



## How Mehul Choksi's Empire Came Crashing Down?

Contd on page 22

### Rob Walker surrendered to authorities He was indicted on federal charges, Gets bail



Edward Mangano, has been indicted on federal charges of obstructing justice and lying to FBI agents just weeks before the scheduled start of his former boss' corruption trial. Walker, a former Republican state assemblyman from

(By our staff reporter) Hicksville, surrendered to federal officials on Thursday in served as chief deputy to former U.S. District Court in Central Nassau County Executive Islip. **(Contd on page 2)**

### Rotomac owner, son arrested in Rs 3,700 crore cheating case



NEW DELHI: The Bank Securities and Fraud Cell of CBI made another high-profile arrest in its probes in bank-frauds - this time Rotomac's promoter Vikram Kothari and his son Rahul Kothari **(Contd on page 23)**

### How Khalistani terrorist Jaspal Atwal got visa ?

Ministry of external affairs says it is ascertaining how visa was issued to convicted Khalistani terrorist Jaspal Atwal.



Indian Government. was never have received the "ascertaining" details about invitation to the official dinner as the incident made convicted Khalistani terrorist Jaspal Atwal got a visa as the incident made headlines. "Let us not presume things and decide how he managed to come. as Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau said the Indo-Canadian businessman should **(Contd on page 23)**

# ***AAPI's 36th annual Convention & Scientific Assembly to be held at Columbus Convention Center***

***Ambassadors Nikki Haley, Navtej Singh Sarna to attend and address the delegates at the convention***

Columbus, OH - February 18, 2018: "The 36th Annual Convention & Scientific Assembly of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI) will be held at the Columbus Convention Center, OH July 4-8, 2018," Dr. Gautam Samadder, President of AAPI, announced here. "The 2018 AAPI Convention offers a rare platform to interact with leading physicians, health professionals, academicians, and scientists of Indian origin," he

added. Ambassador Nikki Haley, the top American diplomat and US Ambassador to the United Nations, and Ambassador Navtej Singh Sarna, an Indian author-columnist, diplomat and current Indian Ambassador to the US, have agreed to attend the AAPI convention and address the delegates, Dr. Samadder announced. He had met with the top-diplomats of Indian origin recently at the Indian Embassy in Washington, DC and had won their for-

mal acceptance to be part of the convention.

AAPI's mission is to provide a forum to facilitate and enable Indian American physicians to excel in patient care, teaching and research, and to pursue their aspirations in professional and community affairs. For 36 years, the AAPI Convention has provided a venue for medical education programs and symposia with world renowned physicians on the cutting edge of medicine.



# ***Former Mangano aide Rob Walker surrendered to authorities after indictment on federal charges***

Walker, identified in the indictment and court papers by his given name, Richard — declined to comment as he walked into the federal courthouse. He pleaded not guilty before Magistrate Anne Shields, who released him on bail of \$200,000 bond. As per media reports, the case against Walker, 43, of Hicksville, centers around a \$5,000 payment made to him in Indiana at a University of Notre Dame football game in 2014 by an unnamed contractor, and Walker's attempts to conceal the payment from investigators. The letter says the charges are part of an ongoing

investigation "into whether public officials in Nassau County, including Walker, accepted payments from contractors with Nassau County and whether the individuals involved have obstructed the investigation and given false statements to federal law enforcement officials."

Few informed members of the South Asian community are openly speculating on social media about possible involvement of, and delay in law enforcement action against so-called "Political Dealers of Community". These dealers are rumored to have engaged in a variety of schemes to extort money from

community by promising, and in many cases getting them "Fast & Furious", but most likely unlawful favors. These favors, like fast track permits/approvals/plans for commercial/residential construction, unauthorized/unregistered access/representations/liaison to politicians, unreported money lending, money laundering, Channeling funds, coercive fundraisers, arranging promotions/jobs for friends and relatives. These dealers are also learned to have used symbolic threats against many law abiding members of the community to silence them.

**Speculations rise in community about possible involvement of a few South Asian political dealers, including a newspaper publisher who was fired by Mangano from his County Job**



# ***Charges Dropped against NUMC Doctor Venkatesh Sasthakonar***



EAST MEADOW, NY— A Nassau University Medical Center doctor who was accused of strangling a nurse was exonerated of all the charges against him at the request of the District Attorney's office, citing a lack of evidence against the doctor.

Venkatesh Sasthakonar, a

weight loss surgeon at NUMC in East Meadow, was arrested on Jan. 22 and charged with attacking an unnamed nurse, authorities say. At the time of his arrest, police said he came up from behind her and wrapped a plastic cord around his neck to strangle her. Police said it followed an argu-

ment the two had over treating a patient.

"Dr. Sasthakonar has maintained his innocence from the moment he was wrongly arrested," the law firm representing Sasthakonar, the Garden City-based Barket Marion Epstein & Kearon, LLP, said in a statement. "The charges were fabricated by a nurse that he was reprimanding for engaging in a serious breach of pre-surgical hospital protocols." Sasthakonar was suspended from his position at NUMC after his arrest. His lawyer said the hospital board is meeting today to discuss it, and he expects Sasthakonar to be reinstated shortly.

The Nassau County Police Department released a statement regarding Sasthakonar's original arrest. Police officers responded to Nassau University Medical Center for an assault assignment," Det.

Michael Bitsko said in the statement. "The victim, who was being treated for injuries, stated they occurred as a result of a confrontation with the defendant. Based on this sworn statement, as well as medical records, probable cause existed to effect the arrest of the defendant and he was placed into custody. Due to HIPPA regulations there are no video surveillance cameras in this area of the hospital, therefore, there is no video surveillance of the incident.

According to Newsday, a group of supporters were waiting outside of the courtroom to congratulate Sasthakonar after his exoneration. They were made up of fellow doctors and some of his patients.

"[Sasthakonar] is thrilled to have his complete exoneration made at the request of the District Attorney's office a mere three weeks after charges



were brought," his law firm said in its statement. "Dr. Sasthakonar is grateful for the diligent investigation conducted by the District Attorney's office, who ultimately agreed that no crime was committed and that charges should have never been brought. He would also like to thank his colleagues and the board at NUMC for their support and for their anticipated decision to reinstate him immediately upon dismissal of the charges."

# Ford Ousts Chief of North American Unit, for 'Inappropriate Behavior'

Ford Motor ousted one of its most senior officials on Wednesday over what it called "inappropriate behavior," adding to the turmoil at a company already struggling to lift its profits and plot a new strategic course.

The official, Raj Nair, had been an executive vice president and the head of Ford's North American operations since June. He had previously served as Ford's chief technology officer during his three-decade career with the automaker.

"We made this decision after a thorough review and careful consideration," Ford's chief executive, Jim Hackett, said in a statement released by the company. "Ford is deeply committed to providing and nurturing a safe and respectful culture, and we expect our leaders to fully uphold these values."

In recent months, there has been a wave of dismissals and resignations of powerful corporate officials after revelations about workplace misconduct, including sexual harassment. Mr. Nair's departure from Ford is one of the most prominent ousters outside the media and entertainment industries.

Concerns over the workplace culture at Ford have become a persistent problem for the company. Details of sexual and racial harassment of female workers

at two of the automaker's plants were uncovered in a New York Times investigation published in December.

Ford declined to elaborate on the nature of Mr. Nair's actions, but said that an internal investigation had determined that they had been inconsistent with the company's code of conduct.

Replacing Mr. Nair as head of North American operations will be Kumar Galhotra, Ford's chief marketing officer and head of the Lincoln brand, the company announced Thursday. He is a 29-year Ford veteran. Stuart Rowley, the automaker's vice president for strategy, will become chief operating officer of the North American business.

Ford was dealing with turbulence in its executive ranks even before the departure of Mr. Nair. Last May, the automaker named Mr. Hackett its new chief executive, replacing Mark Fields. Mr. Hackett, a former chief executive of the office-furniture maker Steelcase, had been running Ford's activities related to self-driving cars.

Since then, Mr. Hackett has sketched the outlines of a new strategy to guide Ford, although investors have remained uninspired and its stock has slumped. In January, the company reported a decline in profit in 2017, and warned that little

improvement was likely in 2018.

"Investors and analysts have been unhappy with the seeming lack of a clear direction for Ford, especially in terms of future mobility services," said Michelle Krebs, executive analyst at Autotrader.com. "The pressure is on Jim Hackett to lay out a clear road ahead for Ford."

Mr. Nair, 53, had been seen as a rising star at the automaker, and a potential future chief executive.

He studied mechanical engineering at Kettering University in Flint, Mich., and joined Ford shortly after graduating in 1987. He worked his way up through the engineering ranks with stints in Asia, where he worked closely with Joe Hinrichs, currently Ford's president of global automotive operations.

In 2012, Mr. Nair was named chief technology officer and head of vehicle development. In that post, he oversaw the development of several important models, including the aluminum-bodied F-150 pickup truck that went into production in 2014. Under his direction, Ford set a plan to develop a fully self-driving car, with no steering wheel, and begin mass production of it by 2021.

Shortly before Mr. Hackett was named chief executive, Mr. Nair was one of at



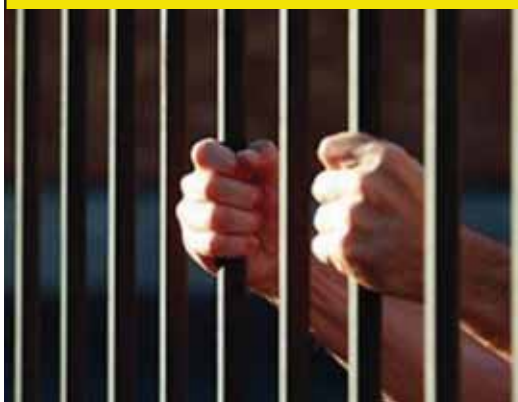
least four top officials given special stock-based retention bonuses. His package was worth \$5 million but was not due to vest until 2020.

After Mr. Hackett arrived, Mr. Nair was put in charge of North America, Ford's largest and most profitable region. The assignment, however, was something of a demotion, moving Mr. Nair from a global post to a regional job.

In a statement issued by Ford on Wednesday, Mr. Nair was contrite.

"I sincerely regret that there have been instances where I have not exhibited leadership behaviors consistent with the principles that the company and I have always espoused," Mr. Nair said in the statement. "I continue to have the utmost faith in the people of Ford Motor Company and wish them continued success in the future."

## Indian faces jail, caning for attempt to murder student nurse



SINGAPORE: An Indian national faces life or 20 years in prison with possible caning for attempted murder of a student nurse who had spurned his advances, according to a media report. The 34-year-old man, whose name has been redacted from court documents, denied he had any intention to kill her in December 2013 but claimed he had taken a knife with him to meet her as he intended to commit suicide in front of her. The Straits Times reported on Thursday. But he could not recall what had happened when he stabbed her at the void deck of an apartment block where the student nurse lived.

Justice Woo Bih Li found that the accused had intended to kill the victim, who was 20 at the time, pointing to her testimony, the accused's statements to the police, and the way he had "repeatedly, relentlessly and forcefully" attacked her.

(Contd on page 22)

## New York Man Pleads Guilty to Attempting to Provide Material Support to ISIS and Passport Fraud

Sajmir Alimehmeti, aka, Abdul Qawii, 24, of the Bronx, New York, pleaded guilty today to attempting to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), a designated foreign terrorist organization, and to committing passport fraud in order to facilitate an act of international terrorism. Alimehmeti pleaded guilty today to a Superseding Indictment in Manhattan federal court before U.S. District Judge Paul A. Engelmayer.

Acting Assistant Attorney General for National Security Edward C. O'Callaghan and U.S. Attorney Geoffrey S. Berman for the Southern District of New York made the an-

nouncement.

According to the allegations in the Superseding Indictment and the Complaint filed in this case, statements made during the plea proceeding, and other documents filed in the public record:

In October 2014, Alimehmeti attempted to enter the United Kingdom but was denied entry after U.K. authorities found camouflage clothing and nunchucks in his luggage. About two months later, in December 2014, Alimehmeti was again denied entry into the United Kingdom, this time after U.K. authorities found that his cellphone contained images of ISIS

flags. Further forensic examination of the contents of the cellphone and Alimehmeti's laptop computer showed numerous indicia of Alimehmeti's support for ISIS, including a photograph of Alimehmeti with an ISIS flag in the background, images of ISIS fighters in the Middle East, a photograph of Alimehmeti making a gesture of support for ISIS, various files relating to jihad and martyrdom, and electronic communications in which Alimehmeti assisted another ISIS supporter in efforts to travel to Syria to join ISIS by providing contact information for an ISIS affiliate who could facilitate the travel.

(Contd on page 21)

## Indian-origin illegal moneylender jailed in UK

LONDON: An Indian-origin businessman who ran an unauthorised money-lending service in the UK has been sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison after being found guilty of crimes under the country's financial regulations.

Dharam Prakash Gopee, charged under the the UK's Consumer Credit Act 1974 and the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, has also been issued with a Serious Crime Prevention Order (SCPO), which will severely restrict the 64-year-old's ability to carry out any illegal money-lending activity in future. The UK's Financial Conduct Au-

thority (FCA) said this was the first case where it had sought such an order, which underlines the seriousness of the case. "The court is sending a very clear message that deliberate and repeated offending will lead to long periods of imprisonment. The FCA will continue to take whatever action is necessary to bring offenders to justice and protect consumers," said Mark Steward, Director of Enforcement and Market Oversight at the FCA. Between 2012 and 2016, Gopee acted as an illegal lender despite being refused a consumer credit licence by the

UK's Office of Fair Trading (OFT) and failing to secure authorisation from the FCA. According to the FCA, he loaned money to vulnerable consumers at high rates, securing the loans against their property, and then sought to take possession if they failed to pay.

Over the four-year period, his own loan books showed that he issued approximately 1 million pounds of new loans and took in at least 2 million pounds in payments from old and new consumers, none of whom were aware that he did not have a licence.

(Contd on page 22)

# India is losing languages

## Apart from a cultural loss, the process can also hamper governance

Many argue that there is no harm in losing languages; it is part of an evolutionary process. But every language is a unique world view and a repository of traditional knowledge...losing them would be disastrous

Last week, the Census directorate said more than 42 languages or dialects in India are heading towards extinction as fewer than 10,000 people speak them. This is not surprising because the process of extinction had started decades ago, an aspect that has been captured well in Ganesh Devy's The People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI), which was released last year. The PLSI recorded 780 languages in the country, of which 400 are dying. The languages that are dying are mostly the ones which never had a script, and are used by

marginal groups such as tribal communities. If one delves into India's political history, the marginalisation of certain languages started in 1926. That year, the idea of organising India on the lines of linguistic states came up. Languages that had scripts were counted, and the ones without a script, and therefore, no printed literature, did not get their own states. Schools and colleges were established only in the official languages.

Many argue that there is no harm in losing languages; it is part of the process of linguistic evolution. "As an argument, it is

okay. But every language is a unique world view and a repository of traditional knowledge...losing them would be disastrous," Mr Devy said in an interview. Moreover, language is also not just words and grammar; it is also about political power and citizens' bargaining power vis-a-vis the State. The lack of a common language between a local administrator and the citizens cripples communication and gets in the way of articulating needs.

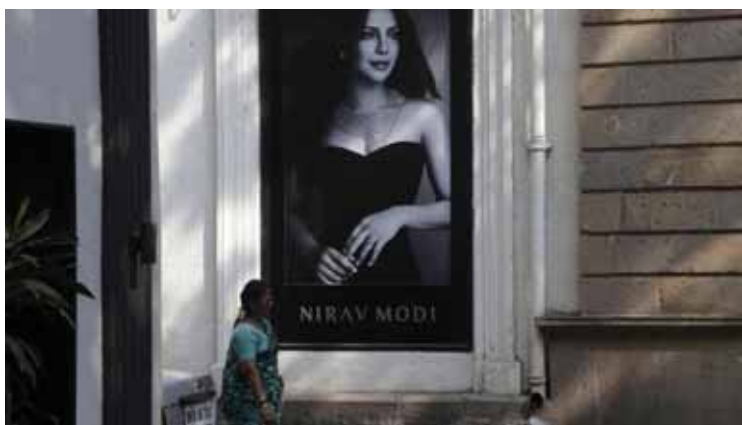
Take, for example, the tribal communities of Chhattisgarh. Many of them cannot speak in



the link language, Hindi. How will they communicate with the State? Many believe that if the State had given importance to tribal languages, the Maoists, who, among other things, have also exploited the communication vacuum between

the State and citizens, would not have managed to become so dominant in the state. Even today, if the State starts working on tribal dialects and starts education in those languages, it would go a long way towards solving the problem.

## Questionable acquisitions: Diamonds with a conscience, anybody?



What would you do with a beautiful piece of jewellery or a luxury item if it turns out that the maker of the brand is a fraud, molester or racist? Amid the rubble of post-scam deconstructions of diamond merchant Nirav Modi, the soft-spoken purveyor of culture and art who hired exceptional photographers and models for his campaigns even as he allegedly duped bankers, this question assumes significance. How does the value of the product change for the consumer once the brand falls from grace? Does an expensive, coveted acquisition bought to make the customer stand out become an embarrassment? For those of us in the business of writing on luxury brands — programmed to find new superlatives for designers, style icons and fashion photographers — the job is becoming tougher by

the day. Luxury and glamour stories must now come with additional vetting — the moral and ethical credentials of the brands as well as their makers. Just recently, The Boston Globe published an investigative report on sexual harassment in the western modelling industry based on the testimony of more than 50 models. Among those named is legendary photographer, Patrick Demarchelier. A sought-after name among fashion titles and luxury brands, he was also commissioned by Nirav Modi for a campaign with Priyanka Chopra and Rosie Huntington-Whiteley last year.

Luxury and fashion marketing have perhaps never been more complicated as a profession. If a model is sexually molested while working for a particular brand, the repercussions of the incident have a ripple effect on the reputation of the brand itself. If an advertising campaign is

### How does the value of the product change for the consumer once the brand falls from grace?

racist or gender insensitive, the product, however good, tends to suffer a dent to its reputation. H&M got a great deal of flak last month because of an advertising campaign in which a black child modelled a green hoodie with the slogan, "The Coolest Monkey in the Jungle". The company rushed to control damage; it ended up recruiting a diversity leader (a professional who will ensure that diversity is reflected in the brand's campaigns). Calvin Klein got away for four decades showing gang violence, drug use and pornographic visuals in its underwear campaigns until protests by advertising watchdogs stopped all that. Now, as financial frauds, reports of ecological exploitation, sexual misconduct and other unacceptable kinds of behaviour in fashion and luxury emerge almost every day, even consumers, especially those labelled as High Net Worth Individuals (HNWI) or Ultra High Net Worth Individuals (UHNWI) might have to take ownership of their choices. No one can sense a fraud, a molester or racist through their wares. But it may be time to question if a diamond necklace by Nirav Modi will

become a family heirloom for future generations of his clients, or if awe-inspiring couture by John Galliano, accused of pro-Nazi sentiments and removed by Dior as its creative director in 2011, will find a place in the buyer's wardrobe?

World views change, facts change, and consumer priorities must change with them. In the current scenario, a crocodile skin Hermes Birkin bag or a shahtoosh shawl made from hair of Tibetan antelopes are not luxury possessions; they are questionable choices.

The artist-versus-art debate is the new black in the creative industry. Woody Allen's tarnished reputation versus the memorable films he has made and still makes; Kevin Spacey's extraordinary acting talent versus allegations of sexual molestation; or famed Peruvian photographer Mario Testino's fashion styling versus his sexual misconduct: is it possible to think of one thing without the other? So also for Nirav Modi, a law-breaker of another kind. A consumer may be unsure of giving pride of place to his jewellery for which she paid lakhs or crores, but finds herself feeling ethically duped. Putting

things in perspective, though, may help. Did you buy the piece because of its craftsmanship or because you wanted to own diamonds by a jeweller who is a social celebrity and endorsed by the rich and famous? Do you crave diamonds with a conscience or those with faultless shine, worth and resale value?

The questions will be different for buyers of luxury handbags made from the skins of animals which were made to suffer in the process. Yet again, what position do we take on Marchesa gowns co-created by Georgina Chapman, the wife of movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, who pushed them on famous women he sexually harassed. Does the fallout of the Weinstein scandal affect the luxury couture made by the wife? In business theory, consumers are the ultimate brand. They make or break a brand's worth on scales of innovation, promise, positioning, quality, myth or social connect. Fraud and ethical bankruptcy are reasons enough to decide if Nirav Modi diamonds are luxury or just epitaphs on a business gone wrong.

# Nirav Modi

**Be they the cooperative bank scamsters of Maharashtra or the chit fund frauds of West Bengal, the powerless poor get robbed all the time.**

All that sparkles is often an ugly, behind-the-counter scam. And this counter is mostly likely an extension of a paan-stained public sector bank employee's cabin. The latest banking scandal—the beauty of it is its simplicity—is a throwback to the Harshad Mehta fraud



involving banks, particularly the State Bank of India. Any audaciously rewarding enterprise ought to be simple and government-funded. Nirav Modi got a lowly deputy manager, Gokulnath Shetty, at Punjab National Bank's Fountain Branch in Mumbai to authenticate letters of undertaking or bank guarantees, using which he raised Rs 11,000 crore and took a non-stop flight to the Forbes' list of billionaires. As simple as that!

What struck me most about Nirav Modi was not his diamonds. I always had a healthy disdain for diamonds because you need to have a minimum bank balance to like diamonds, however tiny. Intellectual contempt for wealth and its manifestations are often a loser's way of coping with a penurious life. Yet, Nirav Modi's story triggered a brain rush. Nirav (if I may) is roughly my age. He also left his home early in his life, learnt the tricks of his trade in his twenties in Mumbai, then got his name written on billboards and made stars—foreign and desi—walk up and down his ramp as many times as he wanted. I too landed in Delhi in my twenties and thought I also learnt a few tricks (like writing stuff that would get Parliament adjourned or make the LoP move a no-confidence motion). Now I realise, that's not how it works. I wasn't good enough to get loans ever from a PSU bank. And instead of round-tripping those I got from private banks, I always ended up repaying them. So, in a way I am not far removed from that farmer who looks at the pesticide bottle as his insurance against insolvency. To succeed in life, one needs to know the behind-the-counter babu, take loans in thousands of crores, dictate the terms of repayment, then renege on those very terms, buy residency in the UK and then talk about banking reforms.

So, I am clearly not qualified to write about banking reforms. But I am awestruck. All you need is a Gokulnath Shetty to rob several banks off a billion US dollars or two. And the scam can remain undetected for seven long years. Do we really need such public sector banks? The great votaries of PSU banks always talk about access to banking, credit, serving the poor...all those sad pseudo-socialist slogans. But what really is on offer at these PSU banks is access to fraud for scamsters by corrupt officials. And there is no dearth of money that is extracted from clueless creditors by way of interest on loans and filched from thrifty depositors on account of transaction charges and penalties. Then there are the sanctimonious unions collectively badgering the customers and the government. It is time to call the banking bluff.

Then we don't expect our political class to rein in these financial fraudsters. Be they the cooperative bank scamsters of Maharashtra or the chit fund frauds of West Bengal, the powerless poor get robbed all the time. After all, ours is a country that had a brilliant finance minister who wanted to dip into the Employees Provident Fund and the Life Insurance Corporation to repay Enron's foreign debts. To be fair to him, it has to be said that he kept himself away from the crucial meeting because he was earlier Enron's lawyer.

## Justin Trudeau should allay India's concerns on Sikh separatism and terror

**The Canadian prime minister's India trip appears to be turning into a PR nightmare**

The visit by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau should have been an occasion for India and Canada to celebrate and boost their long-standing relations, but the trip appears to be turning into a PR nightmare for the leader adored by millions around the world. Diplomats have noted that the visit appears to be heavy on photo opportunities and light on substantive engagements, with just half a day of the eight-day visit set aside for official engagements. Much has also been made of the lack of a personal welcome and an embrace from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, gestures that have been extended to leaders ranging from US President Barack Obama to the crown prince of Abu Dhabi. Indian officials have been at pains to clarify this wasn't in any way a snub for the soft stand taken by Trudeau's Liberal Party of Canada towards Sikh radicals espousing the cause of Khalistan. But the truth is this is a problem that has acquired serious dimensions in recent years and affected relatively trouble-free bilateral relations. Trudeau himself was seen at an event in Toronto last year that featured Khalistani flags and other separatist paraphernalia, a development that irked the mandarins in the external affairs ministry. Other developments such as a motion in the Ontario assembly describing the 1984 anti-Sikh riots as "genocide" have added to the angst in New Delhi's officialdom. Some have suggested that Trudeau and other Canadian politicians have not taken a position on the matter because of their plans to woo the 1.4 million-strong Indian-origin community, many of them Sikhs, for the elections next year. The Liberal Party also needs to shore up its position within the Indian-origin community in the face of the emergence of Jagmeet Singh as the leader of the New Democratic Party. But sections of the Canadian media have warned that Trudeau can ignore the problem of Sikh radicalism at his own peril. As an editorial in a Canadian daily pointed out, the 1985 bombing of Air India flight 182, the deadliest act of terrorism involving an airliner before the 9/11 attacks, was planned and carried out on Canadian soil and resulted in the death of 329 people, including 268 Canadian citizens. Even today, men considered the masterminds of this attack are eulogised as heroes in some Canadian gurdwaras. In such circumstances, mere comments about Canada's support for a "strong and united" India will not do. The Canadian prime minister needs to acknowledge India's concerns in order to take bilateral relations forward and build on the tremendous potential that exists in so many fields, ranging from nuclear energy to people-to-people contacts.



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# India must impose punishing sanctions on the Maldives

*New Delhi's inaction and missteps have aided China's aggressive diplomacy, with Beijing's clout increasingly on display even in countries symbiotically tied to India, such as Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives*

**Brahma Chellaney**

China, the sole defender of the Maldives' embattled autocrat, Abdulla Yameen, has issued an open threat through a State mouthpiece: If India militarily intervenes in the Maldives, Beijing won't "sit idly by" but will "take action to stop" it. This essentially is an empty threat because China has no credible capability to sustain a military operation far from its shores. Despite China's rising naval power, taking on India in its own maritime backyard will be a fool's errand.

India could call China's bluff through quick military action that deposes Yameen and installs the jailed Supreme Court chief justice as the interim president to oversee fair elections under United Nations' supervision. In truth, an Indian intervention is not on the cards, in part because such action would trample on the principles India has long championed.

India has carefully weighed all the factors and resolved not to intervene at present in the vicious politics of the increasingly radicalised Maldives. If the crisis there were to escalate to civil war-like conditions, with street clashes erupting in the capital

Malé, where two-fifths of the nation's total population lives, India could, of course, intervene in the name of "responsibility to protect", the moral principle Nato invoked to counterproductively overthrow Libya's Muammar Gaddafi.

India had a narrow window of opportunity to intervene immediately after Yameen declared a state of emergency and jailed many, including his elderly half-brother, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, whose dictatorship lasted three decades largely because Indian paratroopers in 1988 salvaged his presidency from coup plotters who seized control of much of Malé. Before Yameen fell out with Gayoom, he actually ran a family dictatorship, with Gayoom's daughter as his foreign minister.

Beijing's threat at this stage is not only a Doklam-style psychological warfare against India but, more importantly, also an effort to curry favour with the internationally isolated Yameen. By claiming to shield him from India's potential action, China wants to expand its strategic footprint in the Maldives, where it has already acquired several of the country's 1,190 atolls for projects. The Maldives' first and

only democratically-elected president, Mohamed Nasheed, who was ousted at gunpoint by Gayoom's pro-Islamist cronies, claims China's "land grab" has netted 17 islets.

While India has wisely refrained from any precipitous action in response to Yameen's unbridled lurch toward authoritarianism, it faces a pressing foreign-policy challenge extending beyond the Maldivian crisis. Make no mistake: India's rapidly eroding influence in its strategic backyard holds far-reaching implications for its security, underscoring the imperative for a more dynamic, forward-looking strategy. India's inaction and missteps have aided China's aggressive diplomacy, with Chinese clout increasingly on display even in countries symbiotically tied to India, such as Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. With Beijing seeking to establish a Djibouti-type naval base in the Maldives, China is opening an oceanic threat against India in the same quiet way that it opened the trans-Himalayan threat under Mao Zedong.

On the Maldives, India's moment of truth came not with the latest emergency



proclamation but in February 2012 when Nasheed made desperate phone calls to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh pleading for an Indian intervention against the Islamists besieging his office. Nasheed, however, had roiled New Delhi with his overtures to Beijing, including personally inaugurating the newly-established Chinese embassy on the day Singh arrived in Malé for a Saarc summit. India's refusal to take a long-term strategic view and prevent Nasheed's overthrow has had important consequences, including empowering the Islamists and ceding more space to China. Just months after Nasheed's ouster, the Maldives expropriated its main international airport from India's GMR Infrastructure.

The Maldives has increasingly acted against India's strategic interests with impunity. Six months ago, it sent New Delhi a chilling message by welcoming three Chinese frigates, which docked in Malé and Girifushi

Island, and imparted special training to Maldivian troops. Yameen amended the constitution in 2015 to legalise foreign ownership of land in a way tailored for China, requiring a minimal \$1-billion construction project that reclaims at least 70% of the desired land from the ocean. New Delhi's carrot-only approach also emboldened Yameen more recently to sign a free-trade agreement with China.

India must now start wielding the stick. With other democratic powers, it should impose punishing sanctions. However, the right powers to militarily intervene in the Maldives are the United States and Britain because, unlike India, they have little to lose and democracy promotion is a legitimate foreign-policy plank for them. China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean threatens not just India's security but also the Diego Garcia-centred Anglo-American naval pre-eminence in the region.

## Why China is keen to discuss CPEC with India

**Beijing is strenuously pushing the Belt and Road Initiative to dispel doubts being raised over its economic benefits**

Faced with growing doubts about the much-touted economic benefits of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), accentuated by the recent cancellation of two projects by Pakistan and Nepal, its earliest supporters, the 19th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has incorporated the ambitious \$1.4 trillion geo-economic BRI into the Party Constitution. Inextricably woven into Chinese President Xi Jinping's agenda of making China a global power by 2050, the BRI is set to be included in the country's constitution at the National People's Congress — China's version of a parliament — in March 2018. This will assure it of party and State backing.

In recent months, China has begun to strenuously push the

BRI. The speech of last month by Harvard-educated Chinese Politburo member, Liu He, director of the Central Small Leading Group for Economic Reforms, reflected this. Reiterating China's commitment to globalisation asserted by Chinese President Xi Jinping last year at Davos, Liu He linked this with the BRI. Saying it would ease restrictions on market access he described it as upholding the governance concept of discussing together, building together, and sharing together.

At the same time, the New York Times reported that President Michel Temer of Brazil received an unexpected offer from Beijing for Latin American nations to work closely with China on the BRI. Elsewhere in Davos,

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi praised China's rapidly expanding investments in Pakistan, including power stations and a large port. He dismissed reports of controversy over whether China's giant construction projects were compromising Pakistan's sovereignty, its environment or its financial stability. During his recent visit to China, French President Emmanuel Macron tactfully avoided endorsing the BRI. Instead, he reminded interlocutors that the ancient Silk Road was never only Chinese, but a Sino-European trade route, adding that New Silk Roads could not be "one-way". Keen to avoid a repetition of this failure, China exerted pressure on British Prime Minister Theresa May, with its

ambassador to the UK, Liu Xiaoming, urging her to endorse the BRI during her three-day visit to China. While Jin Canrong, Professor of International Relations at Renmin University, said "If Prime Minister May is smart enough, she would know what China wants to hear from her the most is the support of the belt and road," May finally avoided endorsing the BRI. Meanwhile, the US-based Centre for Strategic International Studies estimated that 89% of the contracts of the BRI have gone to Chinese companies. China is also moving quickly on the ground to establish a dispute settlement mechanism for business along the Belt and Road Initiative. China's official news agency, Xinhua, reported recently that Chinese President

Xi Jinping, who is also Chairman of the Leading Group for Deepening the Reform of the Central Government, while presiding over a meeting of the leading group, delivered an important speech. Among other issues, the meeting emphasised the need for establishing a dispute settlement mechanism for One belt, One road and establishing an effective litigation, mediation and arbitration convergence mechanism to resolve the Belt and Road business and investment disputes in accordance with the law, protect the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese and foreign parties on an equal footing, and create a stable, fair and transparent business environment for the rule of law.



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The confrontation between the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government and the bureaucracy in Delhi could not have got uglier. Possibly for the first time, a chief secretary, the top bureaucrat in a state government, has accused lawmakers of assault. The MLAs concerned and the deputy CM have denied the charges and several AAP members have lodged their own set of complaints against the chief secretary. While the jury is still out on the allegations and counter-allegations, the AAP and



administration between an elected government and the LG's office. This contradiction played out in the past as well but more often than not the adversaries — former Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit and former Home Minister LK Advani, for example — succeeded in maintaining a civil, working relationship so that their differences never got out of hand or brought governance to a standstill.

These are different times and so are the two governments at the helm in Delhi. The fierce political rivalry between the two parties in power at the Centre and the state has long descended into bitter public acrimony, which perhaps makes climbing down over any issue difficult. The bureaucracy, for the most part, is caught between the two sparring rivals. In this face-off, what has been baffling is that none of the stakeholders showed any intent to avert stalemates.

It was a matter of time before things got to where they are now. The image that AAP complains too much is not helping the party or the people who voted it to power. Ultimately, it is for AAP to find a way to run the Delhi government.

## **AAP has to find a way to ensure governance and not get stuck in a gridlock with the Centre**

*In the AAP-bureaucracy face-off, none of the stakeholders showed any demonstrated intent to avert frequent stalemates*

the bureaucracy have a long history of similar altercations. Within three months of the formation of this government in 2015, the chief minister's office openly opposed the appointment of an acting chief secretary by the Lieutenant Governor. The

incumbent chief secretary's predecessor was last year accused of not following the chief minister's order to re-examine the metro fare hike and skipping important meetings. The AAP government also had an open confrontation with at least

another half a dozen IAS officers heading several important departments. More than 200 officials had proceeded on mass leave when two civil servants were suspended in December 2015. The Union Home ministry then revoked the suspension on

jurisdiction issues, further deepening the ever-expanding chasm between the state government and the L-G's office. Admittedly, there is an inherent problem in the overlapping power-sharing structure of the Delhi

## **Business as usual at Nirav Modi's diamond store in Beijing**

**The Nirav Modi store located amid a cluster of other luxury brands was open for business and the employees claimed to be unaware about the controversy raging around the businessman in India.**



It seemed business as usual at the Nirav Modi boutique diamond store at the Peninsula Hotel in Beijing on Thursday.

The shop located amid a cluster of other luxury brands was open for business and the employees were eager to cater to customers. They claimed to be unaware about the controversy raging around Modi in India.

None of the employees seemed aware that he was at the centre of a massive Rs 11,000-crore bank fraud that has hit the brand and its reputation.

"This is a Chinese company based in Beijing," said one employee, adding that business has been "so, so".

Reports said that most of Modi's stores in cities across

India had been shut by Thursday. Modi had opened the store at the hotel located in Beijing's central business district, the first on the Chinese mainland, in May 2017 as part of his plans to expand into China. Leading Chinese actress Zhang Ziyi had attended the inauguration of a diamond store Modi had earlier opened in Hong Kong.

"Founder Nirav Modi stated that he had Chinese customers visiting his boutiques in New York, London, Hong Kong and Macau and the customers were changing the face of the luxury retail industry all over the world," the Economic Times reported before the opening of the store in Beijing.

"They are sophisticated luxury buyers, with an eye for detail and craftsmanship. The boutique in Beijing is our first one in China and we have more boutique launches in China planned over the next few years," Modi was quoted as saying by the newspaper.

## **Hi-tech farming: Can Rajasthan make the desert bloom?**

**The state wants to modernise farming, but it faces structural hurdles and a funds crunch. Will it be able to overcome these and adopt a new strategy that aims to shift a sizeable section of middle farmers away from traditional water-guzzling crops, such as wheat?**

Neat furrows of cabbage, uniformly spaced cherry tomatoes, bell peppers and pomegranates, and exotic fruits, make the International Horticulture Innovation and Training Centre near Jaipur a veritable horticultural Disneyland.

The technologies on display are striking: slim polyethylene hoses with small nozzles run along the length of the plantations; the jets shoot water mixed with fertilizer directly at the roots; climate-controlled greenhouses create balmy conditions, just right for the plants inside.

Hi-tech in farming, however, is not easy. In Rajasthan, modernisation faces a typical structural hurdle. The share of marginal and small land-holdings in total land ownership in the state is 40.12% and 21.90% respectively, according to the state's Economic Survey 2017-18. Such highly skewed land distribution itself makes the use of even simpler tools, such as a tractor, uneconomical.

A document on Rajasthan's agriculture challenges by the Niti Aayog in 2016 cites this as a "major barrier in effective intervention in the

advancement of agriculture".

Yet, India's largest state with 61% arid or semi-arid climate and 35 million in poverty (those with less than Rs 1 lakh in annual income) wants to do an 'Israel' in agriculture: make the desert bloom.

It has, over the last couple of years, set up six hi-tech centres, such as the one outside Jaipur, to disseminate cutting-edge Israeli horticulture technologies. Three more are in the works. No state has so many Centres of

Excellence.

The six are in Kota (citrus fruits), Bassi (pomegranates), Jaiselmer's Sagra Bhojhka (date palm), Devrvas in Tonk district (guavas), Jhalawar (mandarins), and Khemri Dholpur ( mangoes). Three more are coming: Chittor (pumpkin), Boondi district (vegetables) and Sawai Madhopur (flowers). There is an olive programme as well.

"We have got the best technologies from countries such as Israel and Netherlands for these centres of excellence," says agriculture minister Prabhulal Saini.





# ***PNB crisis shows government banks should either reform or perish***

**Deep crisis plagues public sector banks, which need to overhaul system of monitoring and control**



Average share of frauds worth more than Rs 1 crore between 2010-11 and 2012-13 was 90%. This value was just 73% between 2004-05 and 2006-07. RBI's Financial Stability report for June 2017 says that value of frauds worth more than Rs 1 lakh increased from Rs 9,750 crore to Rs 16,770 crore over the last five financial years.

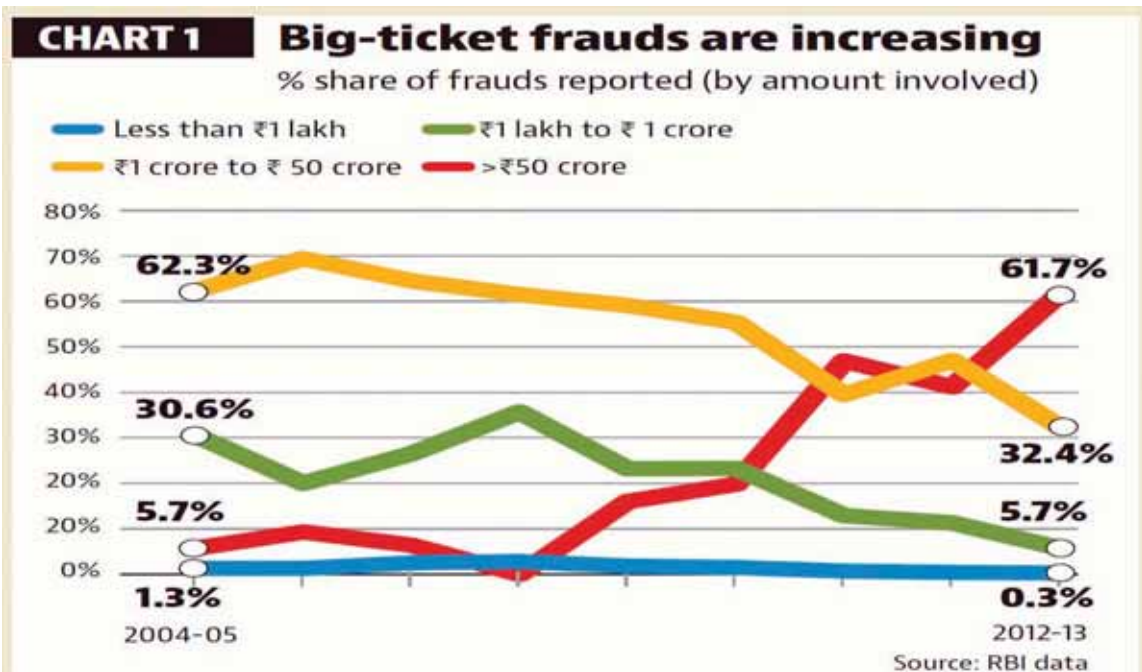
The report also notes that share of frauds in advances (loans) portfolio continued to be high at 86% of the frauds reported during 2016-17 in terms of amount involved. The report is clear in blaming poor governance for the rising problem. It says, "While the fall out of adverse market conditions, recessionary trends, industry specific vulnerabilities and macro-economic risks on bank lending can be considered as relatively difficult to control and mitigate by banks, the same cannot be true in case of loan frauds. In a number of large value frauds, serious gaps in credit underwriting standards were evident".

This view is corroborated by the findings of The Committee to Review Governance of Board of Banks in India. The committee was chaired by PJ Nayak and submitted its report to the RBI in 2014. Public sector banks fare worse when compared to their private peers when it comes to both tabling and discussing risk and compliance related matters in board meetings, the report shows (See Chart 3). Given the fact that public sector banks (PSBs) had a much bigger fraud problem than private banks, the trend is disconcerting to say the least.

A 2015 Deloitte report on fraud in Indian banking also supports such arguments. It lists lack of oversight by senior management as the biggest reason for increase in incidents of frauds in banks.

**Vulnerable banks**  
As much as 90% of total value of reported frauds between 2009-10 and 2012-13 is attributable to advance related frauds in government owned banks.

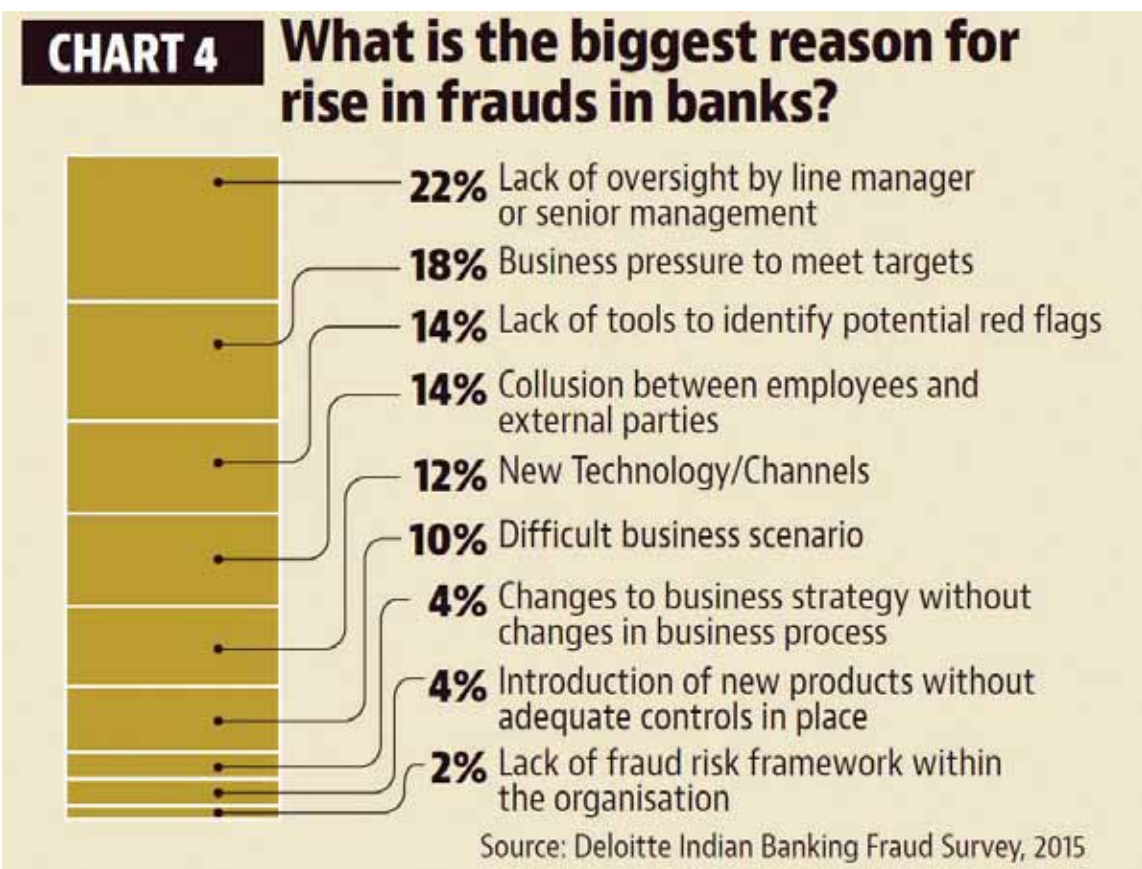
Those who argue for bank privatisation from the why should the government fund their losses viewpoint would do well to remember that the state ends up bailing out even private banks when they face crisis. This fact however cannot diminish the importance of reforming governance and compliance practices in India's public sector banks. The PNB crisis and follow up of advances related frauds, their incidence in public sector banks in a large measure can also be trailed to comparatively poor corporate governance standards and lack of firm resolve by the Board and the Top Management in fighting this menace."



We do not know how much money Punjab National Bank (PNB) will lose due to the current fraud involving letters of undertaking (bank guarantees) issued to companies belonging to Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi. We also do not know whether or not the people who gained from this will be punished. But there is one thing which we do know more than ever.

A deep crisis plagues the Indian banking system, especially government owned banks. The fact that nobody noticed a fraud of such scale at PNB is testimony to this. Blaming malfeasance by a handful of employees and other conspiracy theories will not take us very far in understanding the roots of the problem. Here are some statistics which can help us make sense of growing frauds in banking sector.

**Big-ticket frauds**  
Unfortunately, the Reserve Bank of India does not publish regular statistics on banking frauds. A 2013 speech by then deputy governor of RBI Dr KC Chakravarty (who was chairman and managing director of PNB before moving to the central bank), gives some statistics on bank frauds. It shows that share of big-ticket frauds is rising in the Indian banking system.



# Punjab CM Amarinder Singh gives Canada PM Justin Trudeau list of 9 'radicals'

**In a 40-minute meeting at an Amritsar hotel, Punjab CM Amarinder Singh urged Canadian PM Justin Trudeau to initiate stern action against "radical elements" and named nine Category 'A' Canada-based operatives allegedly involved in "target killings", hate crimes in Punjab**

After weeks of speculation over whether or not they would meet, chief minister Amarinder Singh brought up the Khalistan issue with Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau on Wednesday and handed him a list of Canada-based operatives allegedly involved in promoting radicalism in Punjab, according to officials familiar with the matter.

In a 40-minute meeting at an Amritsar hotel, Singh urged Trudeau to initiate stern action against "radical elements" and named nine Category 'A' Canada-based operatives allegedly

involved in "target killings, hate crimes in Punjab, trying to radicalise the youth, and financing and supplying weapons for terrorist activities", a government official, who requested anonymity, said. Canadian defence minister Harjit Sajjan and Punjab minister Navjot Singh Sidhu were also present at the meeting. Amarinder shook hands with Sajjan, whom he had refused to meet last year and had described as a "Khalistani sympathiser". Trudeau assured Singh that his country did not support "any

separatist movement in India or elsewhere", according to Raveen Thukral, the chief minister's media advisor. The "categorical assurance" from Trudeau came after Singh sought his cooperation in cracking down on fringe elements, Thukral added. "Really happy to receive categorical assurance from Canadian PM@Justin Trudeau that his country does not support any separatist movement. His words are a big relief to all of us here in India and we look forward to his government's support in tackling fringe separatist



elements," Amarinder tweeted after the meeting. Officials said that Trudeau referred to the separatist movement in the Canadian state of Quebec, and added that he had dealt with such threats all his life. Thukral said Trudeau added that he was fully aware of the dangers of violence, which he has always rejected,

and would continue to do so. The two leaders agreed on the importance of strengthening cooperation between across various sectors, with Singh expressing Punjab's keenness to engage with Canada on higher education, scientific research, technology, innovation and skill development.

# Undetected, man's body rots in tunnel of Delhi Metro airport line for months



A man's decomposed body was found inside a highly protected tunnel of the Delhi Metro's airport line between the New Delhi and Shivaji Stadium stations, bringing to light a possible security breach. Police said it appeared the body had been there for at least four-five months as it was reduced to bones, but they could not explain how it might have got there and the possible cause of death.

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) staff noticed the body in the early hours of February 9, when train operations had ended and they were on a routine track inspection, police said. As the officials got close to the passage between two tracks, they encountered a foul smell. Close to the shaft that opened to the ground level, they found the highly decomposed body.

"The station controller of the New Delhi Metro station went inside the tunnel for routine maintenance around 1.30am on February 9. The body was found around 300 metres from the platform of

the station. The track inspection is a routine affair but how the staff missed the body for months is a mystery," said an officer of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), requesting anonymity. The CISF is responsible for the security of Metro stations. The DMRC said the area where the body was found is away from the tracks. "The area is in an emergency shaft of a cross-passage, which opens at the ground level and is not in a regular operational area. Access to this area is through the ground level, which is cordoned off and thus detection was difficult," said a spokesperson.

The airport line is covered with platform screen doors, making the tracks inaccessible. The CCTVs there have not been of any help as they don't store footage for more than 30 days. No one knows how and when the man entered the tunnel.

Following the discovery of the body, police were called and a Delhi police and CISF joint team inspected the area. A forensic team was then called to collect samples so

**The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) staff noticed the body in the early hours of February 9, when train operations had ended and they were on a routine track inspection.**

that the body could be identified.

The 22.7km airport Metro line connects the New Delhi railway station to Dwarka Sector 21. Except for the Dhaula Kuan-Delhi Ridge stretch, the line is underground, running through tunnels that go as deep as 18 metres. Security and maintenance staff enter the tunnel through the gates at the end of the platforms, the keys of which are with the station controller.

Police said it seemed highly unlikely that the person entered the tunnel through the station as the access is restricted to authorised staff. Police said there have been

**Cops probe 3 possibilities**

**Murder:** Someone killed the man, threw body from emergency shaft. But shaft entry is covered and access isn't allowed

**Theft:** Man reached restricted area to steal something, managed to open emergency shaft, fell in and died

**Insider's involvement:** Staffer with access to track area — covered by platform screen doors — took man inside, killed him and left body

no complaints of any staff member missing, thus ruling out that the deceased could have been a CISF or Metro worker. Delhi police have launched an investigation and a senior officer said possible loopholes in security need to be plugged. "It is difficult to find

from where the man entered. We have preserved the DNA samples and are checking if anyone from the area near the New Delhi station is missing. Once the body is identified, the cause of death can be established," said a police officer. No case has been filed yet.

# Child porn racket on WhatsApp busted, 20-year-old graduate arrested from UP

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Thursday registered a case and booked five persons on charges of uploading and circulating child pornography through a Whatsapp group called 'KidsXXX' that had 119 members from India and abroad.

The agency has arrested one of the five alleged administrators of the group, Nikhil Verma, according to a CBI spokesperson. Verma is a 20-year-old, unemployed commerce graduate from Kannauj in Uttar Pradesh, the spokesperson said.

Besides Verma, the other administrators of the WhatsApp group were identified as Satyendra Chauhan, Nafees Raja, Zahid and Adarsh. A case has been filed against them under Section 67-B of the Information Technology Act and the provisions of Protection of Children from Sexual

Offences Act (POCSO).

The official said the agency conducted searches in Delhi, Maharashtra and UP on Thursday in connection with the case and recovered incriminating material stored on computers, hard disks and mobile phones.

A preliminary probe revealed that the WhatsApp group had members from countries including US, China, Pakistan and Brazil, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Nigeria, Mexico and New Zealand, besides India. The CBI will write to its counterparts in these countries seeking assistance to identify all the members of the group, the official said. The CBI will investigate if an organised gang was shooting the videos and pictures and selling them in the virtual world, the spokesperson said.

# Maldives says India's remarks on extension of emergency 'distortion of facts', 'ignore ground realities'

**India has said it is "deeply dismayed" over the manner in which Maldives extended its emergency.**

The Maldives on Thursday brushed aside India's strong concerns over a 30-day extension of a state of emergency and said the world community should refrain from any intervention in the island nation.

In an unusually blunt statement, the Maldives foreign ministry responded to India's dismay over the emergency being extended on Tuesday by saying that "friends and partners in the international community, including India, (should) refrain from any actions that could hinder resolving the situation facing the country".

The statement dismissed India's contention that the extension of

the emergency was unconstitutional as "a clear distortion of facts, which ignore the Constitution and laws of the Maldives".

President Abdulla Yameen's regime pushed through the extension of the emergency through a vote in a parliamentary session that was boycotted by the opposition. The move came hours after India had warned against the emergency imposed on February 5 being extended.

The external affairs ministry had on Wednesday said India was "deeply dismayed" that the emergency had been extended in a manner that contravened the Constitution of Maldives. It also said the delay in the resumption

of the political process would impact the restoration of normalcy in the Maldives.

India had also called for all democratic institutions in the Maldives to be allowed to function in a fair and transparent manner. After the Maldives Parliament's approval, ruling party legislators sought the opinion of the Supreme Court, which on Wednesday issued a temporary ruling ordering the Parliament and the "relevant state authorities" to act upon the extension.

The Maldivian foreign ministry statement said: "There is no doubt that the Maldives is experiencing one of the most difficult periods in the history of



the nation. It is therefore important that friends and partners in the international community, including India, refrain from any actions that could hinder resolving the situation facing the country."

The statement said that the government would work closely with "the international community, including India" and "address the concerns they

might have". Earlier on Wednesday, Yameen turned down the UN secretary-general's offer to mediate between him and the opposition in the ongoing crisis, Antonio Guterres's deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq said. "He offered to the president UN mediation but the president conveyed that mediation was not wanted at this stage," Haq said.

## Indian set to begin operations at Chabahar Port by May-end

**India is building a container terminal and a multi-purpose cargo terminal with a total waterfront length of 1,240 metres at Chabahar Port. Of this, it wants to start operation on 360 metres by May-end.**



metres. Of this, it wants to start operation on 360 metres by May-end. "Project Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) will be in place by March-end. We are in the middle of the process to select the SPV," said Arun Kumar Gupta, managing director of India Ports Global Private Limited (IPGPL).

IPGPL is a joint venture between Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust and Kandla Port Trust to develop Chabahar. The port, located in the Sistan-Baluchistan Province of Iran on the south-eastern coast, is of great strategic importance to India. It will provide the country an alternative and reliable route into Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan, and give it access to resource-rich central Asia.

After his meeting with Rouhani, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said Chabahar was the "golden gateway to Afghanistan and the central Asian region". India, Iran and Afghanistan have already signed a transit agreement for easy passage of Indian goods to their territory.

India is all set to start operations on a part of the Chabahar Port by May-end on borrowed Iranian equipment, two senior government officials familiar with the matter said. The internal arrangement to operationalise the port within the next three months is part of the agreement signed during Iranian president Hassan Rouhani's recent visit to India. As per the deal, Tehran will lease out operational control of a part of Chabahar Port, to India for 18 months. According to the MoU signed between the two sides in 2016, India will equip and operate two terminals in Chabahar Port Phase-I with capital investment of US\$85.21

million and annual revenue expenditure of US\$ 22.95 million on a 10-year lease.

However, till India procures the equipment to operationalise the port — the process for which will take some time — a short-term lease contract has been signed to borrow equipment from Iran to start interim operations on a part of the port where the work is complete.

"We will have a foothold in Chabahar by May. This will give a boost to our plans to connect India with Afghanistan and central Asia," shipping secretary Gopal Krishna said. India is building a container terminal and a multi-purpose cargo terminal with a total waterfront length of 1,240

## India, China, Nepal should step up interaction for win-win outcomes: Beijing



BEIJING: India, China and Nepal should step up "sound interaction for win-win outcomes", Beijing on Thursday said as it congratulated the new Nepalese government headed by K P Oli.

After winning the recent parliamentary elections, Oli, widely regarded as pro-China, had said he wants to deepen ties with China to explore more options and get more leverage in his dealings with India "in keeping with the times".

Oli had told Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post that he wants to "update" relations with India "in keeping with the times" but at the same time he would revive the China-backed \$2.5 billion hydropower project which was scrapped by the previous government citing irregularities.

Commenting on Oli's remarks, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a media briefing here that "China congratulates Oli on becoming the new Prime

Minister of Nepal".

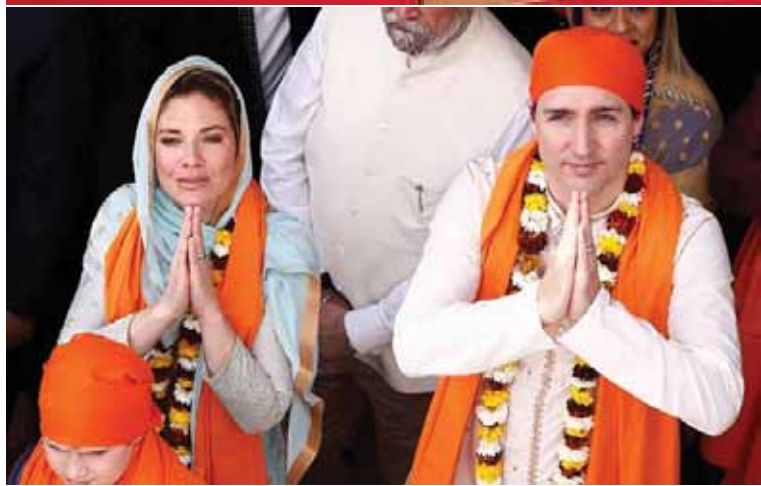
China is willing to work with the new government of Nepal to promote friendly cooperation between the two countries in all areas and achieve common development and thus making contribution to the regional stability and prosperity, he said.

About Oli's comments on his planned approach to ties with India and China, Geng said, "China, Nepal and India are each other's important neighbouring countries. The three parties should step up sound interaction for win win outcomes."

Expectations are high in China about Oli's government as he signed the Transit Treaty with Beijing during his first stint as prime minister in 2015 to end dependence on India for his landlocked country to revive the dam. China has been investing heavily in Nepal blunting India's influence in the Himalayan country. In his interview, Oli had said, "we have great connectivity with India and an open border.

# Just like old friends!

**Justin Trudeau FINALLY meets Modi and gets a hug after seven days of being snubbed and ridiculed for his 'annoying' traditional outfits**



on Tuesday night.

Trudeau has received a deeply mixed reception in India, with some flattered by his visit, but others deeply scornful of his preening for the cameras and especially his traditional outfits - which have been described as 'tacky' and 'annoying'.

While many praised his clothing during the first two days of his trip, patience was wearing thin by the time he attended a Bollywood gala on Tuesday night, before the tide turned against him on Wednesday.

Ministers, authors, journalists and ordinary Indians lined up to mock him, saying his wardrobe made him look as if he was about to attend a wedding.

Leading the criticism was Omar Abdullah, former chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, who tweeted saying Trudeau's preening was 'all just a bit much.'

'We Indians do not dress like this every day sir, not even in Bollywood.'

While Indian newspapers had initially praised Trudeau's attempt to cross cultural boundaries - describing the red kurta he wore on the first day of his visit as 'resplendent' and 'festive' - by Wednesday they lost patience as well.

'Too flashy even for an Indian', proclaimed Outlook India while The Print suggested that he looked like he was auditioning to be a model.

The tipping point seemed to come when Trudeau met the great and good of Bollywood, whose looks arguably inspired some of his own.

But while the actors dressed down for the occasion, opting largely for black suits and shirts,

Justin Trudeau met with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday morning - the only high-level engagement of his eight-day trip to India.

The pair embraced on the red carpet outside the Presidential Palace in New Delhi, seven days after Modi avoided meeting the Canadian Prime Minister at the airport when his plane initially landed.

That move has been widely interpreted as a snub over Trudeau's perceived support for Sikh separatist groups, though Modi officially denies it.

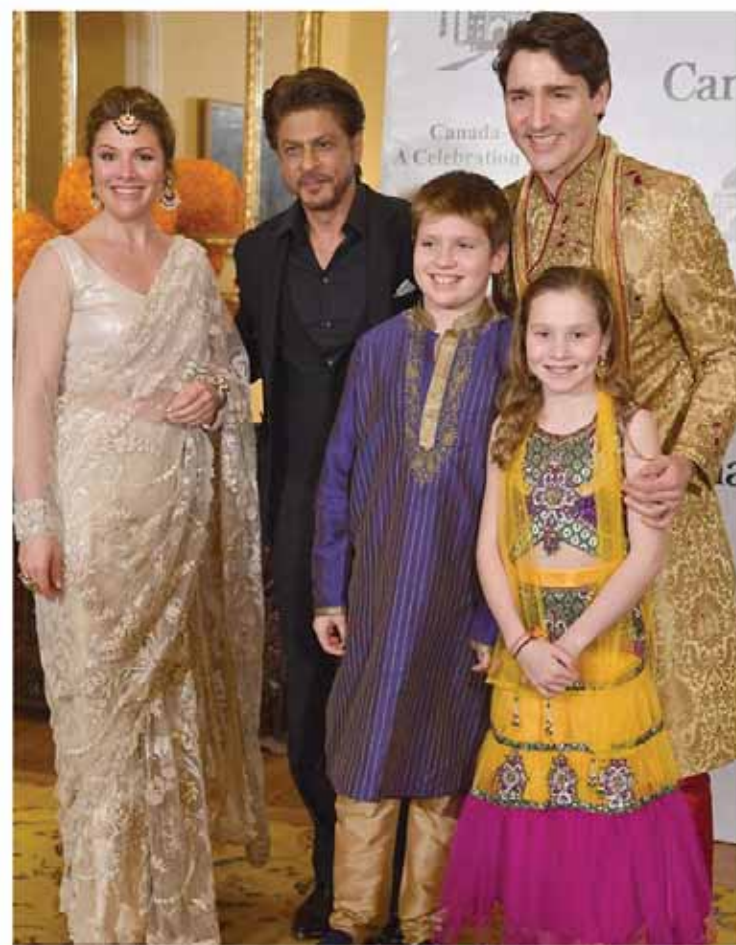
Trudeau had to hastily cancel a dinner invite for a former

member of a banned separatist group on Thursday in a fresh blow to his image.

Jaspal Atwal, who tried to murder an Indian minister on Canadian soil back in 1986, had been due to dine alongside Trudeau at a dinner hosted by the Canadian High Commissioner.

The Prime Minister said he had no idea an invite had been extended to Atwal and withdrew it as soon as he was made aware.

In a further embarrassing blow, images then emerged of Atwal posing with Trudeau's wife Sophie at an event in Bollywood



Trudeau went all-out with a gaudy golden number.

India Today described the choice of clothing as 'tacky', suggesting it was insulting to his guests. High-level politicians have also largely steered clear of Trudeau during his visit, and he has spent much of it trying to shake off the perception that his administration is a soft touch on extremists.

During a visit the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the holiest

site in Sikhism, he assured Punjab's chief minister that Canada does not sympathise with extremist movements.

Canada is home to roughly half a million Sikhs and Trudeau's administration has been accused of being too cosy with those agitating for a separate homeland in India's northern Punjab state.

Trudeau particularly riled New Delhi last year when he attended a parade in Canada at which Sikh militants were feted as heroes.



# NBC's \$12BILLION Olympic gamble backfires as viewers go cold on Pyeongchang Winter Games which are rated the worst in the network's history

NBC's \$12billion deal to cover the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang may not see the profits the network hopes for, as the games are rated the worst ever in NBC viewership history.

This year's Winter Games in South Korea saw the number of views decline by 24 per cent compared to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, within the 18 to 49 years demographic.

The slump in views may have burned a hole in NBC's wallet after the network invested \$12billion to cover the cream-of-the-crop competition, but had to offer free ad time to advertisers when it failed to reach the promised number of viewers.

Although sports viewership has declined in the past two years, in 2012 for the London games the number of eyes following the Olympics peaked, with an average of 31.1million tuning in, according to CNN Money.

But hopes for a rise in Olympic viewership have been crushed as even the games' Opening Ceremony failed to entice enough viewers to watch the dazzling display, yielding an



8.6 per cent decrease in viewers from the last Opening Ceremony in 2014.

NBC notes, however, that viewership for the Olympics is down only 15 percent compared to the aforementioned 24 when including viewers from both NBC and NBC Sports Network also airing coverage of the games.

NBC channels counted 21.9million prime time viewers this year, a dip compared to the 23.7million viewers who watched

the Sochi 2014 Games.

NBC's coverage of the Games resulted in a 9.2/16 metered market result on Friday — the lowest ever for Olympics, according to Deadline.

The low turn out rate in views is costing the network, forcing NBC to reportedly issue free ad time when initial ads failed to reach the agreed amount of viewers.

Now eyes are pointed towards NBC's profitability in light of

viewership decline.

Comcast Chairman and CEO Brian Roberts (Comcast owns NBC), said that he would 'absolutely' renew the NBC Olympics contract.

'Absolutely every time we come to the Olympics we're reminded of just how important this is to the media landscape,' he said in an interview with CNBC.

In 2016 for the Rio Games NBC made a profit of \$250million

- a record for Olympic coverage.

The Summer Olympic Games tend to be more popular than the Winter counterparts, however that didn't stop the 2016 Rio Olympics from seeing a decline in viewership as well.

NBC says it expects to make a profit off the games yet again in Pyeongchang, just as it has with the last three Olympic Games. The network said that its national ad sales were actually up to \$920million compared to the last Olympics where it sat at \$800million.

Mark Lazarus, NBC Broadcasting and Sports Chairman said the Olympic rights is the best deal in all of media.

'Our long-term Olympic rights agreement is the best in all of media. The Olympics have demonstrated the ability to assemble massive and diverse audiences on everything from broadcast television to Snapchat, and are uniquely suited to thrive in today's expanding media landscape,' he said. 'We are very bullish on our investment,' he added.

## Why the world has become a more dangerous place for children

*Not just conflict zones, many other regions are seeing increasing numbers of children being placed in the frontline of conflicts*

Children's suffering across the world appears to be on the rise. If one looks at the last year, for instance, it was another conflict-driven year and children paid the highest price. Even worse, their suffering wasn't limited to predictable conflict regions such as Syria or Yemen. Dozens of countries became brutal arenas of child abuse. Do you remember the Central African Republic? Ukraine? South Sudan? These and many other regions saw increasing numbers of children being placed in the frontline of conflicts.

According to UNICEF's Director of Emergency, Manuel Fontaine, "...children are being targeted and exposed to attacks and brutal violence in their homes, schools and playgrounds. As these attacks continue..., we cannot become numb. Such brutality cannot be the new normal."

Sadly, such horror has become ordinary for many

around the world. In the 1,000 days of fighting in Yemen, at least 5,000 children lost their lives or were injured. At the moment, 11 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance and 385,000 are severely malnourished to the extent of facing death unless treated immediately. The situation is worsened by what's been described as history's worst cholera epidemic. According to Unicef, the disease infects one child every 35 seconds on an average. Another report by the same organisation revealed that two million Yemeni children are out of school, and more than three million children were born into the war. In Syria, after years of violence, three million children had to flee to other countries, thousands perished on the way and thousands of others have fallen prey to human trafficking schemes in Europe and elsewhere. As to the situation in Syria, close to six million



children require humanitarian assistance — and that's when they are not being used as human shields or targeted specifically by snipers. Children of many other countries went through similar ordeals including Afghanistan, Eastern Ukraine, the Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of

the Congo, South Sudan, Somalia and Myanmar. In the 21st century, one would expect the world to be a safer place for our children and not increasingly resemble the horrible days of the 20th century's two world wars. It is almost unbelievable to hear that children are being specifically targeted by snipers

in Syria, or hacked to death in the CAR or burned alive in Myanmar. However, the unacceptable and unthinkable is happening and the most innocent, the most vulnerable, the most precious members of our societies are being hurt. Clearly, our leaders need to take urgent action and stop these atrocities.

Nasa's \$1 billion (£720 million) Mobile Launcher rocket tower is 'leaning', according to the space agency.

During recent upgrades to the 350-foot (106-metre) structure, Nasa added a number of connecting arms, but it appears the extensions have put the tower on a slight tilt.

Nasa has acknowledged 'some deflection and imperfections' in the column but says the launcher is 'structurally sound' and does not need any design modifications.

The Mobile Launcher cost



for 50 seconds of the test. This was the third full-duration test conducted on the A-1 Test Stand at Stennis this year.

'Four RS-25 engines will help power SLS at launch, supplying a combined 2 million pounds of thrust and working in conjunction with a pair of solid rocket boosters to provide more than 8 million pounds of thrust.'

Increased engine performance is crucial for enabling SLS missions to deep space as the rocket, currently being built, evolves over the coming decades to carry astronauts and heavy cargo on a single flight.

The SLS was designed for missions beyond low-Earth orbit carrying crew and cargo to the moon or beyond.

The initial configuration for what SLS can carry past low-Earth orbit and on to the moon is more than 26 metric tons, with a final configuration of at least 45 metric tons.

Nasa intends to send humans to 'deep-space' destinations such as Mars and the moon aboard the SLS, with a date for a mission to the red planet set for the 2030s.

The rocket, set to take its maiden flight in 2019, will eventually carry humans on the Orion spacecraft.

Over the next year, engineers plan to add additional 3D printed parts to the RS-25 engine to reduce waste and costs associated with the SLS.

# The leaning tower of Nasa

*\$1 BILLION 'mobile launchpad' may only be used to fire rockets to space once because it is tilting*



\$234 million (£167 million) to build and is currently undergoing renovations worth \$678 million (£485 million) to prepare it for the maiden launch of Nasa's Space Launch System mega-rocket in 2019.

The lean likely means the already well over-budget tower won't be used for more than one or two launches due to safety concerns, experts claim.

This in-part because the structure, housed at Nasa's Kennedy Space Centre near Cape Canaveral, Florida, would need yet another upgrade after the rocket's initial launch to accommodate larger payloads.

It may be cheaper for Nasa to build an entirely new tower, which would cost around \$300 million (£214 million), according to a recommendation from the agency's Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel.

Speaking on the Mobile Launcher's structural issues, a Nasa spokesperson told NasaSpaceFlight that the tower's 'leaning/bending' was expected, and will not require corrective work.

'Nasa's mobile launcher is structurally sound, built to specifications, and does not require a design change or modifications. As expected, the

mobile launcher is not perfectly still,' they said.

The launch tower was originally built to prop up the launch of Nasa's human exploration spacecraft Ares-1, but the flight was cancelled by President Barack Obama in October 2010 as part of his Nasa authorisation bill.

Since 2011, the Mobile Launcher has undergone a number of upgrades to prepare for the agency's significantly larger Space Launch System megarocket, which is set to take astronauts to Mars in the 2030s.

The Nasa spokesperson said: 'The first surveys of the tower in 2011 indicated some deflection and imperfections, which is not unusual for big steel construction of this magnitude.'

'This is likely due to a combination of welding the different levels and modifying them one at a time from the mobile launcher's original design for the Ares rocket, changes introduced in the structure during these modifications, and the additional mass.'

'There is no data that indicates a structural issue directly attributed to these imperfections (neither caused by the imperfections or causing the imperfections).' But while the tilt

may not require a structural correction, it may limit the number of launches the Mobile Launcher is capable of safely supporting.

'While Nasa seems to believe this lean is not enough to require additional construction, it will likely mean that the Mobile Launcher won't be used for more than one or two launches,' Popular Mechanics reporter Avery Thompson wrote.

News of the Mobile Launcher's lean comes after Nasa completed one of its first full-throttle tests of a Space

Launch System (SLS) RS-25 engine.

The 260-second engine firing at Stennis Space Center in Mississippi represented the toughest test yet for the hardware, which will power the SLS's first unmanned flight in 2019.

In a statement, Nasa said: Operators powered one of Nasa's Space Launch System (SLS) engines up to 113 percent thrust level, the highest RS-25 power level yet achieved.

'The test lasted 260 seconds with power levels at 113 percent

## WHAT IS NASA'S SPACE LAUNCH SYSTEM ?



Nasa's Space Launch System, or SLS, is an advanced launch vehicle that will 'provide the foundation for human exploration beyond Earth's orbit', according to the space agency.

Launching with unprecedented thrust power, SLS will carry crews of up to four astronauts in the agency's Orion spacecraft on missions to explore deep-space destinations.

Offering more payload mass, volume capability and energy to speed missions through space than any current launch vehicle, SLS is designed to evolve over several decades to keep up with modern technologies and payloads.

These include robotic scientific missions to places like the Moon, Mars, Saturn and Jupiter. The rocket's first launch, which will be unmanned, is set for 2019 at Nasa's Kennedy Space Centre in Florida.

The initial configuration for what SLS can carry past low-Earth orbit and on to the moon is more than 26 metric tons, with a final configuration of at least 45 metric tons.

Nasa intends to send humans to 'deep-space' destinations such as Mars and the moon aboard the SLS, with a date for a mission to the red planet set for the 2030s.



# Now Trump **PRAISES** the **NRA** as 'great patriots' who will do the right thing after saying he does want some new gun controls

President Donald Trump gave emphatic support for the NRA Thursday, just hours after tweeting support for a pair of gun control measures.

'What many people don't understand, or don't want to understand, is that Wayne, Chris and the folks who work so hard at the @NRA are Great People and Great American Patriots. They love our Country and will do the right thing. MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!' Trump tweeted.

He was referencing Wayne LaPierre, the executive vice president of the powerful gun lobby, and Chris Cox, the executive director.

Trump didn't elaborate on what it would mean for them to 'do the right thing.'

Less than two hours before, Trump tweeted that he would be 'strongly pushing Comprehensive Background Checks with an emphasis on Mental Health. Raise age to 21 and end sale of Bump Stocks!'

The NRA has yet to issue a position on Trump's call for a ban

on bump stocks, where are used to make a semi-automatic weapon fire like an automatic. The Las Vegas shooter used the device.

LaPierre told CPAC Thursday the group would seek 'real solutions' to safety problems, and rejected new efforts to restrict guns. He called gun-free zones 'wide open targets' - a position echoed by Trump.

Trump didn't amplify his comment on raising the age to 21, but he was likely referring to regulations that many states have on long guns including rifles. Many states also have 18 year age limits on handgun purchases.

Trump was the top recipient of NRA campaign contributions during the 2016 presidential election. The group spent \$11 million on behalf of his campaign, and another \$20 million against rival Hillary Clinton.

At the top of its web site Thursday, the NRA said LaPierre in an appearance on Sean Hannity's Fox News

program that LaPierre 'let Dianne Feinstein, Chuck Schumer and their anti-gun minions know that the NRA will not tolerate their use of a tragedy in their war against the Second Amendment.'

Feinstein is the top Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee and Schumer is the Senate Minority Leader.

The FBI is reportedly investigating whether Russian banker Alexander Torshin illegally funneled money to the NRA to help Trump.

Trump on Thursday defended his controversial proposal to have teachers be able to arm themselves using concealed carry permits to protect schools saying it would be a 'GREAT DETERRENT' to potential shooters.

He then endorsed a proposal to raise the minimum age for certain gun purchases to 21 - and urged Congress to pass legislation that mirrors his demand.

'I will be strongly pushing Comprehensive Background Checks with an emphasis on Mental Health. Raise age to 21 and end sale of Bump Stocks! Congress is in a mood to finally do something on this issue - I hope!' Trump wrote.

Bump stocks allow a semi-automatic weapon to operate more like a fully automatic weapon, and were used in the Las Vegas shooting.

Trump directed his attorney general on Tuesday to do what he needs to do to ban the

**Donald J. Trump** @realDonaldTrump Following  
 ...immediately fire back if a savage sicko came to a school with bad intentions. Highly trained teachers would also serve as a deterrent to the cowards that do this. Far more assets at much less cost than guards. A "gun free" school is a magnet for bad people. **ATTACKS WOULD END!**

7:40 AM - 22 Feb 2018

**Donald J. Trump** @realDonaldTrump Following  
 I never said "give teachers guns" like was stated on Fake News @CNN & @NBC. What I said was to look at the possibility of giving "concealed guns to gun adept teachers with military or special training experience - only the best. 20% of teachers, a lot, would now be able to

7:16 AM - 22 Feb 2018

**Donald J. Trump** @realDonaldTrump Follow  
 What many people don't understand, or don't want to understand, is that Wayne, Chris and the folks who work so hard at the @NRA are Great People and Great American Patriots. They love our Country and will do the right thing. **MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!**

2:31 PM - 22 Feb 2018



Education Secretary DeVos. The posture faced immediate criticism from his own party, prompting Trump to launch a full-throated defense of his remarks this morning - even going so far as to say school shootings would end as a result. He claimed the force of 'highly-trained' teachers would be able to 'fire back if a savage sicko came to a school with bad intentions,' neutralizing an attacker minutes before police officers would be able to arrive on the scene in the event on an incident.



# As we complete 15 Years

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

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

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





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# NRA chief Wayne LaPierre blames 'family, school security and the FBI' for Florida massacre



Amid a new national debate over gun rights, the leader of America's largest pro-Second Amendment group made an unscheduled speech Thursday at a giant convention of grassroots conservatives, arguing that the level of armed security applied to celebrities and banks should extend to schools.

The National Rifle Association's Wayne LaPierre opened up the Conservative Political Action Conference Thursday blaming 'school security, the failure of family, the failure of America's mental health system, and even the unbelievable failure of the FBI, ' for last week's school shooting in Parkland, Florida, which left 17 dead.

'It's a bizarre fact that in this country our jewelry stores, all over this country, are more important than our children,' he fumed from onstage. 'Our banks, our airports, our NBA games, our NFL games, our office buildings, our movie stars, our politicians, they're all more protected than our children at school.'

Does that make any sense to

anybody?' he asked the crowd. 'Do we really love our money and our celebrities more than we love our children?'

While an appearance by LaPierre was expected during the three-day conference, held just outside of Washington, D.C., at Maryland's National Harbor, he was left off the schedule in light of the recent school shooting, with organizers worried that his speech would attract protesters. But it was clear when NRA spokeswoman Dana Loesch was introduced as the first big-name speaker, that LaPierre would soon follow.

'We were all horrified by another terrible tragedy at an American school,' LaPierre began. 'Each and every member of the National Rifle Association mourns the loss of the innocent.'

He then delivered a 30-plus minute diatribe against the Democrats and the media to the crowd.

'The opportunists wasted not one second to exploit tragedy for political gain,' he said, suggesting the 'breathless national media' was eager to 'smear' the NRA.

Democrats, LaPierre warned,

'hate the NRA. They hate the Second Amendment. They hate individual freedom.'

'For them it's not a safety issue, it's a political issue,' he continued. 'Their goal is to eliminate the Second Amendment and our firearms freedoms, so they can eradicate all individual freedoms.'

'Their solution is to make you, all of you, less free,' LaPierre said.

The NRA CEO spent a big chunk of his speech warning off socialism, suggesting that the modern-day Democratic Party was completely now in the Bernie Sanders' mold.

LaPierre said it's 'terrifying' that 'new European-style socialists' have taken over the Democratic Party.

'Obama promised a fundamental transformation of our country, and you know what, it began with his own national party,' the NRA leaders aid. 'A party that is now infested with saboteurs, who don't believe in capitalism, don't believe in the Constitution, don't believe in our freedom and don't believe in America as we know it.'

'Obama may be gone, but they're Utopian dream, it marches on,' LaPierre added.

It goes beyond Sanders, the Vermont independent who ran for president in 2016, losing to Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primary.

'He's near the end of his career,' LaPierre said of the 76-year-old Sanders. 'But how about Kamala Harris, Elizabeth Warren, Bill de Blasio, Andrew Cuomo, Cory Booker, Christopher Murphy and

Keith Ellison?'

The CPAC audience booed.

'They are not Democrats in the mold of John F. Kennedy or Tip O'Neill,' LaPierre said. 'They hide behind labels like Democrat, left-wing and progressive to make their socialist agenda more palatable and that is terrifying.'

Following in the footsteps of Congressional Republicans, who have become more and more critical of the FBI, LaPierre blamed them too, while pointing out that many members of the NRA are in law enforcement.

That didn't stop LaPierre – and Loesch – from saying the bureau dropped the ball.

'I refuse to leave this stage until I say one more time that we must immediately harden our schools,' La Pierre. 'Every day young children are being dropped off at schools that are virtual wide-open soft targets for anyone bent on mass-murder.'

He also refused to leave the stage until he had uttered his trademark line: 'To stop a bad guy with a gun, it takes a good guy

with a gun.'

Before LaPierre spoke, Loesch brought fire to the stage – blasting the national media and agreeing that schools should be protected by deadly firepower. 'We're parents too,' she said of NRA members.

Don't you think our kids deserve the same protection as our celebrities? Don't you all think that our kids deserve the same protection as our athletes? As our banks? As our businesses?'

'But yet we leave them the most unprotected,' Loesch lamented. She opened her remarks by pointing to the back of a cavernous ballroom at reporters and television cameras – and claiming broadcasters crave the ratings that come along with massacres. 'Many in legacy media love mass shootings. You guys love it!' she said.

'Now I'm not saying that you love the tragedy, but I am saying that you love the ratings. Crying white mothers are ratings gold to you and many of the legacy media in the back.'



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# WHY MODI SNUBBED TRUDEAU? *A Foot in the right direction*



minister, a junior level official was sent to greet Justin Trudeau.

Officially the government has not explained the reasons of this snub, but there is an impression in diplomatic circles that this was done to convey to the Government of Canada to get tough with the Khalistani elements within Canada. Well Canada is not the only country, where the activities of the so-called Khalistanis are ignored. The same happens in neighboring USA and the Western European nations like Germany, Italy, France and the U.K. It appears that India depends far too much on the research and knowhow of those countries and their trade and industry.

Compared to Canada, the economies of these countries are much bigger. By snubbing these countries, India can hurt itself in the foot.

**Harjap Singh Aujla**  
harjapaujla@gmail.com

We are living in a civilized community of nations, where a certain definite international protocol is observed. Whenever a foreign prime minister visits India, some high ranking union minister of the rank of home minister, foreign minister, finance minister or defense minister goes to the airport to receive him/her. There are incidents in recent history, when the prime minister himself has gone to the airport himself to receive the foreign prime minister. But in the case of the Canadian prime

## *New York Man Pleads Guilty to Attempting to Provide Material Support to ISIS and Passport Fraud*

After returning to the United States, Alimehmeti continued to support ISIS. Among other things, Alimehmeti displayed an ISIS flag in his apartment in the Bronx and, in the course of recorded meetings with undercover law enforcement employees, Alimehmeti played multiple pro-ISIS propaganda videos on his computer and cellphone, including videos of ISIS fighters decapitating prisoners, and also indicated that he was interested in radicalizing other individuals in the Bronx area. Alimehmeti also made repeated purchases of combat knives and other military-type equipment, including pocket chainsaw, a wire pocket saw and a rucksack designed for tactical combat, which he stockpiled at his apartment in the Bronx.

In October 2015, Alimehmeti applied for a U.S. passport, falsely claiming in the application that his previous passport had been lost. Alimehmeti later told an undercover law enforcement employee that his prior passport – which Alimehmeti showed to the undercover law enforcement officer – had not been lost and, instead, that he was applying for a new passport because he believed the rejection stamps in his existing passport resulting from his attempted entries into the United Kingdom would make it difficult to travel. Alimehmeti further conveyed to undercover law enforcement personnel that he was seeking the new passport, without rejection stamps, to facilitate his travel overseas to join and fight for ISIS.

## *"Prosthetics for Change", a charity started by Ashita Dhadda of New Jersey supplies prosthetics for India's disabled*

(By our Staff Reporter) New York-Ashita Dhadda, The Dwight Morrow High School/Academies student has established a nonprofit; Prosthetics for Change, a grassroots organization, is U.S. subsidiary of Jaipur Foot. The group recently presented a gift of \$5,000 to its Indian parent organi-

zation during an assembly inside Dhadda's school in Englewood, New Jersey. The check was handed over to Prem Bhandari, Chairman of Jaipur Foot US Foundation. (Seen in Pictures) Rajeev Bhambri of India Abroad, Prem Bhandari and Aashita Dhadda with others)



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- Lot Size: 60X100
- Total Taxes: \$10,170.91
- Wood Floors:
- Sect:
- Taxes w/Basic STAR: \$8,547.00
- New Construction: N
- Adult Comm: N
- Schools: 5 Levittown
- Approx Year Built: 1948
- Handicap Access:

**Bsmt/Subfl:**  
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# How Mehul Choksi's sparkling Geetanjali Gems lost its shine

Mehul Choksi, once the poster boy of India's booming diamond trade, is now a wanted man for his alleged collusion in a \$1.77 billion fraud at Punjab National Bank (PNB).

The chairman and managing director of Gitanjali Gems has been missing from the country since January. Though his nephew, and main accused in the case, Nirav Modi, is the one in the spotlight, Choksi's alleged involvement has opened up a can of worms for the jewellery baron's Rs16,573 crore business empire spanning several continents.

In the past few days, several of his personal and official premises have been raided by sleuths over LoUs (letter of undertaking) of Rs4,886 crore fraudulently issued to three of his companies.

The 58-year-old Mumbai-based businessman was dealt another blow after a former employee alleged that the diamonds sold by Gitanjali Gems, a company that rose to fame in the mid-1990s after Choksi took reigns of his family business, were often fake and produced in labs. These spurious stones drew margins as high as 90% for the firm, the former employee alleged.

Gitanjali's three-decade rise

saw furious overseas expansion, a stock-exchange listing, market manipulation, and mounting debt—all amid dazzling brand launches.

Early days

Born into a family of Gujarati traders, Choksi joined the business that his father had established in the 1960s.

It was in 1986 that Choksi launched Gitanjali Gems, which went on to become a top exporter of rough and polished diamonds and jewellery to wholesalers and retailers. Over the years, its export trade expanded to Belgium, the US, west Asia, Japan, China, Hong Kong, and Thailand.

This helped Choksi, who attended the GD Modi College in Gujarat's Palanpur, gather wide experience in the diamond trade.

However, it was in the early 1990s that Choksi sensed a massive retail opportunity.

For years, Indian households have bought gold and diamond jewellery from trusted family jewellers. Preferences began shifting slowly as more shoppers in the 90s bought branded and smaller pieces of jewellery. Many brands such as the Tata Group-owned Tanishq sought to tap into this urban Indian market.

In a marked shift from manufacturing and exports,

Gitanjali launched its own jewellery brand, Gili, in 1994. Margins were higher in this segment and Choksi's brands and businesses were backed by management gurus and Bollywood celebrities alike. Over the next decade or so, Gitanjali expanded its retail footprint at home and abroad.

Choksi's ambition was clear. "The next LVMH will be born out of India," he told Forbes in a 2009 interview, referring to the group that owns the international luxury brand, Louis Vuitton.

As of 2016, Gitanjali's network of own stores (pdf), shop-in-shops, and franchise outlets were spread across 200 cities and 3,000 points of sale in India. These include brands such as Gili, Nakshatra, Asmi, Sangini, Nizam, and Parineeta.

Acquisitions & IPO

Soon, the retailer was eyeing acquisitions abroad and planning to get listed.

In 2006, Gitanjali raised nearly Rs330 crore from the stock market to "set up additional diamond and jewellery manufacturing facilities in Mumbai, at the proposed Gems and Jewellery Special Economic Zone in Hyderabad, and also continue to expand our retail operations," the company said in a Draft Red Herring Prospectus then (pdf).

The firm then issued foreign

currency bonds worth \$110 million, helping Choksi fund his expansion plan. Gitanjali also signed various joint ventures and distribution agreements with foreign brands to retail their products in India and overseas, giving it a certain clout in the market. Meanwhile, it continued to strengthen its association with retailers, splurging on acquisitions. For instance, in 2006, it spent Rs200 crore to acquire close to 100 stores of the US-based Samuels. In November 2007, the firm bought out another based US-based speciality retailer, Rogers, for an undisclosed amount. In 2008, Gitanjali increased its stake to 100% in the De Beers-owned Nakshatra brand, which was already being sold through 480 stores in India. In 2011, it acquired four Italian brands from a unit of Dubai-based Damas International. It also has a minority stake in a Japanese jewellery chain.

At the peak of Gitanjali's success, Bollywood celebrities like Aishwarya Rai, Katrina Kaif, and Kareena Kapoor were associated with its various brands. In 2008, after Kaif was appointed Nakshatra's brand ambassador, sales grew over 60% in less than a year.

The slide At its peak in 2013, the Gitanjali stock was

trading over Rs600. On Feb. 19, it closed at Rs33.80. Its market capitalisation was down to Rs400 crore on the same day. In 2013, it had touched Rs6,000 crore.

Since 2012, things have been turbulent. In 2013, the stock spiralled downward over mounting debt, working capital requirement, weak domestic demand, tightened government policies, and a restructuring plan that spooked investors and traders alike.

In July 2013, market regulator SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India) barred 26 firms from trading on the stock market for six months over "suspected market manipulation." This included Choksi's company. A July 2013 note from credit-rating agency CARE said:

Nevertheless, following a prolonged slump in domestic gold demand, Choksi set forth on the restructuring exercise to bring down costs and focus on diamond jewellery and exports. But matters only got worse. Choksi is now an accused in a scam that could shake up India's banking industry. As the jeweller's role in the crime is uncovered, the man who once had India's who's who at his disposal seems to be sliding deeper into a rut. His days of dazzling may finally be over.

## Indian faces jail, caning for attempt to murder student nurse

He will be sentenced a later date. He faces life imprisonment or up to 20 years in prison, and possible caning or a fine.

The man got to know the student nurse in February 2013, while she was attached to the hospital where he worked as a healthcare assistant. He wooed her even though she had a boyfriend. She initially played along but later apologised, telling him "it was a joke all along".

He refused to accept the rejection and even turned up outside her flat to ask for her hand in marriage.

On 19 December, 2013, he again went to her home to propose marriage. He behaved aggressively on being rebuffed but left after the police were called. He went home, hid a knife in his sock and returned, sleeping at the void deck to wait for her.

At about 8.30am the next day, he confronted her and demanded she go with him to talk. When she refused, he stabbed her in the lower back. She tried to push him away but he stabbed her in the abdomen.

After she fell to the floor, he continued stabbing and slashing her on her head, neck, body and arms.

The woman's parents rushed down upon hearing her screams. When her father saw the accused with a knife in his hand on top of his daughter, he pushed the assailant away.

## Indian-origin illegal moneylender jailed in UK

In sentencing Gopee, Judge Beddoe noted at Southwark Crown Court in London last week that Gopee was aware of the regulator's serious concerns, but ignored them, deciding instead to "deliberately flout the law".

He continued to pressurise debtors with demands for payment, threatening court action that he knew could not be sustained.

Commenting on the defendant's activities as a whole, the judge said that Gopee's business practices "exploited the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of many, many people" who were unaware that their trust in him was misplaced.

He described the scheme constructed by Gopee as involving one contrivance after another in an attempt to get around the law, showing "a horrid pattern of exploitation".

The Serious Crime Prevention Order will begin on Gopee's release from custody and will last for five years. It includes conditions prohibiting him from conducting any business in the credit

sphere, limits the number of bank facilities he is permitted to operate, and requires him to make disclosures of those banking facilities to the FCA.

Breaching the terms of the order is a criminal offence, punishable by upto five years' imprisonment.

Gopee had already been banned from acting as a company director, having been disqualified in May 2016 for the maximum period permissible of 15 years under the UK's Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986.

A number of his companies have already been wound up in the public interest following proceedings by the Official Receiver, and he has also been the subject of a restraint order obtained by the FCA in June 2015 under the UK's Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. Following the lifting of a reporting restrictions, the FCA revealed that it had to bring two sets of proceedings against Gopee for contempt of court in relation to repeated breaches of that restraint order.

# India probing how Khalistani terrorist Jaspal Atwal got visa, Justin Trudeau says he should never have been invited

This is something which we are trying to find out. In due course, we will be able to come up with a reason that how he managed to come in India," the spokesperson for the ministry of external affairs Raveesh Kumar said. "There are two aspects to it: presence and visa. The Canadian side has already clarified that the invitation has been withdrawn. About the visa, I don't know how it happened. We will ascertain information from our commission," Kumar added. Atwal, who was photographed with Trudeau's wife at an event in Mumbai on February 20, and three other men were convicted of the attempted murder for the 1986 attack on Akali Dal leader and minister Malkiat Singh Sidhu on Vancouver Island.

"Obviously, we take this extremely seriously. He should never have received an invitation. As soon as we received the information we rescinded it. A member of parliament had included this individual," Trudeau said.

Earlier, Canadian authorities said the invitation to Atwal to the dinner reception to be hosted by Canadian high commissioner Nadir Patel for Trudeau at the envoy's residence in New Delhi on Thursday night had been withdrawn.

As the invitation to Atwal made headlines political leaders and diplomats

questioned Trudeau's assurance that his country won't support any separatist movement in India.

Congress' Sunil Jakhar said that Trudeau should respect the sentiments of the Indian government and the people of Punjab.

"He is the head of state and he had assured (chief minister) Capt Amarinder Singh that Canada will not support terrorism in any form," Jakhar said.

The Congress leader was referring to Trudeau's meeting with Singh on Wednesday where he said that Canada did not support "any separatist movement in India or elsewhere".

"Really happy to receive categorical assurance from Canadian PM@Justin Trudeau that his country does not support any separatist movement. His words are a big relief to all of us here in India and we look forward to his government's support in tackling fringe separatist elements," Singh tweeted after the meeting.

Senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader Subramanian Swamy also questioned the stand taken by Canada about not supporting Khalistan.

"It was foolish on our part to not do a background check. And how could Canadians, who claim that they do not support the Khalistani, allow the same,"

he was quoted as saying by ANI.

Former high commissioner of India to Canada Vishnu Prakash acknowledged the existence of a "cloud" on the Indo-Canadian bilateral ties due to the Khalistan issue.

"Unfortunately Canada is the only country in the world which is providing a platform, or is seen to be providing a platform to the Khalistan elements, Not the USA, not the UK and that is a matter of concern," Prakash told ANI.

Prakash, in addition to this, also underscored how the tiny faction of Khalistan elements, who control the gurdwaras, use money donated to them to propagate the radical agenda.

"Ninety-nine percent of Sikhs love Canada and India. There is a microscopic percentage of radical Khalistan elements who control Gurudwaras. Money, donated by pious Sikhs, goes to them and they use it to spread radical agenda and spread hatred towards India," Prakash explained.

'Canada must stop glorifying Khalistanis'

Ujjal Dosanjh, an Indo-Canadian politician in British Columbia and a vocal critic of the Khalistan movement who was allegedly attacked by Atwal in February 1985, said he was "flabbergasted" and "left speechless" to learn about the

invitation.

Atwal was not convicted in the attack on Dosanjh because of a technicality related to his identification. The attack on the Punjab minister occurred almost a year later.

"This speaks volumes about the kind of inroads Khalistanis have made into the Liberal Party of Canada and the echelons of power," Dosanjh, who was brutally attacked in a parking lot, said.

Dosanjh, who went on to become the premier (chief minister) of the province and a federal cabinet minister, said this pointed to a "colossal failure" on part of those conducting security checks for the Trudeau visit.

"This is what I have been saying. This is not about freedom of speech, it is about Canadian politicians openly hobnobbing, associating with unquestionable elements that are Khalistanis," he said.

Dosanjh said politicians in his country have failed to appreciate India's deep sensitivities about Khalistani activities.

"There has been no blowback from India till now despite Canadian politicians going to parades, processions and events where posters of Air India bomber Talwinder Singh Parmar and other militants are displayed and they are celebrated as heroes," he said.

He said Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi reportedly took Trudeau aside at Davos and told him that Khalistani activities in Canada were becoming a serious issue.

He added that is why Trudeau's two ministers, Harjit Sajjan and Amarjeet Sohi, made the statement that they have nothing to do with Khalistan just before their departure for India. He said if Canadian politicians stop pandering to separatists and going to their events, the Khalistan movement will die quickly. Dosanjh said Trudeau's statements about India's unity would be meaningless if politicians keep going to the events where militants are glorified. "I cannot stop anyone from glorifying anyone, but what I can do is stop going to such events. This is what Trudeau and other politicians should do now. Or they should insist that they will not attend such events if the killers of innocent people are glorified." Commentators said Trudeau received a lukewarm reception because of his failure to clearly speak out against Sikh extremists and Khalistani terrorists in Canada. Trudeau is also facing criticism for other aspects of his visit, including a number of events that have been described as photo opportunities with no substantive outcomes. Only half a day of the eight-day trip has been set aside for official engagements such as talks with Modi.

## Rotomac owner, son arrested in Rs 3,700 crore cheating case

for cheating a consortium of seven banks of Rs 3,695 crore.

CBI sources said that the Kotharis were arrested after three days of extensive questioning as they refused to explain the modus operandi used to befool the banks and how they used the money after getting it in their bank accounts.

Vikram Kothari was "non-cooperative for past three days", said an official, adding that "he was not disclosing the details of shell companies, use of Rs 2,919 crore he took from the banks, bank officials and private persons who connived with him".

"Since he and his son were

not divulging details, they were arrested," said a senior officer. They will be produced in a CBI court on Friday. CBI has already sealed their houses in Delhi and Kanpur while Income Tax authorities have attached their immovable properties and bank accounts. The BS&FC cell, led by Joint Director Rajiv Singh, has also made high-profile arrests in the Rs 11,400 crore PNB scam in the last two days, including Vipul Ambani and senior bank officers. Singh has successfully led probes in multi-crore Ponzi schemes including Sarada, Rose Valley and others.

In Rotomac's case, Bank of

Baroda had on Sunday filed a criminal complaint alleging that Rs 2,919 crore was siphoned off by the Kotharis, which together with penalties reached Rs 3,695 crore. A consortium of seven banks led by Bank of India gave him loans 2008 onwards with Bol's exposure being Rs 754 crore. Among other lenders, Bank of Baroda had advanced Rs 456.63 crore, Indian Overseas Bank Rs 771 crore, Union bank of India Rs 459 crore, Allahabad Bank Rs 330 crore, Bank of Maharashtra Rs 50 crore, Oriental Bank of Commerce Rs 97 crore. It is alleged that Kothari got loans disbursed on the

basis of foreign letters of credit (FLCs) on the pretext of making payments to his buyers and suppliers in places like Dubai, Sharjah and Hong Kong but they didn't exist.

The Kotharis reportedly provided incomplete documents or photocopies of bills of loading to the banks on the pretext that original papers were sent to the importer.

The banks have alleged that Rotomac did not attach the packing list, mandatory insurance copies of goods, certificate of origin of goods, or the inspection certificate from third parties while submitting documents to it. When

bank officials visited Rotomac's suppliers and buyers abroad, they found that the import/export business was allegedly running through shell companies. The banks have also claimed that Rotomac violated Foreign Exchange Management Act rules and worked for interest rate differential in local and foreign currency in the guise of trade without having any genuine business transactions.

Sources say that Vikram Kothari's wife Sadhana, who was Director in the company, has not been extensively questioned yet, but she can also be also called to Delhi for examination.

## Spend too much time on social media?

# It can cause tension in your real life relationships

*A survey showed teenagers from low-income families reported more physical fights, face-to-face arguments and trouble at school that spilled over from social media.*



Even as effects of social media use on mental well-being is hotly debated, a new study says that spending too much time online can create problems in real life relationships of teenagers and vice versa. Results of a survey conducted by Professor Candice Odgers of University of California, Irvine and her colleagues showed teenagers from low-income families reported more physical fights, face-to-face arguments and trouble at school that spilled over from social media.

On the other hand, the

researchers found that adolescents from economically disadvantaged households are also more likely to be bullied and victimised in cyberspace. "The majority of young people appear to be doing well in the digital age, and many are thriving with the new opportunities that electronic media provides. But those who are already struggling offline need our help online too," Odgers said. In a commentary published in the journal *Nature*, Odgers argued that while smartphones should not be seen as universally bad, vulnerable teenagers experience greater negative

effects of life online. "What we're seeing now may be the emergence of a new kind of digital divide, in which differences in online experiences are amplifying risks among already vulnerable adolescents," said Odgers, who is also a fellow in Canadian Institute for Advanced Research's Child & Brain Development programme. For the last 10 years, Odgers has been tracking adolescents' mental health and their use of smartphones. In her survey of North Carolina schoolchildren, 48% of 11-year-olds said they owned a mobile phone as did eighty-five per cent

of 14-year-olds. The study showed that teenagers from families with a household income of less than \$35,000 per year spent three more hours a day on screen media watching TV and online videos than teenagers in families with an annual income of more than \$100,000. The increased screen time could also convert to more problems offline,

the findings showed. "The evidence so far suggests that smartphones may serve as mirrors reflecting problems teens already have. Those from low-income families said that social media experiences more frequently spilled over into real life, causing more offline fights and problems at school," Odgers said.

## Think vaping is safe?

# E-cigarette vapours are loaded with toxic metals and can cause cancer

*A new study found significant amounts of toxic metals, including lead, leak from some e-cigarette heating coils and present in the aerosols inhaled by users. It can cause cancer and damage your brain.*



It has come to light that e-cigarette vapours contain a significant amount of toxic metals, which can be dangerous. According to a study conducted by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, significant amounts of toxic metals, including lead, leak from some e-cigarette heating coils and are present in the aerosols inhaled by users. Previous studies found that users of e-cigarettes may be at higher risk of lung infection.

In the study, scientists examined e-cigarette devices owned by a sample of 56 users. They found that significant numbers of devices generated aerosols with potentially unsafe levels of lead, chromium, manganese and/or nickel. Chronic inhalation of these metals has been linked to lung, liver, immune, cardiovascular/brain damage, and even cancer.

"It's important for the FDA, e-cigarette companies, and

vapers to know that these heating coils, as currently made, seem to be leaking toxic metals — which then get into the aerosols that vapers inhale," said senior author, Ana María Rule. Vaping, the practice of inhaling this aerosol as if it were cigarette smoke, is now popular especially among teens, young adults and former smokers.

Vaping is popular in part because it provides the nicotine "hit" and the look and feel of tobacco-smoking but without smoking's extreme health risks. Evidence that vaping isn't entirely safe continues to accumulate, however. For the new study, Rule and her colleagues, including lead author Pablo Olmedo, recruited 56 daily e-cigarette users from vaping conventions and e-cigarette shops around Baltimore during the fall of 2015.

Working with participants' devices, which they brought to the researchers' lab at the Bloomberg School, the scientists tested for the

presence of 15 metals in the e-liquids in the vapers' refilling dispensers, the e-liquids in their coil-containing e-cigarette tanks and in the generated aerosols. Consistent with prior studies, they found minimal amounts of metals in the e-liquids within refilling dispensers, but much larger amounts of some metals in the e-liquids that had been exposed to the heating coils within e-cigarette tanks.

The difference indicated that the metals almost certainly had come from the coils. Most importantly, the scientists showed that the metal contamination carried over to the aerosols produced by heating the e-liquids. Of the metals significantly present in the aerosols, lead, chromium, nickel and manganese were the ones of most concern, as all are toxic when inhaled.

Almost 50% of aerosol samples had lead concentrations higher than health-based limits defined by the Environmental Protection

Agency. Similarly, median aerosol concentrations of nickel, chromium and manganese approached or exceeded safe limits. "These were median levels only," Rule said. "The actual levels of these metals varied greatly from sample to sample, and often were much higher than safe limits."

E-cigarette heating coils typically are made of nickel, chromium and a few other elements, making them the most obvious sources of metal contamination, although the source of the lead remains a mystery. Precisely how metals get from the coil into the surrounding e-liquid is another mystery. "We don't know yet whether metals are chemically leaching from the coil or

vaporising when it's heated," Rule said. The researchers did observe, however, that aerosol metal concentrations tended to be higher for e-cigarettes with more frequently changed coils — suggesting that fresher coils give off metals more readily.

The researchers also detected significant levels of arsenic, a metal-like element that can be highly toxic, in refill e-liquid and in the corresponding tank e-liquid and aerosol samples from 10 of the 56 vapers. How the arsenic got into these e-liquids is yet another mystery — and another potential focus for regulators. The findings from the study are published online in *Environmental Health Perspectives*.



# PNB fraud: LoUs to Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi companies started in 2008, arrested bank officials tell CBI

**Revelations into the Rs 11,400-crore loan fraud were made by five Punjab National Bank officials, all of whom were part of the forex department at the bank's Brady House branch at the time.**

The practice of illegally issuing Letters of Undertaking (LoUs) and Foreign Letter of Credit (FLCs) and then rolling them over to favour Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi groups started in 2008 and continued till these were discovered in January this year, according to CBI officials.

The illicit activities resulting in fraud of Rs 11,400 crore occurred under the nose of top Punjab National Bank officials but they claimed to be unaware of the scam.

The revelation came to the fore during questioning by CBI officials of Rajesh Jindal, who was holding charge of PNB's Brady House Branch in Mumbai between August 2009 and May 2011, Gokul Nath Shetty, a former deputy manager of the same branch who retired in May 2017, Bechu B Tiwari, chief manager, in charge of forex department, Yashwant Joshi, scale II manager of forex department, and Prafull Sawant, scale I officer, export.

The officials said they merely continued with the practice that started in 2008. It was not immediately clear who was in charge of the forex department when the illegal practice began.

The CBI officials said the alleged multi-crore fraud by issuing LoUs and FLCs for sanction of loan to diamantaire Nirav Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi's group of firms continued



during Jindal's tenure.

Jindal, posted as GM Credit at PNB's head office in New Delhi, was heading the second largest branch of the bank when the practice of issuing the LoUs without sanctioned limits continued.

Arrested on Tuesday night after his day-long questioning in Mumbai, Jindal is the 12th accused to be held in the case so far. He is CBI custody till March 5.

Tiwari, Joshi and Sawant were arrested on Monday and will remain in police custody till March 3.

All five PNB officials arrested so far were part of the forex department at the bank's Brady

House branch at the time of the fraud, said officials, adding these employees, in collaboration with the staff and associates of the firms headed by Nirav Modi and Choksi, committed wrongdoings for personal gains.

The first FIR in the scam registered on January 31 alleged that Shetty and a single window operator Manoj Kharat, during their forex department posting, fraudulently issued eight LoUs (which are a form of bank guarantee) equivalent to Rs 280 crore on February 9, 10 and 14, 2017, favouring the Nirav Modi companies to Allahabad Bank, Hong Kong, and Axis Bank, without following prescribed procedure.

It added that the funds raised for import bills were not utilised for such purposes in many cases.

PNB's employee Tiwari, in his capacity as chief manager, was to monitor Shetty's transactions. However, Tiwari told the interrogators that during 2015-17, he did not monitor the fraudulent and illegal LoUs issued by Shetty. An official close to the investigation said Tiwari issued three circulars on February 19, 2016, February 7 and March 14, 2017, purportedly for the sake of keeping a check on the LoUs sent through the SWIFT code of the PNB's Brady House Branch without any name. However, he neither

followed it up nor took any steps to see why his instructions were not followed by Shetty, Joshi or Sawant. "Tiwari's deliberate acts of omissions led to the continuance of concealment and large scale liabilities of PNB to the foreign banks," said the official. The CBI filed the first FIR against Diamond R Us, Solar Exports and Stellar Diamond whose partners have been named as Nirav Modi, his brother Nishal, uncle Mehul Choksi and wife Ami. All of them left the country in early January. The second FIR was filed on February 15 for an amount of Rs 4,886.72 crore against the Gitanjali group headed by Choksi. CBI officials said details of additional amounts (of around Rs 6,400 crore) would be added to the first FIR. The second FIR also names 11 directors of the three Choksi owned Gitanjali group companies — Gitanjali Gems Ltd, Gili India Ltd and Nakshatra Brands Ltd.

The PNB fraud came to light on January 16 when officials of Nirav Modi companies approached the bank for buyers' credit without collateral saying they had been getting such facility for years. The bank said that the official who had earlier allowed such illegal facility through LoUs and FLCs had retired by then, and on checking by officials, the whole fraud unravelled.

## The making of a heartless nation

**Why don't we react to crime against women in public places or help accident victims?**

Not just Delhi, it would appear that the entire country has become heartless.

I am writing these lines with mixed emotions of sadness, anger and shame. It seems that the Indian civilisation has put its good qualities on the back-burner and joined the blind race for economic progress which is meaningless without the safety of its citizens.

If you don't believe me, consider this shameful incident that took place in Delhi. A student of Delhi University was travelling in a Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) bus. Seated next to her, a man began to masturbate looking at the student. I am feeling ashamed just writing these words: Imagine the mentality of the pervert who was carrying out this act in public. The girl objected, but this didn't deter the man. She raised an alarm to attract the attention of others travelling in the bus, to no avail. On

top of this, the bus driver and conductor remained indifferent to it all. Is this why they call Delhi a heartless city? Despite the betrayal of her fellow passengers and the DTC staff, the young student didn't lose heart. She bravely recorded this abominable act on her mobile and put it out on Twitter. The outrage that it invoked woke the Delhi Police from its Kumbhakarna-like slumber and they had to take the accused into custody. Until now, the Delhi government, which has been appealing to the people's conscience in the name of victims of sexual and other violence, has not yet penalised either the bus driver or the conductor. Shouldn't such insensitive and callous employees be suspended or put behind bars? You may want to salute the courage and resolve of the girl, but what will you say about her fellow passengers? They deserve to be condemned as much as the

perpetrator. A society is created on the bedrock of cooperation and social harmony. Our harmony has already been sacrificed at the altar of communalism and casteism. Now, if social cooperation also flounders, how safe will we remain in this jungle raj? If you look for an answer to his question, you'll really feel afraid. You must realise that this DTC bus wasn't passing through some deserted forest. Neither was the perpetrator of the obscene act an armed terrorist. Had they so desired, people could have stopped him or informed the police by dialling 100. Even if one of the bus travellers had protested, the man would have been embarrassed. But everybody kept quiet. These are the kind of people who advise the government to act responsibly when incidents of sexual violence take place. Instead of issuing sermons, had they carried out their duties as responsible citizens, such

behaviour would not have been repeated. How damaging their silence is for themselves can be evaluated through a few statistics. In 2016-17, 669 cases of stalking, 41 cases of voyeurism and 2,155 cases of rape were registered in Delhi. The rate of serious crime in 2016-17 saw an astounding jump of 160.4% from 2015-16. This is almost three times the average national increase of 55.2%. So, it wasn't surprising when the London-based Thomson Reuters Foundation said in a survey last year that the national Capital was the fourth most unsafe place in the world when it came to safety of women in public transport, after Bogota, Mexico City and Lima. It isn't just women's safety: In case you meet with an accident in Delhi, most passersby will be more interested in making a video than helping you. One of the victims I referred to earlier was Ankit Saxena.

# Gitanjali Gems, Nirav Modi stores shuttered across India, employees await their dues

## The future of the Gitanjali Gems and Nirav Modi firms and their employees remains uncertain

The sight of the Nirav Modi store at the Flagship Kalaghoda store in Mumbai is pitiful—a watchman's uniform, a pair of dark blue denims and a blue shirt are slung on hangers right under the brass name plate at the entrance of the store which has been shuttered since 15 February, under section 281B of the Income-Tax Act, 1961, while three bored-looking watchmen squat on the front porch doing nothing.

Nirav Modi is the main accused in the Rs 11,400-crore Punjab National Bank fraud case.

In Thane's Viviana Mall, a white facade has been put up in front of Gitanjali Gems-owned Gili store. This is the mall's usual practice when there is renovation work or change in ownership taking place, said a spokesperson for the mall. Modi's boutique store on Lavelle road, Bengaluru, also wears a forlorn look.

The story is worse for some of Gitanjali Gems Ltd's franchises for whom the problem has been persisting for some years now.

For instance, the store on Cunningham road in Bengaluru wears a dark, deserted look despite being in the middle of one of the most bustling business corners of the city. The franchise has cut short its staff strength from around 10 in 2015 to three people right now, as per a store manager, who did not wish to be named. The three have not been paid by the franchise owner for the last three months. The franchise has some Rs80 lakh dues pending which Gitanjali has not paid since 2015, said the store manager, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. On 19 February the Enforcement Directorate officials raided the store from 6pm to the next day 4am, according to the store manager.

The Gitanjali store manager refused to give details of the franchise owner, saying they are told not to share his contact details with the media. Mint couldn't independently reach out to him immediately for a comment. Another franchise from Nagpur



closed his store in February 2017 after seven years of operations. The reason was irregular supplies, said the store owner, on the condition of anonymity. "The first three years were good. But as they (Gitanjali Gems) started expanding and diversifying, the service levels dropped and we decided to give up the franchise," said the franchise owner, who still has close to Rs60 lakh to be cleared from the company but thinks it's better to write it off and move on as it "is futile" to chase the company for payments.

Executives at a Gitanjali showroom in the national capital

said the business has been down ever since the news of the loan fraud broke. At present, there are only three standalone showrooms of the company in Delhi; several Gitanjali showrooms have been closed by the company over the last few years, according to the executives, who did not want to be named. The news of the fraud has also impacted consumer walk-ins. "There is an impact on customer walk-ins as well as on the overall image of the brand," said one of the franchise owners in Delhi, asking not to be named.

Elsewhere in India, close to 100 franchise owners for Gitanjali

have shuttered their stores in the last 2-3 years as they face irregular supplies from the company, according to another franchise owner from Nagpur. Close to a dozen have also filed police complaints in the last 2-3 years, said a former franchise owner, who did not want to be named. According to this franchise owner, there have been many complaints made at different forums, including the Registrar of Companies, capital market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) and even with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), but they fell on deaf ears.

## Fortis-Religare case: Singh brothers say they're not going anywhere, will responsibly address issue

**Billionaire brothers, Malvinder and Shivinder Singh, face a Rs 3,500 crore arbitration payment to Daiichi Sankyo, and are being investigated for alleged financial irregularities at Fortis Healthcare and Religare Enterprises**

Under pressure, billionaire Singh Brothers — Malvinder and Shivinder, on Thursday said they were "not going anywhere", as they face payment of Rs 3,500 crore arbitration award to Daiichi Sankyo and a probe into alleged financial irregularities at Fortis Healthcare and Religare Enterprises. The brothers, who had quit from the boards of Fortis and Religare earlier this month, said that "given the circumstances and immense challenges facing us today, we assure all our stakeholders that we are doing whatever it takes to resolve the issues and will not shy away from our current responsibilities".

In a joint statement, they said: "We assure that we are NOT going anywhere and are addressing the issues with responsibility and sincerity. We will not shy away from any and all processes, questions, clarifications that need to be addressed; and we will provide all cooperation to ensure that the truth comes forth."

The statement comes at a time when there is big furore in the country over the Rs 11,400 crore PNB scam involving billionaire jewellery merchants

Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi, who have fled the country.

The Delhi high court had on January 31 upheld an international arbitral award of Rs 3,500 crore passed in favour of Japanese pharma major Daiichi Sankyo, which had alleged that the former promoters of erstwhile Ranbaxy Laboratories had concealed information about proceedings against them by American food and drug department.

The Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) is also reported to be initiating a probe into alleged financial irregularities at Fortis and Religare.

Moreover, on February 15, the Supreme Court lifted its stay on sale of shares of Fortis Healthcare Ltd pledged with banks by the Singh brothers before August 31, allowing financial institutions, including Axis Bank and Yes Bank, to sell the pledged shares.

Subsequently, the stake of promoter firm Fortis Healthcare Holdings along with promoters Malvinder Mohan Singh and Shivinder Mohan Singh and other family entities have come down to 5.87 per cent from 34.43 per cent earlier.

## Air India draft tender lists 4 options for govt ownership

The government is looking at four options before it for retaining a stake in the disinvestment-bound Air India, which include keeping 49, 26, 24 or zero per cent stake in the national carrier with itself, according to a senior official.

The ministry of civil aviation has prepared a draft expression of interest, which was placed before the empowered committee at a meeting last week. The draft will also be examined by the core group on disinvestment and the group of ministers constituted to prepare a strategy for the privatisation of Air India, he said. The latter will take a decision on the various proposals following which an Expression of Interest will be formally invited. "The draft EOI prepared by the ministry gives different options to the decision making authorities. It gives the pros and cons for different options, which include retaining 49, 26, 24 or zero stake," a senior official of the ministry of civil aviation said on the condition of anonymity. He added that there was clarity in the government that

at least 51% of ownership of Air India would be transferred to a private player.

Aviation think-tank CAPA had last month suggested that the government should exit Air India completely and that "any level of equity retention will deter investors due to concerns about the prospect of continued government interference post-privatisation."

Last June, the Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs approved disinvestment of Air India and constituted a group of ministers, headed by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, to work on the modalities of the stake sale. The proposed EOI will also address the issue of Air India's employees and their future, the official said. "The draft talks about employees of Air India and the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) guidelines that need to be met such as the minimum benefits to be offered to the employees, when and how can their services be terminated, among others" the official added.

## How scam-hit PNB plans to meet capital requirements

MUMBAI: Fraud-hit Punjab National Bank plans to meet capital requirements by writing back provisions after the expected sale of Bhushan Steel, said people familiar with the matter. The lender has set aside more than the mandated money as provisions on its Rs 4,900 crore (\$754 million) exposure to Bhushan Steel Ltd.'s delinquent account, much of which will be clawed back, the people said, asking not

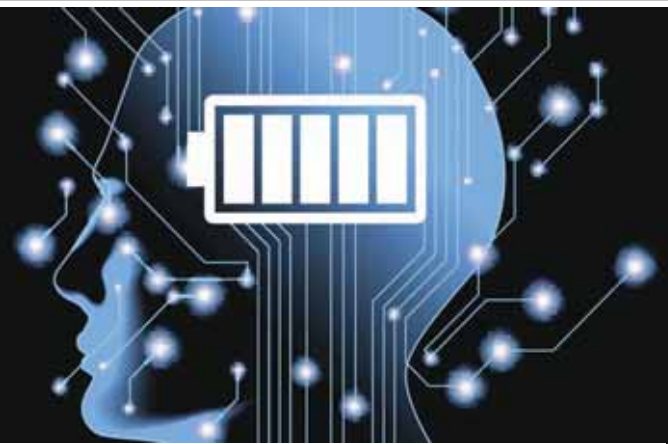
to be identified as the information isn't public. The New Delhi-based bank will also sell some non-core assets, removing any need for the government to increase its Rs 5,500 crore capital allocation for PNB, they added. Bhushan Steel has to be sold this year, according to India's bankruptcy laws, though the timing and price is unclear. The disposal could allow PNB to offset for losses that may arise

from a \$1.8 billion scam it disclosed this month, the extent of which is eight times the lender's net profit for 2017, leaving it vulnerable to a ratings downgrade. The extent of any loss to PNB from the fraud is unclear, as is how much it could get from the sale of Bhushan Steel. PNB expects Rs 1,400 crore from the sale of its headquarters in New Delhi and may also pare its stakes in brokerage PNB Gilts

Ltd. and PNB Housing Finance Ltd., the people said. PNB didn't immediately reply to an email seeking comment and Finance Ministry spokesman DS Malik didn't answer a phone call. PNB shares were trading 1.9 per cent lower as of 2:25 p.m. in Mumbai on Thursday, compared with a 0.4 per cent drop each in the broader Bankex index and the main equity gauge.

## Quantum supremacy: The next \$100 billion gold mine for Indian IT

**A lot of good will come from quantum computing, in better weather forecasting, financial analysis, logistical planning; the search for Earth-like planets; and drug discovery. But it will also open up a Pandora's Box for security. I don't know of any company or government that is prepared for it; all urgently need to build defences.**



The Y2K bug provided a windfall for Indian IT because Western companies had ignored an obvious problem, which if not addressed could have led to catastrophe. Now another catastrophe is looming, one that few people understand, but one that could provide even greater opportunities: quantum computing. Quantum computers could literally upset the global balance of power and pose a greater burden on businesses than the Y2K computer bug did toward the end of the '90s. The Y2K bug took years to remediate and created fear and havoc in the technology sector. And for solving that, we knew what the deadline was. Here, there is no telling whether we have five years or twenty, or whether the sirens will start sounding in just 18 months.

These computers are straight out of science fiction. They rely on particles called quantum bits, or qubits, to process data. In classical computers, each binary digit (bit) represents information in a single value, either 0 or 1. In contrast, a qubit can hold a value of both 0 and 1 at the same time. Rather than doing computations sequentially as classical computers do, quantum computers can use this trait to solve a limited set of problems by laying out a set of possibilities simultaneously and measuring the

results. This is an oversimplification and the measurements are much more complex, but I see these as being equivalent to opening a combination lock by trying every possible number and sequence simultaneously. It sounds crazy that an object can be in two states at the same time. I'll admit that I spent three weeks last year trying to learn quantum mechanics, and became only more confused. The concepts did not make sense. My only consolation was that much smarter people had also struggled with them. Albert Einstein was so sceptical about entanglement, one of the other principles of quantum mechanics, that he called it "spooky action at a distance" and said it was not possible. "God does not play dice with the universe", he argued. He was wrong. IBM, Google, Microsoft, and Intel say that they are getting close to making quantum computers work. IBM is already offering early versions of quantum computing as a cloud service to select clients. There is a global race between technology companies, defence contractors, universities, and governments to build advanced versions, which hold the promise of solving some of the greatest mysteries of the universe—and enable the cracking open of practically every secured

database in the world. Modern-day security systems are protected with a standard encryption algorithm called RSA, which works by finding prime factors of very large numbers. It is easy to reduce a small number such as 15 to its prime factors (3 x 5), but factorizing numbers with a hundred digits or more is extremely hard and could take years using conventional computers. Quantum computers can perform these calculations in hundreds of seconds. They effectively provide a skeleton key to confidential communications, bank accounts, and password databases. In May 2016, IBM surprised the world with an announcement that it was making available a 5-qubit quantum computer on which researchers could run algorithms and experiments. It envisioned that quantum processors of 50 to 100 qubits would be possible in the next decade. The computing capacity of a quantum computer increases exponentially with the number of qubits available to it, so a 50-qubit computer would exceed some of the capabilities of the top supercomputers in world, giving it what researchers call quantum supremacy. IBM delivered another surprise only 18 months later, with an announcement that it was upgrading the publicly available processor to 20 qubits

— and had succeeded in building an operational prototype of a 50-qubit processor, which would give it quantum supremacy. If IBM gets this one working reliably and exponentially increases the number of qubits even once more, the resultant computing speed will increase by a factor of a quadrillion, giving the company — and any other players with similar capacity — incredible powers.

Yes, a lot of good will come from this, in better weather forecasting, financial analysis, and logistical planning; the search for Earth-like planets; and drug discovery. But it will also open up a Pandora's Box for security. I don't know of any company or government that is prepared for it; all urgently need to build defences. It's as vital for them to upgrade their computer systems presently using RSA encryption as it was to upgrade the coding that incorporated the Y2K bug.

There is substantial progress in development of algorithms that are "quantum safe", according to Anish Mohammed, who is a security researcher and founder of Ontici. One promising field that he cites is that of matrix multiplication, which takes advantage of the techniques that allow quantum computers to analyse so much information simultaneously.

## PNB responds to Nirav Modi letter, says followed laws to recover dues

Responding to Nirav Modi's claims about the bank closing all recovery options, Punjab National Bank on Thursday said it has followed lawful avenues to recover its dues.

In a regulatory filing, it also said it has enough assets and capital to meet any liabilities arising from the fraud.

Last week, PNB reported a Rs 11,400 crore fraud involving jewellers Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi and their group firms

and some errant bank employees.

Earlier this week, in a letter, Modi had alleged that PNB's overzealousness had shut the doors on his ability to clear the dues. He had also said that the money he owed banks was less than Rs 5,000 crore and not what was publicised. He had also blamed the bank and its "anxiety to recover dues immediately", for destroying his brand and business and closing all options for a possible repayment of dues.

In a clarification to the stock exchanges about the letter, PNB said, "We have followed lawful avenues available to us as per law to recover our dues." The bank also sought to assuage the concerns of investors and customers about the impact of the fraud on the financials and operations of the bank. "We have enough assets/capital to meet any liability which is decided as per the law," the bank said. The bank had a capital adequacy ratio of

11.58% as of December end. It will get an additional Rs 5,473 crore as capital from the government in the quarter ending March.

It also has huge real estate holdings that it plans to monetize. It also has joint ventures in the insurance and mutual funds space which it can completely or partially exit depending on its requirements. At 2.55pm, PNB's shares were down 1.3% to Rs 115.55.

# Black Panther

Unlike any Marvel movie you've ever seen, groundbreaking in so many ways

**Black Panther movie review: Several artistes - Chadwick Boseman, Ryan Coogler, Michael B Jordan and Kendrick Lamar - come together to create a movie unlike any superhero film you have seen.1**



**Black Panther**  
 Director - Ryan Coogler  
 Cast - Chadwick Boseman, Michael B Jordan, Lupita Nyong'o, Danai Gurira, Martin Freeman, Daniel Kaluuya, Letitia Wright, Winston Duke, Angela Bassett, Forest Whitaker, Andy Serkis  
 Rating - 4.5/5

If the movies have been responsible for tarnishing the reputation of an entire culture, then the responsibility to rebuild it also must fall on them. It has taken a decade, 18 films – most

good, some great, none bad – hundreds of actors, thousands of crew and billions of dollars for the Marvel Cinematic Universe to arrive at this point. The road hasn't always been pretty, but we're here now, older, hopefully wiser, and excited for what comes next. Black Panther is a film that is as much about respecting the past as it is about embracing the future. So it begins with a story, about Wakanda, a fictional African nation hidden away from the world, behind impenetrable rainforests and unconquerable mountains,

uncolonised, unchained. It is the home of T'Challa, who until recently was the crown prince of the country. His father was murdered in Berlin during the events of Captain America: Civil War – we sat and watched in quiet shock as T'Challa wept with the King's head in his arms, his final words to him ringing in his head. Now T'Challa must return to Wakanda, to take over the throne, and become the rightful heir. So he buckles into a futuristic aircraft with his general, Okoye, and his ex, Nakia, and returns home, through impenetrable rainforests and over unconquerable mountains. And as played by Chadwick Boseman, he has the swagger of Kanye West, the theatricality of Beyonce and the raw charm of Barack Obama. Black Panther is Marvel continuing what films like the last couple of Captain America movies, and even Thor: Ragnarok, to an extent, started; I

dare say, for over an hour, it is barely even a superhero movie. But this is just what Marvel needed at this stage in their industry-altering and blazingly ambitious series of interconnected movies. True, there is a lot here that seems signature Marvel – most depressingly, they've once again fallen in the trap of pitting the hero against a beefier version of himself, and the action is Marvel action, which means a lot of quick cuts and very little sense – but there is more that seems unlike anything we've seen in a movie before, let alone a Marvel film. But it takes its time to get there. One scene in particular, set in Korea, is straight out of Skyfall, right down to the set, the arm candy, and the wireless communication. It's followed immediately by a rather lavish chase along the neon-soaked streets of Busan that involves cars with gadgets that harken back to Pierce Brosnan-era James Bond. But while it is set-pieces such as this that we

would normally look forward to in any other Marvel movie – remember the sliced ferry in Spider-Man: Homecoming, or the Formula 1 race in Iron Man 2, or the airport tussle in Civil War? – taken in context to the rest of Black Panther, it seems almost misplaced. It would perhaps have been too bold of Marvel to make this geopolitical thriller without any action – perhaps one day, when there is not a shred of insecurity remaining, and just confidence, and pride, we could expect a movie in which instead of beating each other to a pulp, characters have a chat instead. But till then, we will have Black Panther, a movie that takes just as much pride in showing off its CGI-heavy landscapes as it does in reveling in surreal African rituals. It is vibrant, dizzyingly well-plotted, and when it needs to be, immensely relevant.

# Hostiles

The reason Christian Bale is the greatest Hollywood actor of his generation

**Christian Bale delivers one of the most understated performances of his storied career in Scott Cooper's uncompromisingly grim Western.**



**Hostiles**  
 Director - Scott Cooper  
 Cast - Christian Bale, Rosamund Pike, Wes Studi, Ben Foster, Jesse Plemons, Timothee Chalamet  
 Rating - 4/5

There is a deep melancholy that runs through Hostiles, and essentially every film by Scott Cooper, that defies explanation. The filmmaker only seems to make the sort of movies industry 'experts' insist are becoming less

viable by the year. His latest is not only uncommonly grim for a mainstream picture starring a mainstream movie star, but it is also a Western, a genre that has famously fallen from the audience's good graces, unless, of course, Quentin Tarantino or the Coen Brothers are somehow involved. Barely five minutes go by before Hostiles announces, with gut-wrenching ferocity, what kind of film it is going to be – massive both

thematically and visually, and uncompromisingly brutal in its outlook. We see the family of Wesley Quaid getting attacked by native Americans on horseback. They charge with arrows drawn, unleashing war cries that sear through the quiet. Quaid commands his wife to run, and to take their three children – one of whom is an infant – away from the onslaught. She doesn't get far. Her husband is shot and scalped within her earshot, as are her two young daughters. She barely manages to escape with her baby. The story of Rosalie Quaid, played by Rosamund Pike, is one of the many threads Cooper weaves within Hostiles. Through the course of its languid two odd hours, several characters enter the picture – all of whom are either literally or metaphorically headed towards the final

destination – and even more exit it. The one constant whose duty it is to shepherd these souls – an ageing tribal chief to his village, a disgraced soldier to the gallows, and Rosalie Quaid to safety – is Captain Joseph Blocker, played by Christian Bale. But he has his own journey to complete – one that until recently didn't involve the responsibility of escorting men and women. Hostiles is Bale's second film with Cooper. I wrote about their previous movie, Out of the Furnace, recently. Looking closely, it would appear that both movies are essentially about the same themes – broken characters trudging through life, wordlessly accepting whatever is thrown at them, and fighting back when it becomes impossible to take more abuse. Underneath their rugged

exterior, they're both morality tales about men having to compromise on their beliefs. And both films are anchored by two of the finest, unusually understated Christian Bale performances you're likely to see. Famously, he's the sort of actor whose method invariably overshadows every conversation about him. But range is what he has in droves. There is little that remains to be said about Bale's talents that hasn't already been said, numerous times. I called him the greatest Hollywood actor of his generation in that Out of the Furnace piece, because unlike several of his contemporaries, he knows that the power of silence is often more resilient than scene-stealing bravura.

# Akshay Kumar's Kesari has these beautiful kids too. Our Friday just became better

Kesari: Akshay Kumar is in character, sporting the heavy turban and a full beard. The actor is shooting for the Karan Johar film in Punjab.

Akshay Kumar is in character for Kesari and he is surrounded by children dressed as Afghan kids. It doesn't get more adorable than that, does it? The actor, who is knee-deep in shooting for the film based on Battle of Saragarhi, tweeted on Thursday afternoon, "Innocent smiles galore on set today. Shooting with these lovely children playing Afghan kids in #Kesari based on the Battle Of Saragarhi, one of the bravest battles fought in India." Film's producer Karan Johar was quick to add via Twitter, "Such an exciting

journey this film has been...am so excited and proud to be associated with #kesari." Earlier, talking about how he is prepping for the film, Akshay had said, "I've started shooting for my film Kesari, where I'm in the heaviest turban and beard I've ever had to wear. So I shaved my head to make my life a little easier. I'm known for hating wigs, prosthetics and so on, and Kesari is quite demanding. It's probably my favourite look, though it's taxing to fight and sweat in this avatar. But I wouldn't change it for the world." In January, Akshay had shared his look from the film, writing, "Feeling nothing but immense pride and gratitude while sharing this. Beginning my 2018 with

## What is Battle of Saragarhi?

In September 1897, over 10,000 Afghan tribesmen of the Orakzai and Afridi tribe attacked Saragarhi, North Western Frontier Province (NWFP). The Sikh regiment, under the leadership of Havildar Ishar Singh, knew that they were outnumbered but they still held their ground and fought for several hours.

#KESARI, my most ambitious film and a lot of passion. Need your best wishes as always." Directed by Anurag Singh, the film will hit theatres on Holi 2019. The film has Parineeti Chopra as the lead actress.



# Aiyaary

## Manoj Bajpayee, Sidharth Malhotra film reminds you of TV show CID

**Aiyaary, which means the act of espionage, is designed as a race between two gifted people who understand the nuances of the country's defence programmes. Here's our movie review.**



Aiyaary

Cast: Sidharth Malhotra, Manoj Bajpayee, Kumud Mishra, Adil Hussain  
Director: Neeraj Pandey  
Rating: 1/5

The delicate relationship between a master and his protégé turns sour when the latter realises the futility of the tasks he is expected to carry out. The highly talented student turns rogue and that triggers a war between the two. They know each other's methods and are trying to not blink first, but one of them has underestimated the rival.

In theory, director Neeraj Pandey's (A Wednesday, Baby, MS Dhoni: The Untold Story) Aiyaary seems like a satisfactory 'Catch Me If You Can' kind of thriller where you can expect tense

moments and adrenaline rush, but in reality, it fails to hold your attention for more than five minutes at a stretch. It's an insipid tale of forced slow-motion shots, endless chase sequences and at least three endings.

Colonel Abhay Singh (Manoj Bajpayee), who doesn't think twice before shooting foreign agents point blank in uncharted territories, heads a special covert unit that's been unofficially funded. Major Jai Bakshi (Sidharth Malhotra) adores Abhay and has learnt the tricks of the trade from him. The young major gets disillusioned after realising the extent of corruption in the country's defence deals and the involvement of highly placed officials in it.

An audacious Jai takes the

matter into his hands and decides to earn some money out of the shady deals, but Abhay is determined to not let this happen.

Aiyaary, which means the act of espionage, is designed as a race between two gifted people who understand the nuances of the country's defence programmes. They are not the kingpins of the system, but they are fairly important to run it without interruption.

Pandey wants to weave a web of lies, deceit and suspense around the central plot. His front-man Bajpayee is a dangerous Mossad-trained agent, but forgets to carry the bullets on an assignment to eliminate an enemy. Working like an all-powerful government functionary, he cracks deals with anyone and everyone in the world, and can also push the media to run a news item of his wish. It's a different matter that the news item he gives in replacement is far less worthy of a prime time slot.

In fact, this is where the film totally runs out of the steam. Pandey probably wants a re-run of A Wednesday, he even brings in Naseeruddin Shah for a totally clueless character,

towards the end. This forced twist is lame and makes the film tonally different from what we see for first 120 minutes. It's high time I tell you the length of the film. Well, it's 160-minute of unending mess.

Just when you thought, Bajpayee might be going overboard with his tough guy act, Kumud Mishra takes over and makes it a totally wayward story of arm-twisting and witless humour.

The idea of showing the nexus among the top army officials, politicians, lobbyists and arms dealers hasn't been explored in depth. At no point, it becomes anything beyond two agents tapping each other's calls. Web series The Night Manager could have helped Aiyaary in getting the arms-dealer part right.

Apart from the '80s style opening credit, nothing actually works in favour of Aiyaary that wants to compress many issues in one film. The intentions are noble, but the execution is totally off the hook. Pandey, despite being in his zone, fails to control the pace of the film and ends up with a clogged version of what he thought is

a nice thriller.

Characters of Pooja Chopra and Rakul Preet have been written with complete lack of empathy. They mouth average dialogues and behave in odd ways. At one point of time, it all begins to look like the TV show CID. It's different if you actually like CID.

Bajpayee spearheads the story with his characteristic roughness. One of the rare movies where even he gets lost amid speeding cars and easily hacked computers. The only time he sparkles is the scene where Adil Hussain gives him a good run for his money, but it's too late by then.

As an earnest apprentice, Malhotra begins well but can't hold on to it for long. Like most of the other actors, he too falls prey to a confused screenplay.

Aiyaary is sketchily-written and not compelling. It tests patience even if you are a fan of the genre. It demands way too much endurance than what is left in you after watching Naseeruddin Shah's bizarre monologue.

**Reliance Industries Limited to acquire stake in Eros International**

**Announces Joint Partnership with Eros India to set-up a INR 1,000 crore (USD150 million) fund to co-produce and consolidate content**

**Jyoti Deshpande to head RIL's media and entertainment business as President of the Chairman's Office**

(By our Staff Reporter) Mumbai – : Reliance Industries Limited (“RIL”) and Eros International PLC (“Eros”) announced today that RIL, through a subsidiary, has agreed to subscribe to a 5% equity stake in NYSE listed Eros at a price of USD15 per share, which represents an 18% premium to last closing price. The transaction is subject to customary regulatory and other approvals.

Furthermore, RIL and Eros International Media Limited (“Eros India”) announced that they have agreed to partner in India to jointly produce and consolidate content from across India. The parties will equally invest up to INR 1,000 crores in aggregate (approximately USD150 million) to produce and acquire Indian films and digital originals across all languages.

In addition, it was announced that Ms. Jyoti Deshpande, Group

CEO and MD of Eros will be stepping down from her Executive role after more than 17 years in Eros and move on to head the Media and Entertainment business at RIL as President of the Chairman's Office. Ms. Deshpande will start her role at RIL from April 2018, but will continue to remain as a Non-Executive Director on the Board of Eros. Mr. Kishore Lulla will resume his position of Group Chairman and CEO of Eros.

In her new role at RIL, Ms. Deshpande will lead the company's initiatives in Media and Entertainment to organically build and grow businesses around the content ecosystem such as Broadcasting, Films, Sports, Music, Digital, Gaming, Animation etc., as well as integrate RIL's existing media investments such as Viacom and Balaji Telefilms with a view to build, scale and consolidate the fragmented USD

20 billion Indian M&E sector.

Mukesh Ambani, Chairman & Managing Director, RIL commented, “We are pleased to join hands with Eros, as it will bring further synergies into our plans, making for a win-win partnership. We are delighted to welcome Ms. Jyoti Deshpande into the Reliance family and believe that she will not only give wings to our plans but also play a pivotal role in transforming the sector.” Commenting on the development Mr. Kishore Lulla said, “I am very pleased that Eros is partnering with RIL in its entertainment journey with several synergies across technology, content and digital with Eros Now. We look forward to collaborating and growing as we continue to make new strides on the digital and content forefronts. I am confident that together, we can make a meaningful difference. Jyoti Deshpande has been an invaluable part of the

incredible Eros growth journey the industry in her new role and I am confident that she will at RIL. I wish her the very best of luck.”

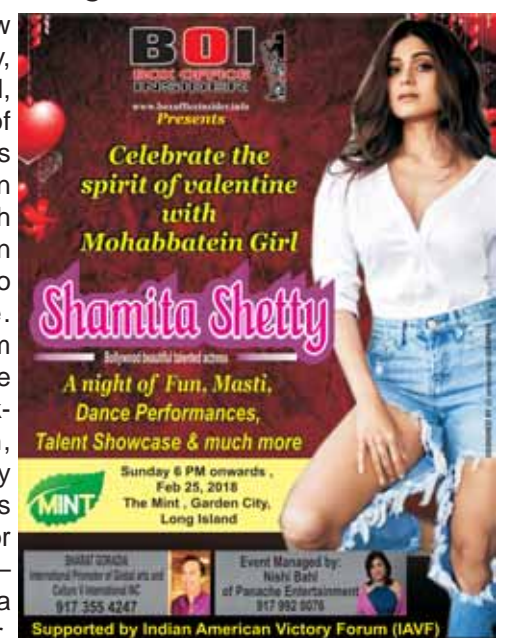
**"Box Office Insider Presents Spirit of Valentine" Bollywood Celebrity Shamita Shetty is coming to Long Island on Feb 25**

(Press Release) New York- Shamita Shetty, an actress and model, and younger sister of Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty will be in Long Island on Feb 25th as Chief Guest of an event to celebrate to Spirit of Valentine. Shamita made her film debut in 2000 with the Yash Raj Films blockbuster Mohabbatein, which was directed by Aditya Chopra. She has won 2001 IIFA Award for Star Debut of the Year – Female. Shamita is a successful Actor, Dancer and was recently winner of "Nach Balliye TV Show".

The event is presented by title sponsor , Box Office Insider (www.boxofficeinsider.info) , a leading entertainment media site; aiming to inform, report, analyse, forecast & create networking opportunities for audience, fans and industry professionals. Box Office Insider is part of NuWay Media Group, that also publish South Asian Insider Weekly and Punjabi Duniya Weekly. NuWay also owns Josh India TV, a WebTV Channel. Sharanjit Singh Thind, CEO of NuWay Media Group , said, "As per part of our ongoing commitment to bring community closer to home and celebrate events to spread happiness, we decided to sponsor this event. Our aim is to keep it a very elegant and classy small event".

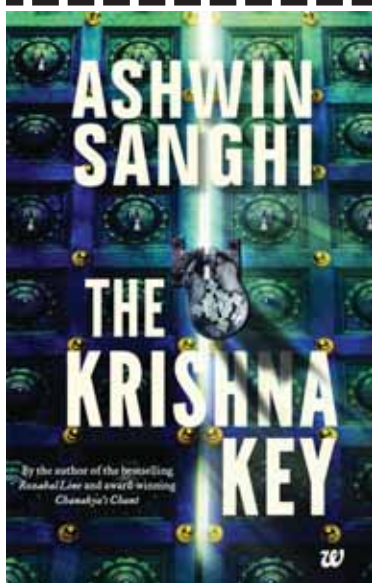
Nishai Bahl of Panache Entertainment, a well known event & Pageant organizer is managing the events. Nishi is highly pleased with the response from public. "We are already ou of VIP tables and left with few general admission". This even, to mark the spirit of Valentine, will be non stop entertainment with presence of Shamita to add glamor".

Bharat Goradia of V International Inc, is managing appearance of Shamita Shetty during the event. Bharat has to his credit



a long list of honors for spreading Indian culture around the world through Bollywood". He has managed a large number of celebrity appearances around the world. "We are making sure a big celebrity like Shamita, safely interacts with each and every guest who attends Spirit of Valentine. My promise it to give the audience a spell bound magical entertainment event on Feb 25th, which whole family can enjoy". Event is supported by "Indian American Victory Forum (IAVF)", an organization formed as well as dedicated to encourage & empower Indian American community in Politics. Aman Thind, Vice President of IAVF, and a student of Zicklin School of Business, said "I am so proud of supporting this event on encouragement by my father. Bollywood not only entertains, it has an amazing ability to bring people of all color and nationalities togetherness spread love, harmony, peace and awareness". It will take place from 6.30 PM onward on Feb 25th in Mint , Long Island Garden City. Mint is known for its delicious food, great ambience, including rooftop lounge and hosting so many VIP events. For more details, please contact, Nishi Bahl 917 992 0076 , Bharat 917 355 4247 or AmanThind 516 474 7576.

**Eros International acquires film rights to best-selling author Ashwin Sanghi's THE KRISHNA KEY**



professor who must prove his innocence against a murder charge. Krishna Key, the third novel by Ashwin Sanghi, tries to unfold the secrets of the Mahabharata and establish Krishna as a historical character rather than a mythical character. The plot is dramatic and provocative, enthralling with its twists and turns creating a seamless opportunity to creatively showcase it in the world cinema. The series is in initial stages of development with talent to be finalised soon. Eros is planning its release in 2019.

Commenting on the development, Ridhima Lulla, Chief Content Officer, Eros International said, “We are gearing towards enhancing the premium content offering on Eros Now, that includes the launch of its originals. We want to offer a myriad content mix on our platform and have been particularly keen on adding Indian mythological themes which remain hugely popular. We are very excited to have acquired the rights to Ashwin's bestselling book which delves beautifully into Indian history and mythology and at the same time blending well with the contemporary world and we an-

ticipate it to be a perfect premise to explore for the big screen and an original series adaption”.

Author Ashwin Sanghi adds, “I am delighted that Eros International has acquired the rights to The Krishna Key. Eros has an incredible team that is exceedingly capable of adapting this action-packed thriller into a very interesting story for cinema. I am confident that the final product will be exciting and entertaining.”

Ashwin Sanghi ranks among India's highest selling English fiction authors. He is considered one of the frontrunners in historical and mythological retelling. Popularly hailed as the Indian Dan Brown for The Rozabal Line and The Krishna Key, both of which were critically acclaimed. He has written several other bestsellers including Chanakya's Chant, The Sialkot Saga and Keepers of the Kalachakra. In 2010, he won Vodafone-Crossword Popular Choice Award for Chanakya's Chant. Additionally, the book Private India became the best seller in the United Kingdom. He was also included in the list of celebrity 100 by Forbes.

Mumbai: Eros International, a leading global company in the Indian film entertainment industry has acquired the rights to adapt best-selling Indian author Ashwin Sanghi's anthropological thriller The Krishna Key into a theatrical film and original series for their digital over-the-top (OTT) South Asian entertainment platform, Eros Now.

The acclaimed thriller set across timelines with its captivating plot, merging the mythological with the contemporary released in 2012. The book follows a history

# Exclusive Interview with Saadia Asad



Saadia Asad, has been lauded by Pakistan Fashion Industry and by common woman on streets equally, for her brand "Noor". Which is, best known, for its Unstitched Lawn Collections. Here, we have her answering a few question, for this season.

**Q1) Pakistan textile industry is back, keeping its pace with international fixation, for its Lawn season. How is Noor Luxury Lawn 2018, by Saadia Asad prepared to take a stride in fathom of collection coming up?**

Lawn, itself is a very challenging business to be in, as one collection can take you to many places, while another can make you lose your position in the market. In order, to survive, I believe, you have to be very confident and hardworking, besides, positioning yourself well in market. Pricing, quality and

color palettes are an important marketing mix, for anyone, to have an edge. So, you, know your work best. At, the end of the day, designs should come at an effective cost production.

**Q2) Describe this collection in sharp 3 words.**

Pleasing, Youthful and Dazzling

**Q3) What is your target market for this collection in terms of age, work, and geographical regions internationally?**

My collections, are usually very youthful, contemporary and modern, but nevertheless, we always incorporate, couple of prints for older age group, that can be worn by them, to look elegant and fashionable at the same time. The age bracket, I would say, would be from 16-60 and our clothes are targeted for countries in which a lot of people from Indian sub-continent reside. Middle East, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, USA,

and UK are our main customer markets, outside Pakistan.

**Q4) Do you have a specific research process when you start with a new collection? Was your visit to Paris a part of this research process?**

I research my collections, in a different way. We, pick up a couple of themes, and then we shortlist them. From, there on, we decide whether, we want to stick to one theme or a fusion of themes.

My Paris trip, was for a completely different purpose, which was to participate for Tex World. It did help in research, as you come across, various international brands, and their work, which provides you with a whole new platform to learn. I do travel a lot throughout the year, to get inspiration, learn new things, regarding patterns, local fabrics, upcoming trends and color palettes that are being used internationally.

**Q5) How long does the process take from an initial design idea to finished products?**

It varies, on the design product. We have made collections within 3 weeks as well, if required. However, the standard pattern, require us to work on it anywhere from 3-5 months.

**Q6) Technology has changed fashion. Your take, on the use of boundless digital printing with architectural aspects like creepers on columns, windows, buildings. Huge bold botanical prints with gardens shown at its**

**best, with details of butterflies and birds. Are you for this over used printing in Pakistan textile designing when many detest.**

Yes, technology has changed fashion world, a lot, as now there is no limit, for production quantity and quality. These days, we are not using, conventional old school printing methods, like rotary flatbread printing. Now, everything is digital, and you can incorporate, a lot of things, that could not be done in past- like architectural buildings, botanical gardens and animals. Introduction, of wider color schemes, with the help of technology, has made it possible, to use up-to three million colors in a print. Lot of people, are doing all this, however, I believe balancing the elements, their placement and the overall visualization, is not under everyone's control. Over done, it does more wrong than right to you. So, what you need to do, while making lawn, is to give, the right touch, of conventional elements, like Muslim architecture and softer color palettes for summer's. But never go overboard with it.

**Q7) What is Saadia more comfortable wearing --Lawn or western wear?**

I believe, there is no better fabric than Lawn, to be worn in summers. The amount, of excruciating heat, we have in our country, there is no other fabric, than Pakistani lawn, that can be comfortable. However, I also do love wearing western wear in winters. We, have

beautiful linens and marina fabrics, with woolen pashmina shawls, that I like to wear for dinners and parties in winter. So, depending on the season, I pick and choose my dresses.

**Q8) Best fashion tip for the season, for your audience all over the world.**

And what's the best fashion advice you have ever got?

Enjoy, what you wear, carry the dress well. Always, feel strong and beautiful, in what you are wearing, and capture the world with your confidence and aura, which exclusively belongs to you, and no one else. The best fashion advice I got, was to keep it simple, stay strong, and enjoy.

**Q9) Lot of fashion designers enter into interiors. What's the correlation. Do we see Saadia launching an interior brand in next 5 years?**

At the moment, my only focus, is to increase the number of stores, that I currently have, across Pakistan. Designing, is all about creativity, whether its in textile, or home interiors, so lets see. Who knows, I might actually try my hand at home textiles in the future.

**By Komal Minhas Bindra THE LAWN MUSE, MOHALI**

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