitz of pardons and commutations

He grants clemency to former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich, ex-New York police commissioner Bernie Kerik and financier Michael Milken.



(News Agencies)- President Donald Trump announced a host of pardons and commutations on Tuesday, ranging from Rod Blagojevich, the former Illinois governor jailed on corruption charges, to Bernie Kerik, the former New York police commissioner. "Yes, we have commuted the sentence of Rod Blagojevich. He served eight years in jail, a long

time," Trump told reporters before boarding Air Force One en route to Los Angeles.

The commutation was one of a flurry of legal actions Trump took Tuesday, including pardons for Kerik, financier Michael Milken and former San Francisco 49ers owner Edward DeBartolo Jr. And they came days before the scheduled sentencing of Roger Stone in federal court in D.C.,

amid wide speculation that the president might pardon his former longtime adviser.

Stone was at the center of last week's drama inside the Justice Department, with four career prosecutors quitting his case after Attorney General William Barr overruled their sentencing recommendation.

Stone's looming fate has drawn Trump's condemnation in recent weeks, with the president calling it a "miscarriage of justice!" on Twitter and excoriating the prosecutors and judge for their handling of the case. On Tuesday, he appeared to echo a Fox News contributor's call for a new trial but told reporters that he "hadn't given it any thought" when asked

whether a pardon was in the works.

Trump's clemency moves furthered a pattern in which those seeking pardons have aggressively lobbied the president's allies and associates, jumping ahead of the formal process by which the White House usually reviews pardon requests. And Tuesday's announcement by the White House offered a few tantalizing hints as to who might be next on the president's list. Trump has teased a pardon for Blagojevich for years. But Tuesday's commutation comes after a media campaign by the former governor's wife that Trump appears to have seen.

Blagojevich, a Democrat, was impeached and removed from office in 2009 for corruption, and was later indicted on multiple corruption charges. He was accused of trying to solicit personal favors and sell the U.S. Senate seat when Barack Obama won the presidency, and was sentenced to 14 years.

In 2015, a federal appeals court overturned four of the original 18 counts on which Blagojevich was convicted, saying aspects of his handling of the Senate vacancy amounted to traditional political "logrolling" that wasn't illegal. But it upheld the other counts and triggered a resentencing that affirmed his original sentence.

Malaysia Believes MH370 "Mass Murder-Suicide By Pilot": Ex Australia PM

(News Agencies)- Former Australian prime minister Tony Abbott has claimed "very top" level Malaysian officials believed vanished Flight MH370 was deliberately downed by the captain in a mass murder-suicide.

The Malaysia Airlines jet vanished on March 8, 2014 carrying 239 people -- mostly from China -- en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

No sign of the plane was found in a 120,000-square kilometre (46,000-square mile) Indian Ocean search zone and the Australian-led search, the largest in aviation history, was suspended in January 2017.

A United States exploration firm

launched a private hunt in 2018 but it ended after several months of scouring the seabed without success.

The disappearance of the plane has long been the subject of a host of theories -- ranging from the credible to outlandish -- including that veteran pilot Zaharie Ahmad Shah had gone rogue.

In an excerpt from a Sky News documentary airing Wednesday, Tony Abbott claimed that he was told within a week of it vanishing that Malaysia believed the captain had intentionally downed the jet.

"My very clear understanding from the very top levels of the Malaysian government is that from very, very early on here, they thought it was murder-suicide by the pilot," he said.

"I'm not going to say who said what to whom but let me reiterate, I want to be absolutely crystal clear, it was understood at the highest levels that this was almost certainly murder-suicide by the pilot -- mass murder-suicide by the pilot."

Zaharie Ahmad Shah's family and friends have long strongly rejected such claims as baseless.

Azharuddin Abdul Rahman, the former head of Malaysia's civil aviation regulator, criticised Tony Abbott's remarks and said there was not sufficient proof to support the idea.

"It is only a theory," Azharuddin Abdul Rahman, who led the regulator when Flight MH370 disappeared, told AFP.



"You do this speculation and it will hurt the next of kin. The family of the pilot will also feel very bad because you are making an accusation without any proof." In 2016, Malaysian officials revealed that the pilot had plotted a path over the Indian

Ocean on a home flight simulator but stressed this did not prove he deliberately crashed the plane. A final report into the tragedy released in 2018 pointed to failings by air traffic control and said the course of the plane was changed manually.

Half A Million Mussels "Cooked Alive" In Waters On New Zealand Coast



(News Agencies)- Up to half a million mussels were effectively cooked in the wild in unusually balmy waters on the New Zealand coast in a

massive "die-off" that marine experts have linked to climate change.

The dead molluscs were found by Auckland man Brandon Ferguson

at Maunganui Bluff Beach, near the northern tip of the North Island.

Footage posted to social media shows a stunned Brandon Ferguson wading through rockpools choked almost knee-deep with mussel shells remarking "they're all dead... there's nothing left".

Professor Chris Battershill, a marine ecologist at Waikato University, said there had been similar die-off in recent years involving tuatua cockles and clams. "The common denominators seem to be really

hot conditions with lots of sunlight and unusually calm waters for an extended period," he told AFP.

"This leads to a combination of heat stress and the animals running out of oxygen because the water's so still. They eventually succumb... they're effectively cooked alive."

Professor Chris Battershill said the extreme conditions were unusual.

"Is it related to climate change, I think it is," he said.

"Mussels are hardy little animals -- you think about when they're

harvested they survive in the supermarket with just a little water on them.

"So it's taken extreme conditions to kill them. And when you have a number of die-offs in recent years involving a number of species then you really need to sit up and take notice."

University of Auckland marine scientist Andrew Jeffs said more mass die-offs were likely to occur as a result of climate change.

He said mussel populations would eventually move to cooler waters as temperatures rose.

Trump installs loyalists in top jobs after impeachment purge

Trusted aide Hope Hicks will return, while Trump's "body man" Johnny McEntee is getting a promotion.

(News Agencies)- President Donald Trump is surrounding himself with loyalists after a week of banishing staffers across the government in a post-impeachment revenge plot. On Thursday, the White House confirmed that Hope Hicks, one of Trump's most trusted confidants, will return to the White House to work directly for the president's son-in-law and top adviser, Jared Kushner, as a senior adviser after nearly two years away. Trump's "body man" Johnny McEntee is also being

promoted to run the office responsible for filling hundreds of top political jobs throughout the federal agencies, according to three senior administration officials, replacing Sean Doocey, who will move over to the State Department. One senior administration official said the West Wing personnel changes are likely to continue in the coming weeks to prepare for both the 2020 campaign season and a potential second term. Taken together, the moves have signaled a pattern of reinstating

and promoting those closest to Trump after purging staffers Trump viewed as insufficiently loyal or part of the alleged "deep state" plot to get him. The last seven days have seen a makeover of White House and agency offices, driven partly by Trump's desire for revenge post-impeachment and partly by his wish to staff the West Wing with people with whom he feels comfortable. The new hires and promotions like Hicks and McEntee also happen to be close with Kushner, who is



overseeing the reelection campaign and has his own influential power center within the White House. "POTUS is surrounding himself with people who believe in him and

his policy agenda," said Jason Miller, a former top communications adviser on the 2016 campaign who applauded Hicks and McEntee's return to the West Wing.

Pillowcases full of snakes keep getting dumped outside a UK fire station



(News Agencies)- Another 16 snakes have been dumped in pillowcases outside a UK fire station where 13

pythons were discovered just last week.

The latest haul of 15 corn snakes and a carpet python was found

on Saturday in a bin behind Farringdon Fire Station in Sunderland, northeast England, according to a statement from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA).

The 16 snakes were taken to the vets and found to be in fairly good condition despite their ordeal, according to RSPCA inspector Heidi Cleaver.

The inspector said she "couldn't believe" more snakes had been found in the "exact same spot" as the 13 royal pythons who were discovered on Thursday.

One of the snakes found last week has since died.

"We were in the midst of Storm Dennis at the weekend when these snakes, who need heat and light in order to survive, were left outside in the cold with just a pillowcase to contain them," said Cleaver. "It would have been very stressful for the snakes to be in such close proximity to each other as well." The UK was battered by heavy rain and strong winds during Storm Dennis over the weekend, leading to severe flooding in some areas. The RSPCA has appealed for

information about the mystery surrounding the snakes being repeatedly dumped in the area. Snakes can't maintain their body temperature by themselves and rely on their environment to do so.

If the reptiles get too cold they may be unable to feed or move as normal, and their immune system may cease to function properly, leaving them vulnerable to disease. Snakes also made headlines in the US last week after a park in the Florida was closed to the public due to a water snake orgy.

Harry and Meghan's use of the word 'Royal' being reviewed, source says

(News Agencies)-The use of the word "Royal" by Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, for their new venture is being reviewed, according to a royal source. Discussions are still underway but the likely direction is that the term will not be a part of the Sussex's branding. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex surprised the world last month when they announced plans to step back from their duties in the British royal family and "transition into a new working model."

At the same time, it emerged that couple had submitted an application for a UK trademark for the term "Sussex Royal," covering hundreds of items under the categories of printed matter, clothing, campaigning, charitable fundraising, education and social care services.

However an aide to the Queen warned the Duke and Duchess

against using the term, The Times of London newspaper reported earlier this month.

"I don't think it's satisfactory. One cannot be two things at once. You either are [royal] or you're not," Thomas Woodcock, Garter King of Arms, told the publication. Woodcock said he was speaking in a personal capacity.

"It is such unusual times that it is a matter of waiting and seeing how things develop," he added.

When Buckingham Palace outlined the new roles for Harry and Meghan last month, it said there were some issues that required additional work and consultation.

Prince Harry and Meghan agreed to stop using the titles His and Her Royal Highness, eschew some state funding and return the Sovereign Grant funds they spent to renovate



their official residence.

The source said that planning was well underway around the launch of the couple's new non-profit organization, adding that details will be shared in due course.

Harry and Meghan left for

Canada with their son Archie after the royal exit announcement.

Since then, it has been announced that the couple were closing their office at Buckingham Palace, leading to some of its 15 employees

becoming redundant. CNN understands that the couple no longer needs an office

at the Queen's main London residence since stepping back from their roles as senior members of the royal family.

'Narendra Modi and Amit Shah can't help out in Assembly elections': RSS blames 'same old formula' by BJP for Delhi poll rout

The fact that the Bharatiya Janata Party's Delhi unit was able to bag only under-10 seats in two consecutive Assembly elections has become a major matter of concern not just for the saffron party, but also for its ideological mentor the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS has found faults in Delhi BJP's poll strategy that led to the saffron party's debacle in the recently-concluded Assembly elections in Delhi. Despite an increase of 6.21 percent in its vote share from 32.3 percent in 2015 to 38.51 percent in 2020 elections, the BJP managed to win only eight seats - five more that it had won in the last elections. The Aam

Aadmi Party (AAP) swept the polls with 62 seats in the 70-seat Assembly. Notably, the AAP witnessed a marginal drop in its vote share from 54.3 percent in 2015 to 53.57 percent in 2020. The Delhi RSS feels that the BJP had been contesting Assembly elections in Delhi for the last 21 years with the same old single formula, which led to party's electoral defeat in 2015 and 2020 in spite of the Narendra Modi wave. The party failed to convert Lok Sabha gains into state elections this time. The BJP has been out of power in Delhi for the last 21 years and it couldn't win since 1998, after the fall of Sushma Swaraj-led government on the issue of rising

onion price. Absence of a credible chief ministerial face and local leadership, lack of grassroots connect, among others have contributed to the poor show by the BJP in Delhi year after year. The BJP was in power in Delhi from December 1993 to December 1998 under three chief ministers - Madan Lal Khurana, Sahib Singh Verma and Sushma Swaraj. "Delhi BJP has been contesting Assembly elections on a single formula for the last 21 years, without nurturing local leadership. The BJP doesn't have a credible local face to counter opposition," Rajiv Tuli, state executive member, RSS Delhi told Firstpost.



He added, "After tall leaders like Madan Lal Khurana, Sahib Singh Verma, Vijay Malhotra, etc, where's the second line of leadership? It was neither built nor projected. The Delhi BJP needs overhauling; it should be revamped with a long-term

vision." When asked whether communal and controversial slogans raised by BJP leaders like Anurag Thakur in the run-up to the election campaigning caused the dent, Tuli said, "They (BJP leaders) are the best judge and right people to respond.

55 Things You Need to Know About Mike Bloomberg



Mike Bloomberg's sudden climb up the polls has been fueled by an unprecedented gusher of cash, a self-funded, blank-check campaign buildup and blanket advertising designed to introduce the \$64-billion man to a national electorate that mostly didn't follow his 12-year

tenure as mayor of New York or his groundbreaking career as the founder of his eponymous financial services, data and media conglomerate. Bloomberg arrives on the debate stage Wednesday night without the year or more of coverage that has been focused on his top

rivals-to say nothing of the eight debates he missed. What do voters need to know? Here, culled from biographies, his memoir and coverage over the years in major news outlets, is a quick primer on the life of Michael Rubens Bloomberg, born on Valentine's Day in 1942 in Boston, one of the richest people in the world and the most recent entrant in this topsy-turvy 2020 presidential cycle. Wednesday night's debate in Nevada is the first for which he's qualified, the result of a change in the rules that eliminated the donor threshold. 1. His father was a bookkeeper at a dairy and never earned more than \$6,000 a year.

2. His mother persuaded the

family's Irish attorney to buy a house in suburban Medford, Massachusetts, and quickly resell it to the Bloombergs because real estate agents wouldn't sell to Jews.

3. One of Bloomberg's favorite television shows as a boy was John Cameron Swayze's "Camel News Caravan." He wrote a letter to Swayze explaining that the one-humped mascot on the cigarette package was not in fact a camel but specifically a dromedary.

4. An Eagle Scout, he escorted elderly residents to polls-including, twice, the mother of aviator Amelia Earhart. 5. His favorite book as a teenager was Johnny Tremain, the novel by

Esther Forbes about the poor boy who becomes a spy for Paul Revere. He read it, he has said, "at least 50 times."

6. At Medford High School, he was president of the slide rule club and a member of the debating society. In the yearbook, which described each senior with one word, Bloomberg was called "argumentative." He wrote a paper as a senior contending that President Franklin D. Roosevelt knew in advance about Japan's plans to attack Pearl Harbor and let it happen because he thought World War II was going to happen anyway and it would lead the United States into the conflict and out of the Depression.

The Myth of George Washington's Post-Presidency

In the wake of the Iowa and New Hampshire primaries, little sums up the confused state of the campaign to defeat President Donald Trump better than reports of Democrats seeking a savior in the most prominent natural-born citizen constitutionally ineligible for the office: former President Barack Obama.

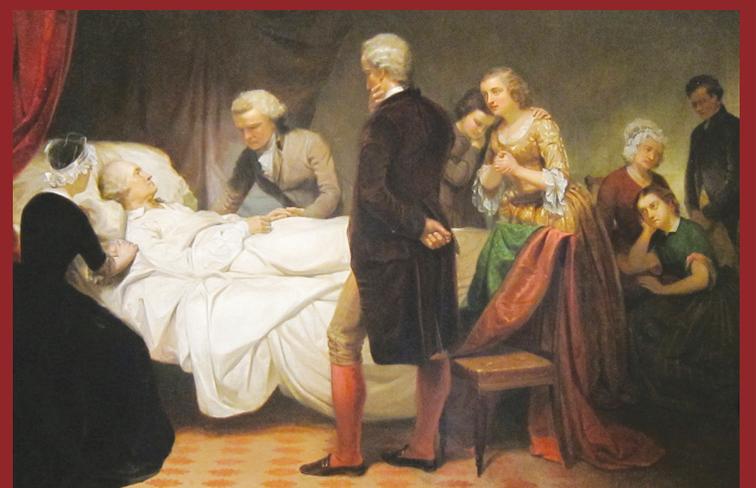
Three years after completing the maximum two full terms the 22nd Amendment allows, Obama remains the most popular figure in the Democratic Party. Even so, he has declined to use his

influence for or against any of the candidates in the party's crowded presidential primary. For his part, Obama has publicly wrestled with how to balance the obligation he feels to make his views known when America's "core values may be at stake," as he said in his final White House news conference, with a desire to uphold what he has since called a "wise American tradition of ex-presidents gracefully exiting the political stage and making room for new voices."

In Obama's telling, that tradition goes back to George

Washington. "After he led the colonies to victory as General Washington, there were no constraints on him ... no democratic norms that guided what he should or could do," Obama explained in a 2018 speech. Washington "could have made himself, potentially, president for life. Instead, he resigned as commander in chief and moved back to his country estate. Six years later, he was elected president, but after two terms, he resigned again and rode off into the sunset."

That is where Obama ended his history lesson, but that is not



how Washington's life actually ended. The story of America's first president riding off into the sunset and vacating public life

has become so much the stuff of legend that even his successors do not realize that it is only legend.

"Plenty Of Evidence" Against Vijay Mallya, India Tells UK Court During Extradition Trial



representatives.

The tycoon's lead counsel Clare Montgomery had described the case as complex and "dense" and claimed that the lower magistrate had misunderstood or misinterpreted many of the circumstances that led to the grounding of Kingfisher Airlines. Vijay Mallya, 64, was arrested in London in April 2017 after being accused by a consortium of banks of wilfully defaulting on more than Rs 9,000 Crores in debt accumulated by Kingfisher Airlines.

Later, a lower court allowed Vijay Mallya to be extradited to India on New Delhi's request.

The businessman later appealed against the verdict in High Court in UK.

The Indian government on Wednesday reiterated its accusation in a UK court that Vijay Mallya wilfully misrepresented the financial health of the now-defunct Kingfisher Airlines.

The government, represented by

the UK's Crown Prosecution Service in the hearing, insisted that there was overwhelming evidence of fraud and deception on Vijay Mallya's part. It follows arguments yesterday and early this morning by Vijay Mallya's legal

Supreme Court To Hear Vijay Mallya's Plea Against Probe Agency Next Month

Vijay Mallya said that the Enforcement Directorate attached his assets on the basis of the complaint filed by the banks that he was not repaying them.

The Supreme Court on Tuesday adjourned the plea of liquor baron Vijay Mallya, seeking a stay on the proceedings initiated by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to declare him a fugitive economic offender and confiscate his assets. The matter will now be heard in March after the Holi break of the court.

Vijay Mallya had on Thursday hit out at Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and ED saying all that investigative agencies have been doing to him over the past four years is "totally unreasonable".

Speaking to reporters after the

third day of the hearing at the UK High Court, where he has appealed against the extradition decision of Westminster Magistrates Court, Vijay Mallya had said, "CBI and ED have been unreasonable, all they have been doing to me over the past four years is totally unreasonable. I request the banks with folded hands to take 100 per cent of your principal back immediately." Vijay Mallya said that the Enforcement Directorate attached his assets on the basis of the complaint filed by the banks that he was not repaying them.

"That is clearly stated in the provisional attachment orders. I have not committed any offences under the PMLA that the ED would suo motto attach my assets. Now I am saying please banks take your money and the ED is saying - we have a claim on these assets," he said.

The fugitive liquor baron said he was mulling to honour his guarantee and pay the banks in full.

"ED on one side and banks on the other side are fighting over the same asset. I have not borrowed any money from ED. In fact, I did not borrow money myself from banks, Kingfisher airlines did. I am mulling to honour my guarantee and pay them in full," he said.

63-year-old Vijay Mallya flew out from India in March 2016 and has been living in the United Kingdom since then.

Sahara chairman Subrata Roy appears in SC, says has paid most of his dues

Sahara chairman Subrata Roy on Friday claimed in the Supreme Court that he had cleared most of the dues demanded by the market regulator to pay public depositors in his group companies, and requested that the court remove the security personnel assigned to him. A bench led by Chief Justice SA Bobde refused to change its earlier order assigning security to him after Sebi, through senior advocate Arvind Datar and standing counsel Pratap Venugopal, opposed it.

Sebi informed the court that he had so far paid only a part of the money due, including interest. Venugopal argued that the security was not for his personal

security, but to keep an eye on him and ensure that he turned up in court when required.

When senior advocate Vikas



Singh, appearing for Roy, urged the court to free the Sahara chief from his security entourage, the CJI remarked that a huge security detail was the hallmark

of a "VIP" these days, even as he stuck to the court's earlier orders. The bench, however, waived personal appearance of Roy, who was present in court during further hearings.

The top court had remanded Roy in a civil jail in 2014 over the group's failure to pay up dues estimated to be Rs 25,781 crore to Sebi. The regulator was to pay the money

to the subscribers of two schemes of the group declared illegal by the court in 2012. Roy was released on parole when his mother passed away two years

later. Sebi has contended that the total principal with interest has now crossed Rs 70,000 crore, at 15% interest on the principal amount. Roy has so far only paid Rs 15,000 crore, it said. Subrata Roy, on his part, claimed that he had paid a major portion of the dues in cash to his depositors. He also demanded a recount of his liabilities. Senior advocate Datar has earlier said in court that the regulator would accept his claims on paying in cash if he could show documents on fund inflows. All this would require a detailed hearing. Till that is done, Sahara's Roy has said that the group would not pay any more money.

Talks Accelerate For Mukesh Ambani's Planned \$15 Billion Deal: Report

Reliance in August valued its oil-to-chemicals division at \$75 billion including debt, implying a \$15 billion valuation for the 20 per cent stake. Reliance Industries Ltd.'s talks to sell a minority stake in its oil-to-chemical division to Saudi Aramco have been gathering pace in recent weeks, according to people familiar with the matter. Aramco officials and bankers on the deal have been working at Reliance's offices in Mumbai for due diligence this month, according to the people, who

asked not to be identified as the information isn't public. Both parties are trying to overcome differences over the deal's structure, which had stalled the process last year, Bloomberg News previously reported. Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance is keen to sign a binding agreement before the next annual shareholders meeting, which is due to take place before the end of September, one of the people said. Reliance in August valued its oil-to-chemicals division at \$75 billion including

debt, implying a \$15 billion valuation for the 20 per cent stake. If the deal closes at this value, it will be the largest transaction in India since Walmart Inc.'s \$16 billion acquisition of a majority stake in Flipkart Online Services Pvt. For Aramco, the deal could be its biggest since agreeing to buy a majority stake in Saudi Basic Chemicals for \$69 billion last year. Mr Ambani in August told shareholders that Reliance and Aramco had agreed to a non-binding deal for a 20 per cent



stake in the oil-to-chemical operations. But in December, the Indian government requested a court to stop the proposed sale

to help ensure the Mumbai-based company has enough assets to pay arbitration claims in an unrelated case.

Telecom sector under stress, Govt needs to focus on its sustainability: Sunil Mittal

The telecom industry, he said, is vital to the nation and the digital agenda of the government. Bharti Airtel boss Sunil Mittal on Wednesday said the telecom sector has been under stress for the last three-and-a-half years and the government should focus on its sustainability. Emerging out of the North Block after meeting top finance ministry officials, he told reporters that the issue of pending dues arising out of the

Supreme Court ruling on Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) was not discussed.

The telecom industry, he said, is vital to the nation and the digital agenda of the government.

"The only thing government needs to do is to focus on how to ensure sustainability of the sector," he said without elaborating.

He said Airtel has already announced its plans to pay the dues that arose from the apex court ruling.

The company has paid Rs 10,000 crore out of its estimated liability of over Rs 35,000 crore.

Mittal, who had first met the telecom secretary prior to going to the finance ministry, said the company is calculating its liability.

Vodafone Idea Chairman Kumar Managalam Birla, who had met the telecom secretary on Tuesday, also met finance ministry officials.

It was not clear if they met the officials together or separately.



INX Media case: Delhi court grants bail to ex-NITI Aayog CEO, others



Special Judge Ajay Kumar Kuhar also granted bail to former Officer on Special Duty (OSD) to finance minister Pradeep Kumar Bagga and former FIPB director Prabodh Saxena. A Delhi court Wednesday granted bail to former NITI Aayog CEO Sindhushree Khullar and others in the INX Media corruption case

which also involves former finance minister P Chidambaram and his son Karti as accused. Chidambarams are already on bail in the case. Special Judge Ajay Kumar Kuhar also granted bail to former Officer on Special Duty (OSD) to finance minister Pradeep Kumar Bagga and former FIPB director Prabodh

Saxena. Former section officer of the FIPB unit in the Finance Ministry, Ajeet Kumar Dungdung; the then under secretary in the FIPB unit, Rabindra Prasad and former joint secretary (Foreign Trade) DEA Anup K Pujari were also granted the relief by the court. The judge, who granted them bail on a surety of Rs 2 lakh each, directed that the accused would not leave the country without its permission. It further directed them not to tamper with the evidence or hamper the probe. The CBI had opposed their applications, saying they may tamper with evidence and flee from justice if granted the relief. While seeking bail for the accused persons, senior advocate Siddharth Luthra and advocate Vikash Kumar Pathak,

had said that the CBI did not arrest the accused persons while probing the matter. "Now while the probe is already complete and the final report filed, there is no ground to take them in custody since there is no ground to suggest that they tried to hamper the probe," they said. On Tuesday, the court directed the CBI to hand over to Chidambarams certain documents filed along with the charge sheet in the case. The judge issued the direction to the CBI during the hearing in the corruption case after the father-son duo told the court that they had not received various documents filed along with the charge sheet. P Chidambaram was taken into custody on August 21, last year when he was arrested by the Central

Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in INX Media corruption case. On October 16, the ED arrested him in the separate money-laundering case. Six days later, on October 22, the apex court had granted him bail in the case lodged by the CBI. On December 4, after 105 days of custody, Chidambaram was granted bail by the Supreme Court in the money laundering case lodged by the ED. CBI had registered its case on May 15, 2017, alleging irregularities in a Foreign Investment Promotion Board clearance granted to INX Media group for receiving overseas funds of Rs 305 crore in 2007 during Chidambaram's tenure as finance minister. Thereafter, ED had lodged the money laundering case.

'83: Presenting "The Wind Beneath Ranveer Singh's Wings" - Deepika Padukone As Romi Dev

It's finally here! Deepika Padukone dropped the first look of herself as Romi Dev in her upcoming film '83 on Wednesday and immediately sent the Internet into a tizzy. '83 revolves around the story of India's historic World Cup win in 1983 under the captaincy of Kapil Dev, played by Deepika's actor husband Ranveer Singh in the film. The actress shared a new picture of the film, which features her as Kapil Dev's wife Romi for the first time ever and her uncanny resemblance to Romi Dev will leave you in awe. In the photograph, Ranveer as Kapil Dev and Deepika as Romi stand beside each other with a

million dollar smile on their faces. It wouldn't be wrong to say that Deepika's short bob haircut stole the spotlight on the Internet. The actress looks stunning as Romi in a black and cream ensemble while Ranveer looks just like the former cricketer in a Team India blazer.

Sharing the photo, Deepika paid an "ode to every woman who puts her husband's dream before her own." She wrote in the caption: "To be able to play a small part in a film that captures one of the most iconic moments in sporting history has been an absolute honour. I've seen very closely the role a wife plays in

the success of her husband's professional and personal aspirations in my mother and '83 for me in many ways is an ode to every woman who puts her husband's dream before her own."

Ranveer, on the other hand, shared the picture with these words: "The wind beneath my wings. The heart of the hurricane." ICYDK, Kapil Dev is also known as the "Haryana hurricane." While Deepika's first look as Romi Dev arrives a couple of months before the film's release, Ranveer presented the first look of himself as 'Haryana hurricane' Kapil Dev on his



birthday on July 6 last year. Take a look: Other than Ranveer and Deepika, '83 features Harrry Sandhu, Tahir Raj Bhasin, Saqib Saleem, Ammy Virk, Jiiva, Sahil Khattar, Chirag Patil, Adinath

Kothare, Dhairya Karwa, Dinker Sharma, Jatin Sarna, Nishant Dahiya, R Badree and Boman Irani as former cricketers Madan Lal, Sunil Gavaskar, Mohinder Amarnath, Balwinder Sandhu,

Why dinner should be the lightest meal of the day



When you're asleep, the body needs to focus on rest and repair. In addition, your basal metabolic rate drops, further hampering digestion of food and absorption of nutrients.

that advice was coined. Through the day, even with a sedentary lifestyle, the body is awake and active, and that means it can digest its food effectively, and begin to use the energy created. A heavy dinner, however, means that in the sluggish hours of sleep, the body is simultaneously trying to do what it's meant to do - rest and repair - and what it now needs to do, which is digest the large meal you downed. "It doesn't help that, when you're asleep, your basal metabolic rate drops, further hampering digestion of food and absorption of nutrients," says Dr Komal Malik, a dietician at Max Smart Hospital. So what time should you have dinner? Dr Komal

recommends you eat your last meal / snack / indulgence of the day a minimum of two hours before bedtime. "In terms of how your body works, the ideal dinner time is 8 or 8.30 pm. That way there are still enough hours to digest and process the food before the body begins to get sluggish before sleep." An ideal dinner should be low on fats, sugars and carbohydrates. You're best off eating soups, khichdi, dalia, roti-sabzi and dal, or something fresh and healthy like a quinoa salad. The meal should be a combination of protein and fiber. Opt for complex carbohydrates like rotis instead of simple carbs like rice and white bread.

It is a proven fact that heavy dinners contribute to weight gain. As the adage goes, 'Breakfast like a prince, lunch like king and dine like a pauper'. And that's as true today as when

you have dinner? Dr Komal

Healthy greens: Other leaves Popeye would love

Amaranth, moras, moringa, mustard or turmeric - go beyond spinach and add these leaves to the traditional Indian diet and reap the healthy benefits

is steamed, mashed and sautéed with spices. "Amaranth leaves are rich in antioxidants, phytonutrients, minerals and vitamins and are a good source of soluble and insoluble dietary fiber," says nutritionist Sheela Joseph.

It boosts the metabolism and is therefore recommended for those with high LDL or bad cholesterol and those trying to lose weight. It is rich in Vitamin K, which boosts bone health.

"Amaranth leaves have three times more calcium and niacin than spinach. They help counter anaemia as they are a very rich source of iron. And the leaves are high in protein content", says fitness expert Nawaz Modi Singhania.

Moras -Also known as sea purslane, Moras grows in the nutrient-rich waters near

mangroves. These leaves can be used in salads, theplas, falafel etc. Because it grows on salty land, it has a salty mineral aftertaste, which is why it is used during salt-free fasting days by communities like the Gujaratis. These leaves are easy

to use - just chop them up and put them in a soup, salad, curry or bhajjya. They even add an earthy flavour to the dish. "This plant is very rich in vitamin C and has been used to treat scurvy in the past. It also has mild antibacterial and antifungal properties," says Joseph.



Turmeric - These leaves contain

curcumin, which is a powerful antioxidant and is known to trigger bile secretion, which aids in digestion. The leaves, when consumed, have remarkable anti-inflammatory properties and can help alleviate joint pain even in those suffering from arthritis. "The active ingredient curcumin promotes healing, which is why a paste from the leaves can be applied even externally, to treat minor burns, cuts and injuries," says Joseph. Turmeric leaves are used in curries in Goa. In Kerala, they are added to ghee-based sweets or pickled for later use.



There's a whole world of greens out there, packed with nutrients and available in a range of versatile flavours. Here's a look at five leaves a desi Popeye would have liked. These are greens that were part of traditional Indian diets and are now being rediscovered. The best

part, you can even grow them in large pots in your home. Amaranth Grows across the country, and is available in green, gold, purple and red. It is sold as chaulai in Hindi-speaking regions; cheera in Kerala; and eaten as keerai masiyal in Tamil Nadu, where it

Love Aaj Kal movie review

Sara Ali Khan, Kartik Aaryan's Valentine's Day offering is love's labour's lost

Love Aaj Kal movie review: Imtiaz Ali Imtiaz invites you into the world of imperfect people, complex situations and dysfunctional relationships, but fails to weave it all together despite good performances by Sara Ali Khan and Kartik Aaryan.

Love Aaj Kal

Cast: Kartik Aaryan, Sara Ali Khan, Randeep Hooda, Aarushi Sharma

Director: Imtiaz Ali

First thought that comes to your mind after watching Imtiaz Ali's Valentine's Day offering, Love Aaj Kal is what could have prompted the filmmaker to tell a decade old story again, with modern characters who are messed up, uncertain and frivolous? Or was it just a mindless decision to cash in on the craze his lead pair - Kartik Aaryan and Sara Ali Khan - generated ever since Sara expressed her wish to 'date' Kartik, on Koffee With Karan? Irrespective of the reason, with this reboot of his own 2009 film by the same name, Imtiaz once again invites you into the world of imperfect people, complex

situations and dysfunctional relationships, and fails to weave it all together. A visibly off and awkward Veer (Kartik) meets a career-driven, high-on-life-and-booze Zoe (Sara) at a bar and they end up together in bed. However, Veer stops midway, leaving her high and dry because he feels they need to be more 'serious' before they make love. He soon turns into a stalker, landing up at the same co-working space where Zoe works, which is owned by Raghu (Randeep Hooda). Now, Raghu is a brooding loner who once gave up everything in Udaipur to be with the girl he loved, Leena (newcomer Aarushi Sharma) in Delhi, but soon turned into a Casanova who hooked up with almost every woman he met.

Back to the lead pair, while Zoe

has her five-year plan in place - she wants to start her event management company and only then get into a long-term relationship; Veer, a techie, is not much of a planner. He just lands up on his bike to pick and drop Zoe at her meetings/dates each time an Uber fails to reach her location. After resisting initially, Zoe eventually falls for him and a series of conflicts with each other and their inner selves soon follow. On one hand, you have Kartik telling Sara that, 'The day you feel I've started to annoy you, I'll move away from your life', and on the other, Randeep can't stop narrating his own 'fairy-tale' and becoming the reason why Sara questions her own choices. Whoever said complex love stories make for great cinema, please wake up and



smell the coffee. You can either deal with complex characters or a complex story but mix up both and it's the audience that ends up feeling helpless and confused. That's somewhat the emotion I was left with after watching Love Aaj Kal. While Kartik and Sara put their best foot forward as Zoe and Veer to make you believe in their unbelievably complex love story, it's the tedious narrative and screenplay that ruined it for

me. A slow and boring first half is followed by a seemingly predictable second half, making you yawn at multiple places. Just like the original, this film, too, cut between two timelines but awfully choppy editing doesn't let you remain invested in either of them. The flashback sequences of Randeep's story gets interrupted way too often to accommodate the present-day setup.

To All the Boys PS I Still Love You movie review

Netflix rom-com nails the Noah Centineo vibe



To All the Boys PS I Still Love You movie review: Noah Centineo and Lana Condor reprise the roles that propelled them to internet fame, in Netflix's conventionally dependable romantic comedy.

To All the Boys: PS I Still Love You

Director - Mike Fimognari

Cast - Lana Condor, Noah Centineo, Jordan Fisher

Testing the limits of fantasy and the human ability to suspend disbelief, the complicatedly titled To All the Boys: PS I Still Love You expects you to believe in a universe where Noah Centineo can be rejected for someone else.

An entire film (To All The Boys I've Loved Before) was dedicated to indoctrinating unsuspecting audiences into his cult. But this time, in the cruelest example of cinematic subversion, debutante

director Mike Fimognari takes on the unenviable task of introducing a third wheel who not just goes toe-to-toe with Centineo in the swoon department, but also asserts himself as the obvious choice for the foolishly conflicted Lara Jean.

After spending an entire film pretending to be in love with Peter Kavinsky, Lara Jean is hit with a dilemma when a childhood crush appears out of nowhere and expresses his long-dormant feelings for her.

Lara Jean, meanwhile, is trying to make sense of emotions she's never felt before. Does she deserve Peter? Is she worthy of

him? Does he still have feelings for his ex? It is rather outdated, rationally speaking, to show such self-pity on screen anymore. But simply because the portrayal of a certain kind of behaviour is unpopular doesn't mean that Lara Jean's emotions are in any way invalid.

John Ambrose McClaren's sudden arrival only complicates matters more. Crippled with insecurity and curiously prone to making bad decisions, Lara Jean rekindles her friendship with him, without ever disclosing that she is dating Peter. There is a wonderfully overwrought plot at the centre of PS I Still Love You; it's a far less novel and infinitely more conventional high school romance than its predecessor, To All the Boys I've Loved Before, which in 2018 gave the kiss of life to a dying genre, and almost singlehandedly revived the rom-com. Unlike, say, Sex Education, Netflix's other breakout hit about

teenagers learning to navigate the harshness of high school, PS I Still Love You is ever so slightly removed from reality. Fimognari overdramatises recognisable experiences with the hope that its target audience will immediately connect with the characters, and older viewers will perhaps be reminded of the days when they, too, were making similarly irrational decisions.

Best known for his collaborations with director Mike Flanagan, Fimognari has shot PS I Still Love You himself, giving it a lush look that mimics the hazy romanticism of an Instagram filter. Certain frames, especially those involving a meal, are shot from above, composed like your best friend's food posts put through Perpetua. When a character receives a text, not only does the chat window appear on screen - this is a somewhat tired trope now, anyway - it is, on occasion,

accompanied by iMessage confetti and firecrackers.

Even as Imtiaz Ali struggles to remain relevant to millennials, convinced that the best way to communicate with them is through hashtags and stuff, Fimognari has learned their visual language in a manner that isn't as obvious, and subliminally successful at representing the voice of the characters whose stories he's telling. You and I weren't allowed to bring cellphones to school; high schoolers these days have probably had one in their hands since the day they were born. Phones are a vital part of their lives, and not necessarily the unnecessary distraction slightly older people might think of them as. The teenage experience rarely changes, regardless of which generation is living it - bullies are mean and first love is sacred - and thankfully, PS I Still Love You understands that.

Irrfan Khan starrer Angrezi Medium's to be released on March 20th, 2020

Jio Studios and Prem Vijan present Angrezi medium, a Maddock films production, directed by Homi Adajania, produced by Dinesh Vijan, releases on March 20.

For most daughters, their father is their super hero. Directed by Homi Adajania, Angrezi Medium, captures the heart-warming relationship between a single father, Irrfan Khan, and his daughter, Radhika Madan. With the trailer releasing today, Father's Day seems to be coming early this year.

Irrfan opened his heart to his fans with a voice message on the eve of trailer launch of his much awaited sequel to Hindi Medium. Sharing that while he won't be able to promote the film owing to his illness, he shared how Angrezi Medium has been an extra special journey.



As the trailer begins, Irrfan will bring a warm smile to your face with his opening statement, 'Inside I am very emotional... outside I am very happy... bas itni hi Angrezi aave hai humein'.

Speaking on Irrfan and the film, Director Homi Adajania says, "I love Irrfan more than I know how to say. Considering everything, I'm not really sure how we managed to make this film, but I do know that we chose to laugh through most of it. It's shown me a lighter way of being and I'll always cherish this."

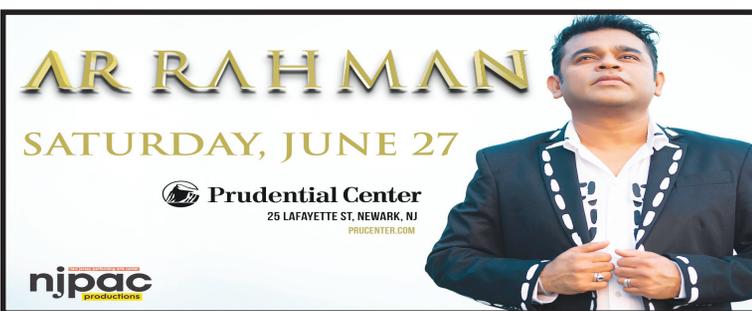
Producer Dinesh Vijan shares, "Angrezi is a special film for all of us and i have so many mixed feelings. I've seen Irrfan through this entire process and it's been a rollercoaster ride full of emotions. It's all heart and

I hope that every child and parent will connect with it."

Jyoti Deshpande, President - Media & Entertainment, RIL adds, "Ever so rarely comes along a film that is beautiful in every possible way. Heart-warming and soulful, making you laugh and cry at the same time, Angrezi Medium is a rare gem that Jio Studios is incredibly proud to present as part of our collaboration with Maddock Films. "

The story of the film revolves around an adoring father who goes to bizarre lengths to fulfil his daughter's dream. The movie also stars Kareena Kapoor Khan, Deepak Dobriyal, Ranvir Shorey, Kiku Sharda, and Dimple Kapadia in pivotal roles. Irrfan will be surely missed during the campaign but in his words, we will wait for him.

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(Newark, NJ) - Oscar Award, a Golden Globe, four National Film Awards, fifteen Filmfare Awards and thirteen Filmfare Awards South in addition to numerous other awards and nominations. In 2009, TIME Magazine placed Rahman in its list of World's Most Influential People. A.R. Rahman's 2020 concert tour will feature songs in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and English. Tickets go on sale to the general public starting Friday, Feb. 14 at 10 a.m. ET at Ticketmaster.com. Tickets will be available in person at Prudential Center Box Office on Monday, Feb. 17. For more information, please visit Prucenter.com.

The hottest Bollywood dance track of 2020 has arrived with Dus Bahane 2.0 from the upcoming Tiger Shroff film BAAGHI 3



which hits theaters across North America on March 6. BAAGHI 3 is Directed by Ahmed Khan starring Tiger Shroff, Shraddha Kapoor, and Riteish Deshmukh. Ronnie and Vikram are brothers who share an unbreakable bond. Since childhood, Ronnie always

comes to the rescue whenever Vikram falls in any trouble. Their journey begins when a certain turn in events, leads Vikram to travel abroad to complete some work. On this trip, Vikram gets kidnapped by people who are not to be messed with but as Ronnie witnesses his brother getting

beaten and kidnapped, he knows that he will do whatever it takes to destroy anyone and anything that stands in the way of Vikram's safety. Ronnie goes on a rampage of destruction to see his brother safe again, even if it means that he independently has to take on an entire country.

BEHIND THE SCENES: AKSHAY KUMAR SUMS UP HIS SHOOTING EXPERIENCE WITH KATRINA KAIF



Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar who recently completed the shooting of his upcoming movie 'Sooryavanshi' took to Twitter to share a behind the scenes image from the sets. The image sees Akshay Kumar embracing his co-star Katrina Kaif by the sea as both the actors stare out into the sunset with smiles on their faces. Akshay Kumar looks dapper as usual in a blue shirt

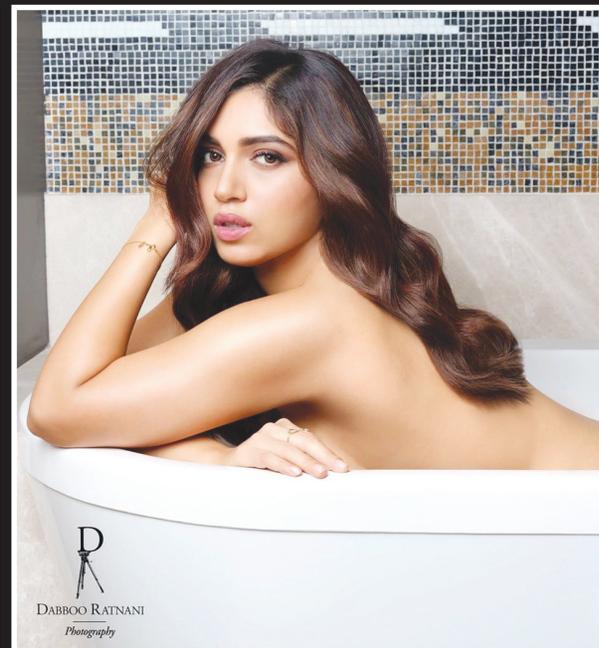
and Katrina can be seen wearing a floral ensemble. Akshay Kumar described working with Katrina Kaif through the picture and captioned the tweet saying 'If I had to describe shooting with #KatrinaKaif in one picture, this would be it :) #G o o d V i b e s O n l y #Sooryavanshi #BTS'. The pair are reuniting on screen after a gap of nearly 10 years and have

previously featured in hit films such as Singh is King, Namastey London and Welcome.

Akshay Kumar has three exciting films lined up for 2020, the actor will be seen next in Rohit Shetty's cop universe saga Sooryavanshi, followed by horror-comedy Laxmmi Bomb and he will be ending the year with historical drama Prithviraj based on the heroic Prithviraj Chauhan.

Girl On Fire: Kiara Advani's Shot From The Dabboo Ratnani Calendar Is Setting The Internet Ablaze

The calendar by Dabboo Ratnani features the A-listers of Bollywood, from Shah Rukh Khan to the Bachchans



Celebrity photographer Dabboo Ratnani recently launched his much-awaited annual calendar for this year and it features Bollywood's A-listers such as the Bachchans, Shah Rukh Khan, Vidya Balan, Alia Bhatt, Anushka Sharma, Abhishek Bachchan and Bhumi Pednekar among others. A day after the launch, Kiara Advani posted her picture from the calendar photoshoot on her Instagram profile, that will leave you amazed. In the picture, the 27-year-old actress of Kabir Singh fame can be seen posing naked with a leaf. Sunny Leone also gave us a glimpse from her

Dabboo Ratnani calendar photoshoot, on her Instagram profile. Leading actors such as Abhishek Bachchan and Vicky Kaushal also posted pictures from their photoshoot on their Instagram profile. Besides Kiara Advani and Sunny Leone, actresses such as Jacqueline Fernandez and Kriti Sanon also posted pictures from their photoshoot on Instagram. Bhumi Pednekar and Ananya Pandey, who made their debut in Dabboo Ratnani's calendar this year, posted their pictures from the photoshoot the morning after the launch event. While Bhumi could

be seen posing naked in a bathtub, Ananya could be seen wearing a silver jacket and neon shorts and posing with a football. The calendar launch on Monday was attended by celebrities such as Rekha, Jackie Shroff, Vidya Balan, Bhumi Pednekar, Sunny Leone among others. The celebrity photographer's most-awaited calendar also features the Bachchans, Shah Rukh Khan, Vidya Balan, Alia Bhatt, Anushka Sharma, Parineeti Chopra, Akshay Kumar, Hrithik Roshan, Vicky Kaushal, John Abraham, Kartik Aaryan, Tiger Shroff and Varun Dhawan.





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Wine vs. weed in Napa Valley

Grape growers worry that pot won't pair well with the terroir they have spent a century and a half cultivating



the Napa County Farm Bureau, which has taken a strong position against cannabis cultivation. "Napa is an internationally recognized brand, and you don't want anything to disrupt the brand."

Napa County has explicitly banned commercial cannabis growing in its unincorporated rural areas, where most vineyards lie. Local farmers and winemakers are keen on protecting Napa, but they have philosophically opposing views on how weed could affect the region's reputation - which could be tested this year if residents get a chance to vote on allowing cannabis cultivation.

Some winemakers see marijuana as a threat to their image and, potentially, the quality of their grapes. But others see cannabis as the only real way to diversify the county's grape-dominant

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(News Agencies)- Napa Valley is famous for its cabernet sauvignon. But with the cannabis industry moving in fast, some of the region's storied vintners are sounding the alarm that California's newest legal crop could damage the flavor - and brand - of their prized wines. Those grape growers worry that pot won't pair well with the terroir they have spent a century and a half cultivating. "You have to protect the Napa name," said Ryan Klobas, CEO of

In Prez Trump's remarks on India visit, a hint about the 'big trade deal'

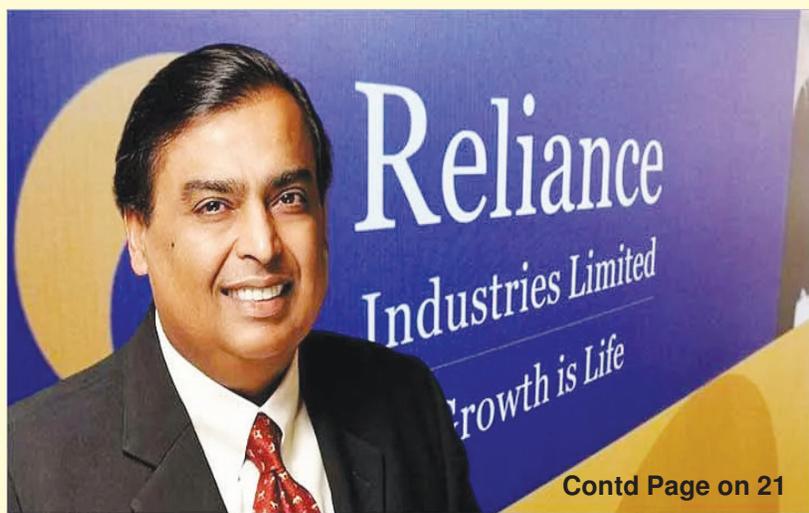


(News Agencies)- President Donald Trump downplayed a limited trade deal that was supposed to be announced during his upcoming visit to India but is currently mired in uncertainty and said Tuesday he was "saving the big deal for later on", possibly after the US election in November when he will be seeking a second term. Trump did not seem happy about the situation though. Speaking to reporters before leaving town for a string of election rallies, he fell back to his old grievances about India on trade saying the United States is "not treated very well by India". But he was letting it slide because, one, he likes Prime Minister Narendra Modi "a lot"; and, two, he is looking forward to seeing millions of people welcome him in Ahmedabad. Prospects of the announcement of a trade deal during Trump's visit dimmed considerably

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Reliance Industries to consolidate media, distribution businesses

TV18 Broadcast, Hathway Cable, DEN Networks to merge under Network18



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Sen. Tom Cotton stands by startling theory on coronavirus origins: 'We need to be open to all possibilities'

(News Agencies)- Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark. stood by his earlier suggestion that the deadly coronavirus may have originated in a high-security biochemical lab in Wuhan, China, telling "The Story" Tuesday that we "need to be open to all possibilities" in exploring the origins of the outbreak that has sickened more than 75,000 people around the world.



international science journal." "I'm suggesting we need to be open to all possibilities and we need to demand that China open up and be transparent so a team of international experts can figure out exactly where this virus originated," Cotton said. He also brought up the

When host Martha MacCallum pressed the senator on his startling and unverified claim, Cotton cited a study published by Chinese scientists in The Lancet, which he called a "respected

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