



Triple talaq

India Criminalises Muslim 'Instant Divorce'



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(By Our Staff Reporter) New Delhi - India's parliament has approved a bill that makes the Muslim practice of "instant divorce" a criminal offence. "Triple talaq", as it's known, allows a husband to divorce his wife by repeating the word "talaq" (divorce) three times in any form, including email or text message. The Supreme Court declared the practice unconstitutional in 2017. Supporters say the new measure protects Muslim women. Opponents say the punishment is harsh and open to misuse. Men found in breach of the new law can be jailed for up to three years. The bill was first tabled in 2017 but stalled in the upper house of parliament, where some MPs called it unfair. India's governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supports the bill, while the main opposition Congress party opposes it. But the BJP doesn't have a majority in the upper house. On Tuesday, the bill was passed by 99 votes to 84 after a number of walkouts and abstentions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was quick to celebrate the vote as "a victory of gender justice".

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Santa Cruz sock co. apologizes & removes Lord Ganesh socks within hours of Hindu protest

(By our staff reporter) Santa Cruz (California) based sock company MERGE4 has apologized and taken down socks carrying image of Hindu deity Lord Ganesh within few hours of Hindu protest, which called it "highly inappropriate". MERGE4 founder-CEO Cindi Busenhart, in an email to Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, who spearheaded the protest, wrote: "We offer our sincere apologies to the Hindu community. We have removed the Ganesh socks from our website and plan to discontinue the design... it was not our intention to trivialize the Hindu faith in any way". Zed, who is President of Universal Society of Hinduism, in a statement in Nevada today, thanked MERGE4 and Busenhart for understanding the concerns of Hindu community which thought image of Lord Ganesh on such a product was highly insensitive.

Rajan Zed suggested that



MERGE4 and other companies should send their senior executives for training in religious and cultural sensitivity so that they had an understanding of the feelings of customers and communities when introducing new products or launching advertising campaigns.

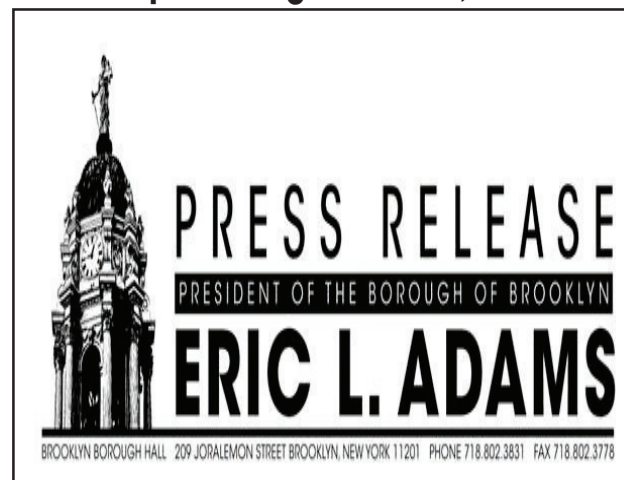
Zed had said that Lord Ganesh was highly revered in Hinduism and was meant to be

worshipped in temples or home shrines and not to adorn or wrapped around one's feet/legs. Inappropriate usage of Hindu deities or concepts or symbols for commercial or other agenda was not okay as it hurt the devotees.

Hinduism was the oldest and third largest religion of the world with about 1.1 billion adherents and a rich philosophical thought and it

should not be taken frivolously. Symbols of any faith, larger or smaller, should not be mishandled, Rajan Zed had noted. Zed had stated that such trivialization of Hindu deities was disturbing to the Hindus world over. Hindus were for free artistic expression and speech as much as anybody else if not more. But faith was something sacred and attempts at trivializing it hurt the followers, Zed added. In Hinduism, Lord Ganesh is worshipped as god of wisdom and remover of obstacles and is invoked before the beginning of any major undertaking. There are about three million Hindus in USA. Award-winning MERGE4; a certified B Corporation with a tagline MERGE4 "GRIPS YOUR SOLE"; sells socks for men, women, youth. It claims: "Beyond magnificent in appearance, style and comfort, MERGE4 socks are constructed like no other". It also states:

BP Adams Statement on assault of Hindu priest in glen OAKS, Queens

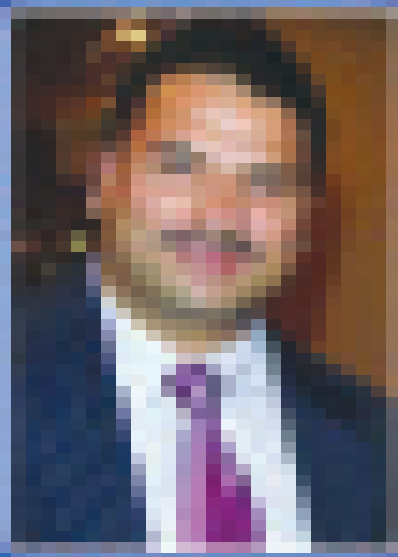


(By our Staff reporter)- "This vicious, reprehensible assault was evil, plain and simple. If the reports indicating that the suspect viciously beat a Hindu priest for walking in his neighborhood in Glen Oaks, Queens, that is the textbook definition of a hate crime, and the perpetrator should be charged as such. We cherish our Hindu community, and while all violence must be condemned, it is particularly galling to see a man of faith beaten within an inch of his life for looking different.

Harish Chander Puri on Sunday over the phone and reiterated that we will always stand united against hate, and will not tolerate attacks on our fellow New Yorkers. I was struck by his resiliency in the face of a horrific attack, and his willingness to forgive his assailant after all he had been through was truly awe-inspiring. We should all be inspired by his example and determination to move forward, and we should recommit ourselves to stopping the resurgence of hate in our city and beyond," said Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams.

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India Day Parade, Hicksville, Long Island

IDP Hicksville Press Conference was held on July 25th at Lotus Restaurant at Hicksville



(By our staff reporter)-IDP USA (India Day Parade) recently held a well organized Press conference attended by more than 150 people. A number of media (Print , TV, Online) were in presence and duly acknowledged with medals by IDP USA President Jasbir Jay Singh. President of IDP USA, along with his full Executive Council and volunteers committee of 108 people received all media and sponsors with warmth. IDP is celebrating 7th India Day Parade which will be on Sunday 4th August, 2019 and will be starting from Patel Brothers at 12 : 00 noon in Hicksville and will end at E Barclay Street Parking Lot opposite Asamai Temple. Grand Marshal Raj Kummar Rao, bollywood celebrity along with Consul General Sandeep Chakravorty and Iraada Foundations' Chintu Patel are Grand Marshals. Gujarati Screen star Aarti Patel is going to be Guest of Honor with some other dignitaries. There will be all day cultural programs by our local talent and by professional DJs and Live bands . Deepak Kumar of Satellite Garba & Dandia King and Miss Pooja, melodious queen of Punjab will be performing live to entertain all. There will be special attraction as this year's raffle has BMW SUV as Grand Prize and Ticket prizes will entice people to buy tickets and also engage them to enjoy and be part of celebrations towards the end. Ticket price is just \$20. Jay Singh said, we will be having Booths for shopping, soliciting and food to enjoy. Mini Carnival is there for kids as they can enjoy free rides. 11 floats and 40 groups will be marching the Golden Mile. The neighborhood will be flanked with the tri-color. IDP is glad to mark the 550th birthday of Shri Guru Nanak Dev ji and 150th birthday of Mahatma Gandhi ji this year. IDP is a proud Contributor to 'CRY' and "Akshaya Patra." Finally President and Executive Committee thanked to Founders of IDP, Past Presidents, Past Committees, Sponsors and Media for all their help, advice and contributions.

Standard and Poor's Affirms AA-with positive outlook credit rating on Hemstead Town

Credit Rating Agency Lauds Gillen Administration for Strengthening Town's Financial Positions and Clamping Down on Spending

(HEMPSTEAD, NY) July 25, 2019 - Standard & Poor's (S&P) Global Ratings affirms Hemstead Town's credit rating of 'AA-' with a positive outlook marking the Town's second year of a positive outlook. S&P lauded the Gillen administration's strengthening of the Town's financial position, "driven primarily by expenditure controls." "Management is making concerted efforts to

control expenditures, through improvements to internal expenditure controls," noted S&P's report. "Continued improvements in budgeting practices, along with future budgetary savings following staff reductions, support our view that year-end additions to reserves are likely." The Gillen administration instituted a hiring freeze in April following a series of unbudgeted raises, promotions and transfers that were approved by the Town

Council. It also implemented several levels of approvals for purchases to curb spending within departments. The Town's full-time workforce for 2019 is at its leanest in decades, with 1,850 budgeted positions. This compares favorably to 2015 when there were in excess of 1,970 positions. "I'm pleased that our financial outlook continues to be positive," said Supervisor Laura Gillen. "Righting Hemstead's fiscal



ship is an ongoing process and I am confident that the conservative measures my administration has put into place will pay dividends and move our Town toward an even more secure financial footing."

After more than a decade of repeated raids on the rainy day fund, S&P noted that under the Gillen administration, the Town projects a total "governmental funds surplus in fiscal 2018 of about \$22.1 million, with a general fund surplus of around 4.8 million." This is in stark contrast to "[F]iscal year-end 2015, [when] available general fund balance was a negative \$6.9 million." S&P noted that if this accounting practice is used once again, "It could place downward pressure on the rating."

The passage of RTI amendment bill is the death knell for the landmark legislation: George Abraham, Vice-Chair, IOC, USA

(By our staff reporter)- "The recently passed RTI amendment is the death knell for this popular law that served the public since 2005 in unearthing so much of corruption and wrongdoing by the public officials," said George Abraham, Vice-Chairman of the

Indian Overseas Congress, USA. "The objective by the NDA government is very clear: they want to dilute and weaken the Right to Information Act of 2005. By dismantling the bill as it is, the Modi regime may be enabling the crony capitalists to engage

in corruption and while being shielded from any public scrutiny. It is also consistent with their strategy of weakening Institutions and make them subservient to do their bidding," Mr. Abraham added. As per news reports, on 22 July, the Lok Sabha passed the RTI

Amendment Bill, 2019, which removes the statutory protection of tenure, salaries, allowances, and conditions of service given to the central and state Information Commissioners, who are the final adjudicators of information requests. Instead, it says that

their tenure and salaries shall be "as prescribed by the Central Government." The changes undermine the autonomy of the commissioners tasked with implementing the law and thus weakens one of India's most robust open government and transparency laws.

India's Great News For The World - More Tigers

Excellent news on Global Tiger Day: the latest national tiger census says India has 2,967 tigers - double that counted by the first national census conducted in 2008 with a new scientific methodology created by the Wildlife Institute of India. Before that, a completely unscientific pugmark count method was employed and the figures were regularly fudged. At the first scientific national census in 2006, alarm bells were ringing as tiger numbers were at 1,411, the lowest experts said it had been in decades. Two of India's big project tiger parks, Sariska and Panna, had lost all their tigers and poaching and habitat loss was a problem. Since then, Panna has bounced back with over 30 tigers while Sariska has some now too.

As India is the largest range state for the tiger today, an increase in its numbers is a huge and positive step for the world. This also puts India on a positive track for 2022, the Year of the Tiger, by when the 13 tiger countries have promised to double their tiger numbers. This promise was

made in 2010 under the Global Tiger Recovery Program. While 2022 might not see global tiger numbers doubled, tiger numbers in India, Nepal and Bangladesh have increased.

The national census covered an area of nearly 4 lakh square km across the country. Of this, nearly 1.3 lakh square km, was covered by camera traps. To date, 2,500 individual tigers have been camera-trapped; the rest are estimated through habitat analysis, prey availability, direct sightings and indirect sightings. The census is an enormous undertaking and this time, even the North East states were covered quite extensively

While what India has accomplished is commendable and to be celebrated, questions are inevitable. On a state-wise break up of numbers, it seems improbable that Madhya Pradesh, for example, could have had a nearly 70% increase in tiger numbers in just the last five years with numbers growing from 308 to 526, while habitats have not really increased. Madhya Pradesh in this census

list is the state with the most number of tigers reclaiming the crown from Karnataka, which is now in second place with 406 tigers. The Western Ghats in their entirety, however, hold close to 776 tigers, and this shows the importance of contiguous forest tracts. Maharashtra is another state with major gains. Numbers have jumped from 190 tigers to 312 tigers. Tamil Nadu on the other hand has only gone up by 35 tigers.

It is also important to note that states like Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand have shown a decrease in numbers. These are the states that face huge mining lobbies. Andhra Pradesh has also shown a decline, standing only at about 48 tigers, 20 less than five years ago. This is alarming as Andhra has the largest tiger park in the country, Nagarjunsagar-Srisailem Tiger Reserve. The Telengana forest department has just opposed mining for uranium in their maiden tiger reserve, Amrabad. The Ministry for Environment, Forests and Climate Change, however, has given a go-ahead.



The North East has grown from 100 tigers to 219 since 2008. The most exciting discovery was that of tigers in the snow in the highest reaches of the Dibang Valley at 11,000 feet in Arunachal Pradesh in the camera trap set up by researchers in December 2018. This was a previously unknown population to the scientific world, whereas the local Idu Mishmi people were always aware the tigers were there, highlighting the need to work with local and indigenous communities.

Three project tiger reserves, Buxa, Dampa and Palamau, showed no presence of tigers.

These parks have been in trouble for over a decade and nothing has been done to either secure them or solve the problems.

While it's great to know numbers have increased, we cannot afford to slide into complacency. Tigers are the world's largest feline predators and have lost 96% of their home range in the last 100 years. As a species, they are robust, in that they will breed well when conditions like habitat, prey base and minimal human activity interfere with their daily routine. This is why the largest numbers of tigers are still found in our protected areas and their surrounds.

When India Was Obsessed With Another Moon Landing



For a 12-year-old schoolboy, Armstrong's moonwalk couldn't have been worse timed. The summer vacation had given over in the middle of July and for desis, the Eagle landed- given the time difference - on a Monday. That wouldn't have been so bad if Armstrong hadn't taken hours - bloody hours - to undo the hatch and climb down the ladder. The Lunar Module (it was capitalized in our heads) landed at a quarter to two in the morning. That wasn't so bad because in my brother's head and mine, that

wasn't the main event and we could sleep through it. The main event was Man on Moon: Armstrong's boot meeting lunar surface.

Some crazed scheduler decided this would happen a little over six-and-a-half hours after Eagle touched down. In my world this meant that by the time we left home to drag ourselves off to the school bus-stop on Pandara Road, it still hadn't happened. Instead of listening to the great descent on a Philip's radio the size of a small trunk, connected

to a reliable rooftop aerial, we would have to tune in to this world historical event on a dinky transistor radio which, even in optimal conditions, produced mostly static. Also it was illegal; St. Xavier's School didn't allow radios in school premises and officious bus monitors had been known to argue that school buses were, in effect, school premises.

Walking to the bus stop, Sudhakar and I were paralysed by the anxiety that we wouldn't be able to listen in, live, to the greatest event in our lives. There were apparently half a billion people who watched the moon landing happen but television had barely arrived in India and we weren't part of that communion. Thanks to my obsessed older brother, I had been tracking this journey to the moon for the better part of a year. From cutting and pasting colour photos of Pataudi, Bedi and Chandrasekhar and articles about them on to sheets of chart paper and then filing them in shoe-lace binders, we had transitioned seamlessly into glueing profiles of Armstrong,

Aldrin and Collins next to carefully cut out photos of the space craft. Cutting out the Eagle (which looked like a modernist metal frog) was especially hard because its landing legs were so thin that a single bad snip with the too-large tailor scissors we had meant a legless lunar module and a hunt for another photo. I'm not sure why we felt we were improving these pictures and articles by embalming them in albums but I suspect that in the information-scarce world of the 1960s, we thought we were creating a handy private archive. It helped that the moon landing was preceded by the greatest PR campaign in the history of humanity. The USIS (United States Information Service), which ran a library near Mandi House, had whole shelves of expensively illustrated books on the American space programme. It was a Cold War library and once Kennedy made the Space Race the centre-piece of this conflict, no expense was spared. Every month, a copy of SPAN, the US Embassy's propaganda magazine, slid

through the front door, free. From lengthy photo features on the PL 480 programme, the editors switched in 1969 to saturation coverage of the race to the moon. Since both my parents were civil servants of sorts, we got two copies, one to cut and one to keep. SPAN was a symbol of how loaded the US was: every page was thick, glossy, photo-quality paper, crammed with colour photographs. And it was free.

So by the time July 21 rolled round, we knew in technicolor detail that this was a world-historical event. And because we were in on the run-up to the take-off, we adopted this great partisan Cold War adventure as our own. This didn't mean that we were thick enough to think we were all Americans now. No, we knew we weren't American children. We didn't have paper rounds, and we definitely couldn't turn packets of seeds into Daisy air rifles. But we could make believe that when the astronauts declared they came in peace for all Mankind, that meant us too.

The backlash is growing against Xi Jinping in China and around the world

The backlash abroad against President Xi Jinping's China, at least in developed nations, has spread rapidly in the last year. Some countries, like Australia and Canada, feel patronized and bullied. Neighbors worry they are being marginalized. Advanced industrial nations, especially Germany and South Korea, see China coming at them like an unstoppable, oncoming train. The US, for decades the world's lone superpower, is confronted by a once-in-a-lifetime challenge from Beijing. All of these phenomena, previously bubbling under the surface, have burst into clear view during Xi's time in office. Beijing's opaque internal political system means it is hard to make judgments about domestic Chinese politics, but there can be little doubt that a backlash is underway at home, too.

Good and bad enemies

As a leader, Xi is unique in post-revolutionary party politics in not having any identifiable domestic rival or successor, largely because he has ensured that none have been allowed to emerge. But Xi has earned himself an array of what we might call "bad enemies" and "good enemies" since taking office in late 2012. They range from the once-rich and powerful families he destroyed in his anti-corruption campaign, all the way to the small-r reformers angered by his illiberal rollback of the incremental institutional advances of the reform period. Forced to lay low initially because of the dangers of challenging him outright, Xi's critics at home have begun to find their voice. They have been outspoken mainly on economic policy, but the deeper undercurrents of their criticisms are unmistakable. The sons of former top leaders, revered scholars who guided China's economic miracle, frustrated private entrepreneurs and academics furious about Xi's unrelenting hardline -- all have complained in multiple public forums, in speeches, in online postings and in widely circulated essays at home and offshore, about Xi's policies and style. "Something strange is happening in Xi Jinping's China," wrote Ian Johnson in the New York Review of Books. In what was supposed to be the "perfect dictatorship", the country was witnessing "the most serious critique of the system in more than a decade, led by people inside China who are choosing to speak out now, during the most sensitive season of the most sensitive year in decades." The exact number of "tigers" toppled by Xi's anti-corruption campaign -- in other words, officials who were once part of the designated elite whose jobs had to be cleared through the Party's central personnel system -- is not

easy to calculate. The best estimates put it around 300 to 400, including scores of generals. The officials who have been prosecuted and jailed include members of the Politburo, ministers, vice-ministers, the heads of state-owned enterprises, provincial party leaders and governors, and mayors. An anti-China protester raises a placard with a portrait of Chinese President Xi Jinping during a protest in front of the Chinese consular office in the financial district of Manila on April 9. In each of those cases, the investigations don't just hit the individual official who has been targeted and detained. Literally, hundreds of thousands of people who are tied into and rely on that single person for their income are effectively swept up with them. Their livelihoods, and all that they have invested in clawing their way through the system, can evaporate with the stroke of a pen. Some members of the patronage networks are often arrested themselves. Xi has made enemies of them all. "Xi has destroyed millions of people in the elite who now all hold a personal grudge against him," said a China-based businessman, who asked not to be named, earlier in 2019. "These people are not a bunch of uneducated peasants from the sticks in Henan. They had skin in the game." Threshold for an uprising 'is high Despite all this, Victor Shih, a US-China specialist, was doubtless right when he said that the threshold for some kind of "intra-party uprising" against Xi remains very high. "He would need to commit a catastrophic mistake that jeopardizes the continual rule of the Party for his potential enemies within the Party to rise up against him," Shih said in the New Yorker. But the idea that Xi is literally "president for life," as he is often referred to in the wake of the 2018 abolition of term limits, will in all likelihood be proved wrong. From mid-2018, Xi was already facing a public backlash on economic policy, the area where it has always been safest for Chinese to speak out. Xi has a legion of critics on foreign policy as well, who believe he has overreached and left the way open for the US and others to bind together on issues ranging from trade and technology to military and strategic influence in east Asia. Most scholars have delivered their critiques in private, or in carefully coded language. However Deng Xiaoping's son, Deng Pufang, was explicit in a speech late last year to a disabilities forum which was leaked to the Hong Kong media. He urged China's leadership to "know its place" in the world, and concentrate on its problems at home.

Kashmir: Assert authority, maintain peace

The past week has seen a sudden spurt in activity in Jammu and Kashmir. National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval, visited the state. The Centre deployed additional paramilitary forces. There are reports of possible threats in the run up to August 15. The Centre, in line with its decision to empower the third tier of government in the state, has also decided to encourage each panchayat to hoist the Indian flag on Independence Day. There have been rumours that New Delhi will revoke Article 35A, which gives a degree of autonomy to the state by prioritising permanent residents. And the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has stepped up internal deliberations for the assembly elections.

Three trends can be clearly discerned. The first is the movement towards elections, which could be held by the end of the year. This is welcome news. The state has been under Governor's Rule for over a year now; a democratically elected government will help channel aspirations; and this will create space for both existing mainstream actors and newer players. The second trend is the firm desire of the Indian State to stamp its authority in the Valley. Home minister Amit Shah's statements; Mr Doval's visit; the mobilisation of troops; the anti-corruption investigations, which could implicate many mainstream

and separatist leaders; a crackdown on militants; and the determination to have the Indian flag up across the state indicate that Delhi is in no mood to tolerate any activity that undermines the integrity of the state. This, too, is long due, but there must be no political vendetta or security excesses.

The final trend is a move towards a renegotiation of the contract that exists between the Union and Kashmir. The BJP believes that problems in the state have arisen because it has not been fully integrated into India and, therefore, provisions which guarantee it special status must be reworked. This, however, calls for pause and reflection. Kashmir's accession to India happened under unique circumstances. As the historian, Srinath Raghavan, has argued, both Article 370 and 35A are a product of this legacy. This is not to suggest they are set in stone. And they were indeed temporary provisions. But any moves to rework the letter and spirit of the provisions must happen after due consultations with Kashmiri political forces, especially the National Conference and Peoples Democratic Party, which have stood by the Indian Constitution in difficult times. Delhi must assert authority, but avoid disruption.



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The vacuum in the Congress

The party is paralysed by defeat and indecision.

It has been 65 days since Rahul Gandhi told the Congress Working Committee, on May 25, that he would like to take responsibility for the party's loss in the Lok Sabha elections and would step down as party president. It has been 25 days since Gandhi, in a farewell note on July 3, went public with his decision to resign. This was his way of putting an end to speculation that he may reconsider his decision, and stop the party from urging him to stay on. Never in Congress' history has there been a vacuum at the top, of this form, for so long. There persists uncertainty about

the current structure of decision-making. Office-bearers are being appointed in the name of the Congress president, but there is no president. More significantly, the inability to come up with an alternative has had real political implications. There has been no review of the 2019 defeat. The Congress has been ineffective in Parliament, even as the government has pushed a range of legislations with far-ranging implications. In Karnataka, the Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) government has fallen, with Mr Gandhi, pointedly tweeting that vested interests, including from

'within', had targeted the government. This was an acknowledgment of the internal rivalries that destabilised the government in the state. Factional feuds have broken out in state units. The party has to prepare for five state assembly elections - Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, and Delhi - in the next six to eight months. But even the most hardened optimists in Congress have almost written off prospects of succeeding. And most importantly for a political party, not only is the party worker on the ground demoralised, but cannot see hope for the future. And



without hope, political mobilisation is enormously difficult. Except for Priyanka Gandhi's foray to UP to express solidarity with the victims of the Sonbhadra killings, there has been no visible effort at political revival. The CWC - which has to decide on the next president - has not met. Many names have

done the rounds, but senior leaders seem unable to narrow down on whether to opt for a member of the 'old guard' or get a younger leader; whether to have a leader from the north or the south; whether to factor in caste. There is also lack of clarity on whether the members of the Nehru-Gandhi family will, ultimately, choose the president, or

whether they will stay out of the process, as Mr Gandhi said he would in his note. Put it all together, and it is clear that India's oldest party is perhaps facing its most severe crisis, paralysed by defeat and indecision. Unless it acts quickly, the road ahead will continue to be bleak.

James Carafano: Iran -- Will Pompeo and Tehran talk soon? Here's why it just might happen



So far the Trump administration has been as dependable as a Rolex. When global actors threaten American interests, Trump takes notice. Washington then pressures with one hand and offers an off-ramp with the other. Iran is a case in point. Secretary of State Pompeo just renewed the U.S. offer to renew negotiations without preconditions. He even offered to jump on a plane to Tehran. Only time will tell if they take him up on his offer. Maybe.

For starters, the situation in the Gulf looks more stable than it did a week ago. That shouldn't be surprising. Granted, some pundits couldn't wait to proclaim that DEFCON 5 was just around the corner. But both the U.S. and Iran have stated publicly and repeatedly that neither are up for armed conflict. It's often wise to give more weight to the pronouncements of officials in the studio. What seems to interest Tehran most right now is keeping its options

open. Last week the regime seized a British-flagged tanker and declared its intent to increase its uranium enrichment program. Both moves seemed born of the desire to strengthen its position for future negotiations. Iran also announced it is holding "constructive" talk with the Europeans over JCPOA - the Obama era nuclear deal from which the U.S. withdrew last year. Clearly, the regime is looking to gain leverage with places like Berlin and Paris in these talks as well. At the same time, however, Tehran did

some major finger-waving, warning the Europeans not to join in an international effort to help police the Strait of Hormuz. Iran will likely fail to keep other nations from joining the U.S. in countering the threat of Iranian piracy in the Gulf. Moreover, it is quite likely that, following Brexit, the new British government under Boris Johnson will switch sides on the Iran agreement. Iran doubtless is closely watching U.S. domestic politics. Even as they map out plans for four more years of dealing with Trump, they surely are hoping that impeachment or some other crisis will distract or weaken the administration in the near term and produce a more compliant administration in 2021. Also under Tehran's microscope: U.S. negotiations with North Korea and the Taliban. The mullahs are looking for signs that Trump's attention span for complex,

protracting foreign policy conundrums will wane and lead to the U.S. walking away from its responsibilities. The negotiations with Kim are particularly relevant. If the North Koreans can snooker Trump into a deal where they get to keep their nuclear weapons, then the Iranians might conclude they can play rope-a-dope with the White House as well. In contrast, if the U.S. president drives a hard denuclearization bargain with North Korea's Dear Leader, then Tehran will know that they are really up against it. Since Pompeo just announced there are no plans right now for a third leader summit with North Korea, it does seem Trump, at least for now, is sticking to his hard bargaining position. Talks with the Taliban hold the mullahs' interest for other reasons. There is not yet consensus within the administration on how to proceed in Afghanistan. Some want to convince the president to find an excuse to cut and run. Others argue nothing - certainly not U.S. interests - will improve if the Taliban is allowed to run amok again in Afghanistan. What all sides do agree on is that way forward requires a political settlement - one can be and will be enforced and which has the support of the Afghan people. The Iranians are watching to see what kind of deal Trump holds out for. If he stays committed to a tough and enforceable settlement, they will have to treat Trump as a formidable negotiating opponent. If he folds in Afghanistan, they'll draw a different lesson. Don't expect Iran to rush to the negotiating table, but clearly, they are thinking, planning and plotting for the day they might have to. Pompeo probably won't have to pack for a trip to Tehran anytime this year. But flight plans are always subject to change

Kashmir: The world will not believe Trump, writes Karan Thapar

Oh dear, what a frightful kerfuffle! Donald Trump's comments claiming Narendra Modi asked him to "mediate" or "arbitrate" over Kashmir are a huge embarrassment and a significant setback to the bilateral relationship, but also utterly unbelievable. Except for the fact we've all heard and seen him, you could legitimately ask if Trump made it up or was fantasising or simply confused about what Modi had actually said.

Unfortunately, try as it will, the government can't dismiss what's happened. For a start, Trump's comments were made in the company of Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan at a press

conference at the Oval Office. Second, they were a direct and immediate response to Khan's plea for mediation. "The US can play the most important role in bringing peace to the subcontinent", he said. "Only President Trump can bring the two sides together ... we've tried our best. Now I'm hoping President Trump will push this process." And then, third, there's what Trump actually said.

Trump spoke about a conversation he claimed he had with Modi two weeks earlier. This, presumably, was at the G-20 in Osaka where, according to Ivanka Trump, they had "a one-on-one meeting". In which case

only the two of them know what was said. Now, according to Trump, they were talking about "this subject" when Modi asked, "Would you like to be a mediator or arbitrator?" Trump asked for clarity. "Where?" "Kashmir" was Modi's succinct-but-pointed reply. And then Trump added: "If I can help, I would love to be a mediator ... if you want me to mediate or arbitrate, I would be willing to do it."

Hearing it from Trump, it seems pretty explicit and categorical. He went into considerable detail. It wasn't a throwaway line or a brief reference. And, remember, he's the President of the United States, the most important man



in the most powerful country in the world. Yet I find it hard to accept. Not for a moment am I prepared to believe any Indian prime minister would ask for intervention in Kashmir. It's so obviously and totally a reversal of India's well-established seven-

decade-old stand this could not even have been said in error. And yet, and yet, and yet ...

So what did happen? I'm pretty sure dear Donald, who's prone to error and confusion yet always cocksure he's got it right, simply misunderstood.

Unnao shows how political power can undermine justice



The Unnao rape case will go down in Indian history as an emblematic one, because it exemplifies every issue that lies at the heart of the political and legal infirmities in the system. It has brought to light the brutality

a young woman encounters in large parts of India; it has shown the long struggle a marginalised citizen faces in even registering a case against a powerful figure; it has exposed how political power can undermine even the

basic tenets of legal procedure; it has shown the moral hollowness of the political establishment. And now, it has, to the utter shock of the rest of the country, displayed the possible willingness of the accused to eliminate all shreds of evidence, including through the use of violence, against the victim and witnesses.

The facts of the Unnao case are now well-known. The survivor accused Kuldip Singh Sengar, a Bharatiya Janata Party Member of the Legislative Assembly, and his brother, of rape in June 2017. While the police recorded her statement, they did not name the assailant. In April 2018, her father was allegedly assaulted by Sengar's supporters, arrested,

and died. It was only after the survivor attempted to immolate herself in front of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's residence that the issue gained public attention. A public outcry followed, an FIR was registered, and the case was handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). While Sengar was arrested, so was the survivor's uncle for an older case. Earlier this week, when the survivor was on her way to meet her uncle in prison, a truck collided with her car, killing two aunts she was travelling with. She and her lawyer were left in a critical condition. Till an investigation is complete, it would be wrong to attribute the accident to a

conspiracy. But what is known is the following. Sengar had the motivation; he had the facilities from inside prison to organise such an exercise; the survivor had felt threatened and written to authorities; and security guards meant to protect the survivor had reportedly been in touch with Sengar and his associates. The fact that the truck was reportedly owned by a Samajwadi Party politician adds to the murkiness. While an FIR has been registered against Sengar and the case been handed over to CBI, an independent probe - perhaps monitored by a higher court through an amicus curiae - is needed. Unnao is a test of both humanity and law.

The passage of RTI amendment bill is the death knell for the landmark legislation:

"The recently passed RTI amendment is the death knell for this popular law that served the public since 2005 in unearthing so much of corruption and wrongdoing by the public officials," said George Abraham, Vice-Chairman of the Indian Overseas Congress, USA. "The objective by the NDA government is very clear: they want to dilute and weaken the Right to Information Act of 2005. By dismantling the bill as it is, the Modi regime may be enabling the crony capitalists to engage in corruption and while being shielded from any public scrutiny. It is also consistent with their strategy of weakening Institutions and make them subservient to do their bidding," Mr. Abraham added. As per news

reports, on 22 July, the Lok Sabha passed the RTI Amendment Bill, 2019, which removes the statutory protection of tenure, salaries, allowances, and conditions of service given to the central and state Information Commissioners, who are the final adjudicators of information requests. Instead, it says that their tenure and salaries shall be "as prescribed by the Central Government." The changes undermine the autonomy of the commissioners tasked with implementing the law and thus weakens one of India's most robust open government and transparency laws.

This is not the first attempt by the Modi government to weaken

the RTI act. In 2008, they had circulated a bill but had to withdraw under pressure from the civil society. However, emboldened by the recent election victories, they have rushed through this amendment while rejecting the opposition demand to refer the matter to the Parliamentary Committee.

The landmark RTI Act, 2005, allows any citizen to seek information from any government authority on payment of Rs 10. If this information is not provided, the person can appeal to the public information officers (PIOs) appointed in each department. If they are still denied the information, they also have the option of appealing to independent

officials who function as Information Commissioners-at the central and state government levels-who then adjudicate the claims to ensure fair implementation of the transparency law. According to Anumeha Yadav, "allowing the central government to do so for all information commissioners is harmful for the following reasons: it undermines the autonomy of the officials whose role it is to remain independent of the government; it weakens the ability of information commissioners to pass orders to disclose information that the central government may not wish to provide; and it also damages citizens' access to vital public information, as well

as the principles of open government. By allowing the central government to take power to decide their salaries and tenures, the proposed amendments undermine the authority of state governments and the spirit of federalism, and further concentrates powers with the central government". Shashi Tharoor, M.P. from Kerala in summing up his speech opposing the amendment put it bluntly "It is not an RTI amendment bill but an RTI elimination Bill which violates the constitutional principles of freedom and of federalism and undermines the authority of RTI commissioners and severely dilutes the provisions of the law itself "

Predictably, Priyanka - Only One Name On Congress Shortlist

So how do you replace a President named Rahul Gandhi? Well, if you are a member of Dynasty Central, otherwise known as the Congress party, the only choice is his sister, Priyanka Gandhi. Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, a rare commodity currently in the Congress in that he is a successful and mass leader, has now joined Shashi Tharoor's cry of Priyanka Gandhi Vadra for President. Singh said that "PGV was an ideal candidate for Congress president while adding "Rahul Gandhi would need to take a call on that but there would

be absolute support from the party if he wishes that." Tharoor in an interview to the wire service PTI said yesterday that he hopes PGV will throw her hat in the ring when the party calls for the election of its president. Tharoor added it was up to the Gandhi family to decide if she would contest for the job. He also spoke with candour - arguably another rarity in the Congress - about "lack of clarity over the leadership (is) hurting the Congress." Tharoor wants elections for all key posts including the Congress Working committee (CWC) as a way "to

legitimise the incoming set of leaders". In an interview to NDTV today, he said that the Congress Working Committee cannot decide the next president since its own members are not elected. The new call for PGV comes as the Congress flailed in its efforts to save the Karnataka government. And though this was perhaps the biggest sign of its coma since Rahul Gandhi quit nearly seventy days ago, the party showed some signs of perking up after the Singh intervention was made public - "PGV for President." The problem with this premise is that her sibling Rahul Gandhi had expressly stated when he quit that he did not want a member of his family to replace him. While this seemed to render PGV off-limits at the time, senior leaders who I spoke to for this column say that it can only be PGV who can prevent a Congress implosion or a party split as Team Sonia (senior leaders) squares off against Team Rahul (Young Turks). RG had a turbulent 18-month tenure as



party chief compared to his mother, Sonia Gandhi, who clocked 19 years to become the longest-serving Congress president. "Rahul Gandhi has not thought his decision through. How can he bar his sister from being President, specially as the party wants her?" argued a senior leader. "Which non-Gandhi president will be able to function with all the members of the Gandhi family in active politics?" Clearly, the Gandhis are the humongous elephant in the AICC office as no senior leader is inclined to think about running against them - or in spite of them. And while PGV was extremely reluctant earlier to consider the job, the existential crisis that has gripped the party may be too much to turn her back on. Significantly, the only recent sign from the Congress that is still a force to be reckoned with was the PGV face-off last week with Yogi Adityanath, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, as she tried to meet with the families of 10 tribals who had been massacred in Sonbhadra. Even when PGV staged her all-night sit-in at the guest house where she was detained, she insisted that she "had been sent there by Rahul-ji".

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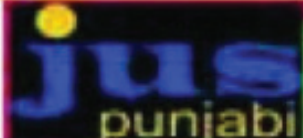
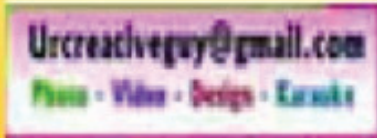


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Jammu and Kashmir normal, don't heed rumours: Governor Satya Pal Malik

Governor's reference was to buzz that the revocation of Article 35A that gives special privileges to permanent residents of the state is imminent.

(News Agencies)- Jammu and Kashmir governor Satya Pal Malik on Tuesday asked people not to pay any heed to rumours of an impending major decision on the special status of the state. His reference was to buzz that the revocation of Article 35A that gives special privileges to permanent residents of the state is imminent. Over the past week, every move by the Centre has been seen as a precursor to the revocation of 35A. Over the weekend, it was the deployment of security forces, and a note by a railway security officer on stockpiling rations. On Monday, it was an internal police department memo asking superintendents of police (SPs) to provide details of

mosques in their locality. "A lot of rumours are spread here. Do not pay any heed to them. Everything is fine, everything is normal," Malik said in response to a query by reporters. The Centre has said the deployment of security personnel is normal; the railway protection force has clarified that the officer who issued this order was not authorised to do so, and the police have described the memo as routine. Malik, without mentioning the Railway Police Officer's order but presumably referring to it, said such orders were invalid. The state is currently under President's rule. The revocation of Article 35A and Article 370 [which grants special status to

J&K] is one of the promises listed in the Bharatiya Janata Party's manifesto for the April-May Parliamentary elections which saw the party return to power with 303 seats out of 543 in the Lok Sabha.

The central government on Saturday ordered the deployment of 100 companies of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) on an "immediate" basis. One CAPF company comprises about 100 personnel. The next day, an order from a senior Railway Protection Force official to his subordinates telling them how to respond to the situation in case it turns violent and the action which railways staff require to take - stocking rations for at least four months; sending families back home - was circulated on social media. Later in the evening, a senior railway official issued a clarification saying that the



issuing authority was on a year's study leave (from last week) and "the next in line issued the letter..." and that this person "is not authorized to issue any such letter." On Monday, the J&K police issued an order seeking details on mosques and their management committees.

Meanwhile, separatists in the Kashmir Valley have accused the Centre of deliberately vitiating the situation by issuing "daily orders" being circulated daily to create alarm among people, after the deployment of more forces. Any move against our places of worship and religious matters will be resisted strongly by all

Muslims across the state. Do not deliberately vitiate the situation," Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, chairman of the moderate faction of the All Party Hurriyat Conference, tweeted on Tuesday. They have also criticised the government for sending 10,000 troops to the Kashmir Valley in order to strengthen counter-insurgency operations and law and order duties. Criticising the move, the Hurriyat faction led by hardliner Syed Ali Geelani, said in a statement on Tuesday, "Concentrating the already saturated piece of land with more armed forces is creating war hysteria and panic in length and breadth of the state...."

500 more Indians allowed by Pakistan to attend Sikh festival

The 'jatha' or caravan of Indian pilgrims crossed over to Pakistan through the Wagah border crossing on Tuesday morning, the Foreign Office said.



(News Agencies)- Pakistan on Tuesday allowed a special group of a little more than 500 Indian Sikh pilgrims to join an event at Nankana Sahib that will launch celebrations marking the upcoming 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism.

The 'jatha' or caravan of Indian pilgrims crossed over to Pakistan through the Wagah border crossing on Tuesday morning, the Foreign Office said.

"These pilgrims are scheduled to kick start celebrations of the 550th birth anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak from his birthplace,

Nankana Sahib... on... 1 August, 2019," it said in a statement.

Every year, thousands of Indian Sikhs travel to Pakistan on the birth and death anniversaries of Guru Nanak, the Baisakhi festival and the death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

The Pakistan high commission in New Delhi issued visas to the Indian pilgrims on July 26.

These visas were "over and above" the thousands of visas granted every year under the framework of the India- Pakistan Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines of 1974, the statement said.

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BJP-Led Karnataka Govt Cancels 'Controversial & Communal' Tipu Jayanti Celebrations

The BJP has objected to the celebrations on the birth anniversary of Tipu Sultan, calling him a tyrant who demolished numerous temples and forcefully converted several Hindus to Islam.

(News Agencies)- The BJP-led Karnataka government on Tuesday cancelled Tipu Jayanti celebrations in the state, calling it "controversial and communal." The decision comes just three days after B.S. Yediyurappa, the Karnataka BJP chief, was sworn in as the chief minister after weeks of political uncertainty crippled the state. The Siddaramaiah-led Congress government had started the celebration of Tipu Jayanti as an annual affair on November 10 in 2015, and it was continued by the Congress-JD(S) coalition government headed by H D Kumaraswamy last year despite opposition from BJP and others. According to the order, the decision was taken after Virajpet MLA K G Bopaiah wrote to Yediyurappa requesting him to cancel Tipu Jayanti celebrations organised annually by the state Kannada and Culture Department, highlighting opposition to such celebrations, particularly in Kodagu district. Kodagu district was marred by widespread protests and violence during the first official celebration in 2015, during which Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) worker Kuttappa had died. BJP and right-wing organisations had stiffly opposed, Tipu Jayanti celebrations, calling the ruler a "religious bigot". Reacting to the BJP government's decision, former Karnataka chief minister and Congress leader Siddaramaiah said that he had started Tipu Jayanti celebrations because according to him, Tipu was the first freedom fighter in the country. "BJP people are not secular," he said. Stating that Tipu had worked for the development of the then Mysuru state, he said foundation to KRS dam was laid during his period and he also worked for the development of industries, agriculture and trade. "Not with any other intention, as he was a lover of freedom, freedom fighter, we had decided to celebrate it (Jayanti). BJP with malice, because of their hatred towards minorities, they have done this. I oppose this move," Siddaramaiah added. The BJP has objected to the celebrations on the birth anniversary of Tipu Sultan, calling him a tyrant who demolished numerous temples and forcefully converted several Hindus to Islam. The BJP and Congress have often locked



horns over the legacy of the 18th-century ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore who was also referred to as the Tiger of Mysore. He was killed in May 1799 while defending his fort at Srirangapatna against the British forces. Tipu Sultan is a controversial figure in Kodagu district as Kodavas (Coorgis), a martial race, believe thousands of their men and women were seized and held captive during his occupation and subjected to torture, death and forced conversion to Islam. He was also accused of execution of Mandyam Iyengars at the temple town of Melkote in Mandya district on the day of Deepavali, as they supported the then Maharaja of Mysuru. However, the scale of such suppression is disputed by several historians, who see Tipu as a secular and modern ruler who took on the might of the British.

MP police asked to expedite probe into Vyapam cases



(News Agencies)-The Congress-led Madhya Pradesh government on Tuesday asked the special task force (STF) of the state police to complete its probe into fresh complaints pertaining to irregularities in the professional entrance examinations, known as Vyapam case, in three months. There are as many as 197 complaints which were not taken up by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), STF officials said. STF had handed over the investigation into the Vyapam case to the federal agency four years ago following a Supreme Court order. State home minister Bala Bacchan said, "STF will probe all the aspects of the Vyapam scam, which were untouched till now." The Vyapam (Vyavasayik Pareeksha Mandal) scam surfaced in July 2013 when police arrested 20 impersonators appearing for the medical entrance examination in Indore. Vyapam is the Hindi acronym for the Madhya Pradesh Professional Examination Board, which conducts entrance examinations for government jobs.

'Archaic practice confined to dustbin,' PM Narendra Modi on triple talaq bill passage

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his tweet, also called it a "victory of gender justice" that will "further equality in society."



was likely to free Muslim women from the "curse of a regressive practice".

"Today is a great day for India's democracy. I congratulate PM @narendramodi ji for fulfilling his commitment and ensuring a law to ban Triple Talaq, which will free Muslim women from the curse of this regressive practice," Amit Shah tweeted. The "triple talaq" bill, passed thrice by the Lok Sabha, cleared its toughest test in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday when some parties opposed to the law such as Nitish Kumar's JD(U) and the AIADMK decided to abstain from voting. Their absence brought down the effective strength of the 240-member Rajya Sabha and the majority mark, making it possible to pass the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2019 with 99 members in its support. Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad showed the victory sign as he emerged out of Parliament. Union ministers Nitin Gadkari and VK Singh said it was a "historic day".

(News Agencies)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked "all parties and MPs" who supported the passage of "Triple Talaq" bill for rising to the occasion in order to correct a "historical wrong done to Muslim women," moments after the legislation crossed the Rajya Sabha hurdle on Tuesday with 99 votes in its favour. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his tweet, also called it a "victory of gender justice" that will "further equality in society." "An archaic and medieval practice has finally been confined to the dustbin of history! Parliament abolishes Triple Talaq and corrects a historical wrong done to Muslim women. This is a victory of gender justice and will further equality in society. India rejoices today!" He said in his first tweet. His second tweet on the issue expressed his gratitude for all those who supported the Bill. "I thank all parties and MPs who have supported the passage of The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2019 in both Houses of Parliament. They have risen to the occasion and this step of theirs will forever be remembered in India's history." Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who piloted the "Triple Talaq" bill congratulated the Prime Minister for "fulfilling his commitment" that

Sonia Gandhi takes charge in House as Congress faces vacuum

The same week, she came to the aid of her colleague Manish Tewari, who was speaking during Zero Hour on US president Donald Trump's claim that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had invited him to mediate on the Kashmir issue.

(News Agencies)- Last week, United Progressive Alliance chairperson Sonia Gandhi called an emergency meeting of Rajya Sabha members from the Congress and other opposition parties to discuss the floor strategy during the discussion and voting on the Right to Information (amendment) bill. The same week, she came to the aid of her colleague Manish Tewari, who was speaking during Zero Hour on US president Donald Trump's claim that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had invited him to mediate on the Kashmir issue. She pulled out a sheaf of papers listing details of Trump's comments (made the previous evening, India time), which Tewari quoted from in the course of his

speech. On July 8, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader TR Baalu led a walkout of his party colleagues over the President rejecting two bills passed by the Tamil Nadu assembly on admitting students to medical college solely on the basis of their Class 12 marks. Baalu was visibly upset with the Congress members for not keeping quiet while he was speaking (they were protesting the then ongoing drama in Karnataka). The DMK, like most other parties in Tamil Nadu want the state to be outside the purview of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET). According to a Congress leader familiar with the matter who asked not to be named, when Gandhi was told that the

Congress could not, as a national party, oppose NEET, she said party members from Tamil Nadu should have supported Baalu whose party is an ally of the Congress. The three anecdotes -- there are many more -- indicate that the ongoing leadership crisis in the Congress has forced Gandhi to step up her own involvement in Parliament. In the ongoing budget session, Gandhi, 72, has often been seen marshalling her party members in the Lok Sabha, prompting them to raise important issues, even strategising with other opposition parties to put up a united front against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government in both the Houses of Parliament. After having handed over




the reins of her party to her son Rahul Gandhi in December 2017, Gandhi took a backseat not only in the organisation but also in Parliament though she continued to hold the post of the chairperson of the Congress parliamentary party (CPP) in the 16th Lok Sabha (she also continued to sit in the first row). She was re-elected CPP chairperson in the 17th Lok Sabha after the Congress recorded its second worst electoral performance in

the just-concluded national elections, winning just 52 seats. Like in 2014, it yet failed to get 10% seats of the total strength (54 out of the total 543 seats) of the Lower House to qualify for the post of the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. The party won 44 seats in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The debacle forced Rahul Gandhi to offer his resignation to the Congress Working Committee (CWC) on May 25. Since then, the party


hasn't done much to find his successor, and it actually isn't clear who will initiate this process. At least in Parliament, Gandhi has stepped in to fill the leadership vacuum. During the meeting she called with Rajya Sabha members, it was decided that the Congress and other opposition parties would insist on sending the bill to a joint select committee of both the Houses for a thorough scrutiny before it was passed in the Rajya

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States reviewing forest rights claims

At least eight states have also admitted before the top court that the authorities had failed to follow due procedure under the law while deciding the claims of FDSTs and OTFD to forest land under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006.

(News Agencies)- In a breather for hundreds of thousands of forest-dwelling scheduled tribes (FDSTs) and other traditional forest dwellers (OTFDs), state governments have told the Supreme Court that an exercise is under way to review their rejected claims of community rights over land they have occupied for generations, and asked for time to complete the process.

At least eight states have also admitted before the top court that the authorities had failed to follow due procedure under the law while deciding the claims of FDSTs and OTFD to forest land under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006.

A bench led by Justice Arun

Mishra had on February 13 this year ordered the eviction of FDTs and OFTDs whose claims had been rejected. But the court stayed the order on February 28 after the Centre and Gujarat government rushed to the bench, seeking a modification to the directive following widespread concerns among tribal rights activists. The bench had then asked states to file affidavits explaining how the claims had been processed and if the rejections were justified.

Twenty-five states have filed their affidavits before the SC. The matter was listed for a hearing on Tuesday, but could not be taken up for hearing. Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhand have admitted due procedure laid

down under the Act was not followed in rejecting the claims. Eleven states have undertaken a review of the rejected claims. Jharkhand has asked for time till July 2020 to complete the exercise, Assam eight months; Karnataka 18 months while Chhattisgarh has given itself a deadline of two years to complete the review. Gujarat and Telangana have requested the court to grant them six more months to finish the review and Bihar four months to decide on the claims. Karnataka has in its affidavit admitted that most of the cases had been rejected without a proper opportunity being given to the communities for adducing evidence and without following the principles of natural justice. In some of its districts, Assam found that the rejection was only



recorded in the proceedings, but no rejection order was passed. Assam assured no genuine forest dweller would be deprived of the rights to community land in the review. Jharkhand said that it was struggling to carry out the review given that a large number of case records have not been found. Bihar said that from a perusal of the reports received so far, it appears that due procedure in "totality has not been followed while passing rejection orders". The debate on whether forest dwellers whose claims were rejected should be evicted has polarised even

conservationists. Nine academics including Sharachchandra Lele, a fellow in environmental policy and governance at Ashoka Trust for Ecology and Environment (ATREE); author and historian Ramchandra Guha; and R Sukumar, an elephant expert from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, filed a petition in SC, saying that the implementation of the act in recognising community forest rights has been very poor and praying that states be directed to recognise community forest resource rights, which is critical for conservation.

Ratul Puri rejects ED claim that he likely killed Agusta witness



(News Agencies)- The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday claimed in a special court that a witness who is missing in the case of alleged irregularities in the ~3,600 crore AgustaWestland helicopter deal may have been killed by Ratul Puri, a suspect in the case and nephew of Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath. The court did not make any observations on the allegation but offered Puri interim protection against arrest until Wednesday, extending an order it issued on Saturday. The Enforcement Directorate, which investigates cases of money laundering and foreign exchange rule violations, made its submission while arguing against an anticipatory bail plea moved by Puri, who is being probed for his role in the AgustaWestland deal. ED's counsel, DP Singh, said, "The man is so influential that he is not only at

flight risk, but we fear that one witness might have been killed." "...His family(that of the allegedly murdered witness) is so shocked that they are scared of filing an FIR [first information report]." The reference was to a Delhi-based witness, KK Khosla, who recorded a statement before income tax authorities four months ago. Singh said Khosla subsequently retracted his statement and has been missing for the past four months. "We reached his (witness) family about his whereabouts. They said they do not know..." he said. Responding to the ED's allegations, Puri's counsel, senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, told HT, "We will be filing a proper reply (to ED arguments) day after tomorrow. I am surprised that allegations are made on suppositions. Last I heard, there was not even an FIR by anyone regarding murder. Yet the counsel for prosecution, who is supposed to be responsible, is making wild allegations of liquidation." ED and the Central Bureau of Investigation are probing allegations of corruption and money laundering in a contract for the purchase of 12 luxury VVIP helicopters for use by top leaders, including the President, Prime Minister and former Prime Ministers. The deal was cancelled on January 1, 2014 over the allegations of wrongdoing.

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Firm that makes Budweiser banned from selling beer in Delhi for 3 years

AB InBev, which counts popular beer brands such as Budweiser, Hoegaarden and Stella Artois in its portfolio, told Reuters the Delhi government's allegations related to operations of SABMiller prior to its takeover, and it looked forward to receiving a fair hearing on the matter.

Delhi has banned the world's largest brewer, Anheuser-Busch InBev, from selling its products in the city market for 3 years for allegedly evading local taxes, government orders seen by Reuters showed.

The city government orders from earlier this month followed a 3-year investigation which found that beer maker SABMiller - acquired by AB InBev in 2016 for around \$100 billion - used duplicate barcodes on its beer bottles supplied to city retailers that year, allowing it to pay lower levies. AB InBev said in a statement it denied the Delhi government's allegations and would appeal against the order. "The barcodes were being

duplicated by ... SABMiller and supplied to the retail outlets to evade payment of excise duty," said a 19-page order, dated July 16, which detailed the findings. In a second order last week, the Delhi city authority said that AB InBev should be put on a "blacklist" for three years. It also called for the sealing of two of AB InBev's warehouses in the capital city, an action that a senior Delhi government official told Reuters on Tuesday had already been completed. "This means the company is debarred from Delhi market for all purposes, unless they appeal against this," said the official, adding that no fresh stock of AB InBev beer brands can be sold

at liquor shops or restaurants. Neither of the orders had been previously reported.

AB InBev, which counts popular beer brands such as Budweiser, Hoegaarden and Stella Artois in its portfolio, told Reuters the Delhi government's allegations related to operations of SABMiller prior to its takeover, and it looked forward to receiving a fair hearing on the matter.

"Integrity and ethics are part of our core values ... (We) look forward to presenting our views in full cooperation with the excise appellate process," a company spokesman said.

AB InBev is the second biggest player in India's \$7 billion beer market, accounting for a 17.5



percent market share, according to research firm IWSR Drinks Market Analysis. Though separate local market share figures were not available, industry executives said the Delhi ban would be a major setback for AB InBev, which is also battling a separate Indian antitrust probe concerning alleged beer price fixing by SABMiller and other companies. "New Delhi remains an extremely critical market for any beer company ... this is the country's social capital, apart

from Mumbai. It's a showcase market for the premium beer portfolio," said a former senior AB InBev executive, who declined to be identified.

This month, AB InBev cancelled the planned listing in Hong Kong of its Asia Pacific unit, citing "several factors, including the prevailing market conditions".

A young and affluent population and a growing pub culture, especially in the big cities, have spurred beer consumption in India.

'I have failed... sorry', wrote CCD founder VG Siddhartha in letter to directors

Cafe Coffee Day founder Siddhartha went missing after asking his driver to drop him off at the Netravathi bridge in Mangaluru as he wanted to take a walk.



Cafe Coffee Day founder VG Siddhartha, who went missing from Mangaluru on Monday, had a few days back written a note to his employees apologising for failing to create 'a right profitable business model'. Siddhartha went missing after asking his driver to drop him off at the Netravathi bridge in Mangaluru as he wanted to take a walk. There was no sight of him an hour later and the driver alerted the family, and they in turn informed the authorities. "I am very sorry to let down

all the people who put their trust in me. I fought for a long time but today I gave up as I could not take any more pressure," Siddhartha, the son-in-law of former Union Minister SM Krishna, wrote in the letter dated July 27. Siddhartha adds that he could not take any more pressure from one of the private equity partners 'orcing him to buy back shares, a transaction he had partially completed six months ago by borrowing a large sum of money from a friend. "Tremendous pressure from other lenders lead to me

succumbing to the situation," he adds.

"There was a lot of harassment from the previous DG income tax in the form of attaching our shares on two separate occasions to block our Mindtree deal and then taking position of our Coffee Day shares, although the revised returns have been filed by us. This was very unfair and has led to a serious liquidity crunch," he explains.

"My intention was never to cheat or mislead anybody, I have failed as an entrepreneur. This is my sincere submission, I hope someday you will understand, forgive and pardon me.

Siddhartha, who started his CCD chain with an outlet in Bengaluru and soon rose 15,000 outlets, enclosed a list of assets and tentative value of each asset with the letter. "As seen our assets outweigh our liabilities and can help repay everybody," he wrote signing off.

FTC Releases Agenda for Loot Box Workshop on August 7



The FTC has released the final agenda for its August 7, 2019 workshop that will examine consumer protection issues related to video game "loot boxes," in-game rewards players can buy while playing a video game. Andrew Smith, Director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection, will provide opening remarks at the workshop, which will focus on the marketing and use of loot boxes and other in-game purchases, and the potential behavioral impact of these virtual rewards on consumers. The workshop will feature three panel discussions. The first panel will explore the role of loot boxes and similar mechanics in the video game ecosystem and the impact of these monetization models on end users. It will be followed by a discussion on the potential social, psychological, and economic motivations associated with loot box spending. The last

panel will focus on current initiatives for disclosing in-game micro-transactions and explore ideas for other mechanisms that may enhance consumer protection. The workshop, which is free and open to the public, will begin at 10 a.m. ET and take place at the Constitution Center, 400 7th St., SW, Washington, D.C., and will be webcast live on the FTC's website. Directions to the Constitution Center building as well as public comments submitted about the workshop are available on the event webpage. The Federal Trade Commission works to promote competition, and protect and educate consumers. You can learn more about consumer topics and file a consumer complaint online or by calling 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357). Like the FTC on Facebook, follow us on Twitter, read our blogs, and subscribe to press releases for the latest FTC news and resources.

Triple talaq: India criminalises Muslim 'instant divorce'

But others accused his Hindu nationalist BJP of targeting Muslims.

Asaduddin Owaisi, an MP from the opposition All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen party, said the new law was a nother attack on Muslim identity under the BJP, which has been in power since 2014.

What is instant divorce?

There have been cases in which Muslim men in India have divorced their wives by issuing the

so-called triple talaq by letter, telephone and, increasingly, by text message, WhatsApp and Skype. A number of these cases made their way to the courts as women contested the custom.

Triple talaq divorce has no mention in Sharia Islamic law or the Koran, even though the practice has existed for decades. Islamic scholars say the Koran clearly spells out how to issue a divorce - it has to be spread over three months, allowing a couple

time for reflection and reconciliation. Most Islamic countries, including Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan and Bangladesh, have banned triple talaq, but the custom continued in India, which does not have a uniform set of laws on marriage and divorce that apply to every citizen.

Why is the bill so controversial? Campaigners and political parties are sharply divided over the bill. Those against it, including some

Muslim women, point out that it's unusual to criminalise divorce. The Congress party and others have pointed out the practice was already outlawed by the country's top court. Others have said the state has no place in regulating the marital home. But those in favour of the bill say triple talaq is deeply discriminatory towards women.

Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad defended the bill,

saying the practice had not stopped despite it being banned. He told the Rajya Sabha that some 574 cases were reported after the Supreme Court verdict. "The judgement has come, but no action on triple talaq has been taken. That is why we have brought this law, because the law is a deterrence," he said. Campaigners say it's almost impossible to quantify how many cases of triple talaq occur in India.

The alleged schemes took millions of dollars from financially distressed consumers

Enterprises, the FTC and the Ohio Attorney General allege that the companies generated and processed remotely created payment orders (RCPOs) or checks that allowed many unscrupulous merchants, including deceptive telemarketing schemes, to withdraw money from their victims' bank accounts. The FTC's Telemarketing Sales Rules (TSR) specifically prohibits the use of RCPOs in connection with telemarketing sales. Bruce and Patricia Woods, and their son in-law, Victor Rodriguez, controlled and managed the

payment processing scheme, which they ran through Madera Merchant Services, LLC and B&P Enterprises. In 2008, Ohio sued Bruce Woods for running a similar scheme. The telemarketing operations that Madera and B&P Enterprises supported included, among others, student debt relief schemes American Financial Benefits Center and Impetus Enterprise, and the credit interest reduction scheme operated by Educare and Tripletel. The FTC and Ohio allege that using RCPOs,

Madera and B&P Enterprises have withdrawn more than \$13 million from accounts of victims of these telemarketing operations since January 2016.

Madera and B&P Enterprises opened numerous business checking accounts with local banks and credit unions, primarily in Texas and Wisconsin, to process RCPOs for the schemes they supported. High return rates and other red flags led financial institutions to close many such accounts. When that happened, Madera

and B&P Enterprises opened new accounts with other banks. Since 2016, the defendants have opened more than 60 accounts with at least 25 different financial institutions.

The Credit Card Interest Reduction Scheme

The FTC and Ohio AG allege that Educare Centre Services, Inc. and Tripletel, Inc. sold sham credit card interest rate reduction services to consumers through telemarketers, including Dominican Republic-based Prolink Vision, S.R.L. According to the complaint, the defendants

promised to significantly reduce the interest rates on consumers' credit cards, and also promised a 100 percent money back guarantee if the promised rate reduction failed to materialize or the consumers were otherwise dissatisfied with the service. These were false promises. Most, if not all, of the defendants' customers did not receive the promised rate reduction, and the defendants routinely refused to honor refund requests, instead often threatening dissatisfied customers with collections or lawsuits.

Three of family in Punjab killed over inter-caste marriage

The police say there were three more assailants whose identities they have been unable to establish.

The incident took place at around 1 am when Harman Singh and the three deceased were sleeping in their home. Sensing trouble, Singh had already dropped his wife at a relative's house in Thathi Sohal village on Monday evening.

Singh returned to the village only on Monday. After he came home, Singh said, "I came to know that the relatives of my wife were gathering in the village. In the evening, I dropped my wife at a relative's home and came back." "At 1 am, I heard a noise outside my house. I saw the accused were trying to scale the outer walls of my house. I fled by

jumping from the roof of my house and went to my uncle Balkar Singh's home," he added. By the time he returned with his uncle, his father, brother, and sister were dead.

Soon after the incident, superintendent of police (headquarters) Harjit Singh, deputy superintendent of police (city) Kamaljit Singh, and station

house officer (SHO) of Sara-e-Amanat Khan police station Ranjit Singh reached the spot and began their investigation.

"As per our preliminary investigation, the trio was killed by the family members of the woman who were against the love-marriage. There were many deep cuts on the dead bodies. The bodies have been sent for

post-mortem," said Harjit Singh. The accused have been booked under sections 302 (murder), 452 (trespass with intent to hurt, assault or wrongfully restrain), 148 (rioting, armed with deadly weapon) and 149 (unlawful assembly) of the Indian Penal Code. "Raids are being conducted to nab the accused," Kamaljit Singh added.

Nirav Modi and Vijay Mallya's extradition cases pushed to next year

appeal against the home secretary's order to extradite him was upheld on July 2.

Several remand and case management hearings will be held in the magistrates court before Modi's trial is held over five days in May.

Modi is wanted in India in connection with major financial offences to the tune of Rs 14,000 crore related to a Mumbai branch of the state-owned Punjab National Bank. Indian agencies have been seeking Mallya's extradition for alleged money laundering and fraud after he flew to London in March 2016 as banks closed in on him to

recover Rs 9,000 crore in loans and interest his grounded Kingfisher Airlines owed them.

Mallya's case has progressed from the magistrates court to the home secretary, who needs to order the extradition. The high court upheld Mallya's application to appeal against the order on the grounds that the magistrates court had erred in December 2018 to conclude that there is a prima facie against him in India.

Mallya's appeal will be heard over three days from February 11, according to

the high court's schedule.

Mallya's claim has been that the inability to repay loans taken from Indian banks was due to a business failure, which was contested by the Indian government through the Crown Prosecution Service. He has also repeatedly offered to repay the loans.

Modi's and Mallya's are among several Indian extradition requests, including that of suspected cricket bookie Sanjeev Chawla, whose case has also progressed through the magistrates court and the home secretary, and is awaiting a ruling in the high court on his application to appeal.

CBI books Rolls Royce over 'contract with PSUs'

It has alleged that the company appointed an individual "as a commercial advisor in India for providing sales, logistic support, local business expertise and strategic advice in violation of term and conditions of purchase orders and integrity pact" with both HAL and ONCG. The integrity pact bars the appointment of individuals for such purposes, CBI adds.

The case has been filed five years after a long "Preliminary Enquiry" registered by the agency, CBI said in the FIR, which says that "there is a likelihood" that M/s Rolls Royce engaged "M/s

Aashmore Pvt Ltd "on payment of commission in other purchase orders," which in turn was paid as "kickbacks to unknown officials of HAL involved in the procurement process".

Similarly, for ONGC and GAIL, CBI has said in the FIR, that Rolls Royce paid M/s Aashmore Pvt Ltd nearly a million British Pounds as commission for 68 contracts with GAIL between 2007 and 2010. And between 2007 and 2011, commission worth nearly Rs 30 crore was paid to M/s Aashmore Pvt Ltd for 73 purchase orders placed by ONGC from Rolls Royce, the FIR added.



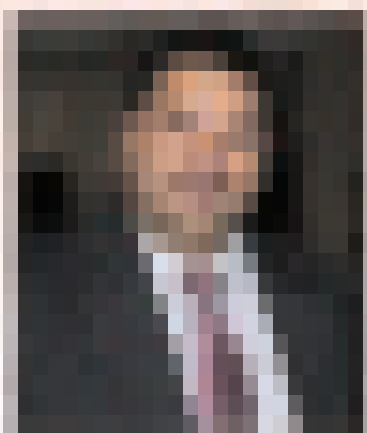
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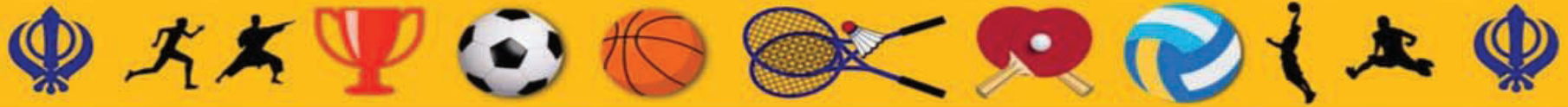
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Exclusive: TSA officers placed on leave after discovery of racist display



was just a joke." The manager's reaction further upset the three officers, the TSA employee said. According to an internal email obtained by CNN, the incident prompted the agency to launch an internal investigation, and two officers have since been placed on leave. The chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security sent a letter to TSA on Tuesday, urging the agency to make sure the incident is "promptly and thoroughly investigated," and that those involved are "held accountable for their actions." Mississippi Democratic Rep. Bennie Thompson wrote reports indicating local management did not take the incident seriously is "unacceptable and leaves TSOs to work in an environment where they believe they are not supported or protected." A veteran Miami TSA officer who

asked that his name not be used for fear of retaliation said he was upset about the incident, which he says has many of Miami International Airport's black and Hispanic TSA officers distraught. "The mood now at the airport is people are upset this hasn't been properly taken care of yet. We want everybody held accountable for what they have done," the officer said. In a statement, the TSA said the display was immediately removed once reported and that an investigation was launched into who was responsible for the "unacceptable behavior." "TSA does not tolerate racist or offensive behavior and those found responsible will be held accountable for their actions," Jenny Burke, a spokeswoman for the agency, said in a statement. "Two TSA officers have been placed on administrative leave while the

investigation is ongoing." In the internal email obtained by CNN that was sent six days after the incident, TSA's acting deputy administrator Patricia Cogswell writes to other high-ranking TSA officials that "given the number of emails and such coming in to HQ about the MIA situation, please pull together a message for SO (senior officers) to issue, and think about other information that should go out to all offices." After deliberations about the best way to communicate with the workforce about the incident, executive assistant administrator for security operations Darby Lajoie sent an email saying, "We've been made aware of an extremely troubling event in Miami this week involving a racially charged, disturbing display that cuts at the very core of who we are and what we stand for as an agency."

(News Agencies)-Two Transportation Security Administration officers have been placed on leave after a racist display was found inside a TSA workstation at Miami International Airport. Three TSA officers discovered two stuffed gorillas tied together and hanging with a noose on July 21, according to four TSA employees with knowledge of the situation and a picture obtained by CNN. A TSA employee with knowledge of the situation told CNN the display was hanging from a "pole right in the center of the TSA workstation located underneath the airport where passengers' checked luggage is screened before being placed on aircraft." The three officers notified their manager, but according to an employee with knowledge of the situation, the manager "tried to downplay the noose and gorilla display, saying it wasn't racist, it

She's 79 and sentenced to jail. Her crime: Feeding stray neighborhood cats

(News Agencies)-In a town with the same name as a famous fictional cat, a 79-year-old woman is sentenced to jail time for feeding stray cats, but the story is a little less straight forward that you would believe. Nancy Segula of Garfield Heights, Ohio, told CNN affiliate WJW that the animals started showing up a few years ago after a neighbor moved away and left his cats. Being a cat lover, she was worried about them and started feeding them. It may not seem like a big deal, and it's something people do across the country, but it's illegal to feed stray cats or dogs in Garfield Heights. Neighbors complained

and called the animal warden, and Segula said she started receiving citations for the offense in 2017. However, city Law Director Tim Riley disputes that claim and said she started receiving citations in 2015 and has received more than four over the past four years. This was not her first conviction. Segula was convicted after her first citation in 2015 and was sentenced to two years of probation in 2017 after various citations, including having too many animals and not disposing of the waste that was often found in her neighbors' yards, Riley said. She was told not to feed the strays anymore, but he says that request was ignored. At a

probation hearing in May, she received a 10-day jail sentence that was suspended with the understanding that she would no longer feed the animals. The most recent citation asked her to appear in court after more complaints came in about the animals. She admitted feeding the cats and was sentenced to the jail time, starting August 11, for contempt of court. Riley said 22 cats have been removed from Segula's home. However, Segula is getting another day in court. Garfield Heights Municipal Court Judge Jennifer Weiler was supposed to hear her case last week but was away, and the magistrate took over. Weiler told



WJW that she has ordered a new hearing so she can hear from both sides. Does the punishment fit the crime? Segula's family was shocked and upset when they first heard she

had been sentenced. "I'm sure people hear about the things that happen downtown in that jail. And they are going to let my 79-year-old mother go there?" said her son, Dave Pawlowski.

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Princess Haya: Dubai ruler's wife seeks marriage protection order

(News Agencies)- The estranged wife of the ruler of Dubai - one of the most high-profile leaders in the Middle East - has asked for a forced marriage protection order in a UK court. Sheikh Mohammed Al Maktoum's wife, Princess Haya Bint al-Hussein, is the third female member of his court to apparently try to run away. This month she was reported to be in hiding in London and is said to be in fear for her life. The case began in London on Tuesday. What happened in the High Court?

Princess Haya asked for wardship of her children - with whom she left the United Arab Emirates (UAE) - as well as a forced marriage protection order and a non-molestation order. The details of the orders sought by the

princess are not known. Sheikh Mohammed meanwhile applied for the return of his children to Dubai, and also applied for the court to impose reporting restrictions on details about the orders - a request the judge rejected. Sir Andrew McFarlane ruled there was "a public interest in the public understanding, in very broad terms, proceedings that are before the court".

Who is Princess Haya?

The princess, who was born in Jordan and educated at private schools in Britain, is an Olympic equestrian and the half-sister of the current Jordanian ruler, King Abdullah II. She married Sheikh Mohammed in 2004, becoming his sixth and "junior" wife. The 70-year-old sheikh, who is the

billionaire owner of Godolphin horse racing stables, reportedly has 23 children by different wives. Princess Haya, 45, initially fled to Germany to try to seek asylum there, but it emerged this month that she was living in central London - specifically, in an £85m (\$107m) town house in Kensington Palace Gardens. It's believed that Princess Haya will want to stay in the UK. However, if her husband demands her return to Dubai, this could cause a diplomatic headache for Britain - which has close ties to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). After she fled, Sheikh Mohammed wrote an angry poem accusing an unnamed woman of betrayal and treachery, and posted it on his Instagram page. Why is Princess Haya said to have run



away? Sources close to the princess said earlier this month she had recently discovered disturbing facts about the mysterious return to Dubai last year of Sheikha Latifa, one of Sheikh Mohammed's daughters. Sheikha Latifa had escaped the UAE by sea with the help of a Frenchman, but was intercepted by armed men off the coast of India. She

was then returned to Dubai. At the time, Princess Haya defended Dubai's reputation over the incident, claiming that Sheikha Latifa had been "vulnerable to exploitation" and was "now safe in Dubai". Human rights advocates said she was abducted against her will. Images of 'missing' Dubai princess released Later, however,

sources alleged that Princess Haya had become aware of new information related to the case, and as a result came under increasing pressure from her husband's extended family. In July 2000, another of Sheikh Mohammed's daughters - Sheikha Shamsa Al Maktoum, who was 19 at the time - briefly escaped from the family's Surrey home.

Al-Qaeda remains 'resilient', works closely with LeT, says UN report



(News Agencies)- Terror group Al-Qaeda remains "resilient", continues to consider Afghanistan a safe sanctuary for its leaders and works closely with the Lashkar-e-Toiba and the Haqqani network despite being overtaken by the Islamic State, a UN counter-terrorism watchdog set up by the Security Council has said in a new report.

The Islamic State itself which has diminished with the loss of its so-called "caliphate" in Syria and Iraq, has evolved into a "mainly covert network" and its leadership is

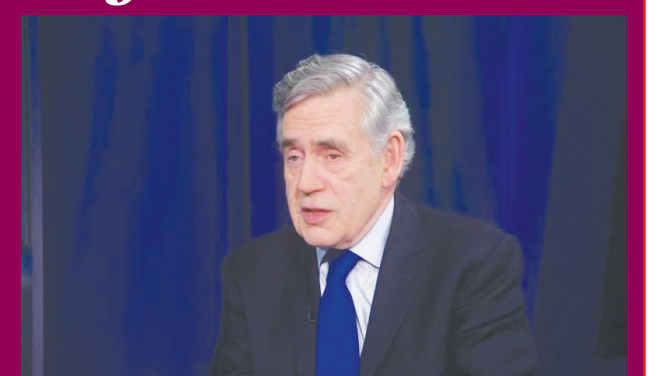
focusing on establishing "establish sleeper cells at the local level in preparation for eventual resurgence", according to the 24th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team that was submitted to the UN Security Council Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee this month. Even in its current form, the report by UN's terrorism watchdog set up by Resolution 1267 of the Security Council, said the Islamic State poses the most "immediate threat to global security" and remains stronger than Al-Qaeda in terms of its

"finances, media profile and current combat experience and terrorist expertise". But Al-Qaeda "remains resilient", the UN body said although there are questions about its leader Ayman al-Zawahiri's health and the group's succession plan. It "continues to cooperate closely with Lashkar-e-Toiba and the Haqqani Network", the report said underscoring the threat these Pakistan-based terrorist groups continue to pose for the region and the world. A recent US department of defense reported the existence of hundreds of LeT fighter in Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda remains the source of the largest collection of foreign fighters, which is Afghanistan. And the terrorist outfit responsible for the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks remains a potent force in Afghanistan. Its "members continue to function routinely as military and religious instructors for the Taliban" the report said.

Boris Johnson has rare powers. He's gonna need them

(News Agencies)- Boris Johnson, Britain's next prime minister, is a pragmatist, and having been born in the United States, understands America as well as perhaps no other politician since Winston Churchill. He recognizes the paramount importance of the post-Brexit relationship between the United States and the UK. He has worked hard to forge a positive relationship with President Donald Trump at a time when other world leaders have found that difficult or impossible to do. Indeed, when people liken Boris Johnson to Trump, the comparisons are often either overblown or superficial (the hair). But the two, undeniably, do have this in common: They are politicians who are communicators first and foremost, unafraid to speak their minds.

Of course, Johnson is a journalist who often reaches for the metaphor, the peroration, the 800-word opinion article, rather



than the raging, blunt tweet. But both men are direct. They cut through. The Tory Johnson has cut through against Republicans from time to time, whether as foreign secretary, making clear his policy disagreements with Trump on Iran, or his rapier pushback against Trump's claims of "no-go" areas in London. Mitt Romney, after suggesting London would not be ready to host the 2012 Summer Olympics, found himself on the receiving end of Johnson's rhetoric as well. But it's not just in pushing back on otherwise like-minded American politicians where Johnson the communicator thrives.

I've been fortunate enough to have seen some of this up close, having spent time with Johnson both in London and Washington. In a meeting we had in the mayor's office in 2015, Johnson displayed a keen knowledge of the US political system and its cast of characters, asking incisive questions, and not dismissing Trump's chances in the Republican primary. But more noteworthy is his demonstrated ability to not so much win over a room, but to have won the room over before he even stepped on stage, as was the case with a 2015 Politico Playbook breakfast conversation with Johnson.

A new chapter in the Afghan Great Game

Pakistan has an advantage; the US is managing a strategic defeat. India must be more proactive

(News Agencies)- The terrorist attack against vice-presidential candidate and president Ashraf Ghani's running mate, Amrullah Saleh, on July 28 in Kabul was a part of an attempt to eliminate strong Afghan leaders opposed to the Taliban and its patron, Pakistan. Last October, another formidable and outspoken critic of the Taliban and Pakistan and Kandahar's police general, Abdur Raziq, was killed. Fortunately, for Afghanistan - but not for the Taliban or Pakistan - Saleh escaped only with a minor injury. At 46, Saleh embodies the hopes of thousands of young Afghans for a forward-looking country which continues to be rooted in its moderate Islamic and national cultural traditions. A fearless and astute security professional, he became the

head of Afghan intelligence at 32. That assignment, and his earlier association with Ahmed Shah Masood, gave Saleh an insight into Pakistan's relentless interference in Afghanistan through the Taliban and other groups. It also instilled in him a fierce desire to defeat these machinations.

Saleh will not be deterred by this terrorist attack, but these are difficult days for leaders of his persuasion. The Afghan enterprise that was put in place with international assistance after the United States (US), with the help of Northern Alliance forces, ousted the Taliban regime in November 2001, is unravelling. The Taliban and Pakistan are clearly in an advantageous position. President Donald Trump's silly bombast of the US' capacity to win the war if it was

willing to kill 10 million people is true in terms of US power. But are such wars ever waged and won only with raw power? The fact is that the US allowed the war to grind on because it refused to cross the Durand Line to destroy Taliban safe havens. It is, now, in the process of managing a strategic defeat.

Over the past nine months, the US has been negotiating with the Taliban, and the insurgent group backed by Pakistan is behaving like a victor. It has compelled the US to abandon its vital negotiating positions on ceasefire and direct Taliban-Afghan talks. Worse, despite threats to Pakistan to give up its deviousness or face US wrath, Trump has been compelled to seek its help to erode Taliban obduracy. Zalmay Khalilzad, the US envoy negotiating with the



Taliban, is hopeful of reaching an agreement soon with the Taliban on the issues of US troop withdrawal and Taliban assurances that it will not allow the presence of international terrorist groups on territories under its control. The US is willing to go along with vague Taliban guarantees on the latter issue; perhaps, it hopes that a continuing intelligence presence will enable it to monitor what is happening in the country. The current sticking

point is the time frame of US troop pull-out. The US wants to do it over a year, while the Taliban is insisting that it should be much quicker. It is likely that both sides will reach a compromise on this point, for the US has agreed to quickly close down a majority of its Afghan bases.

After the US-Taliban agreement, the focus will shift to intra-Afghan talks, which will have to be inevitably held amid continuing violence.

The elusive China-Nepal rail link: High costs and risks, uncertain benefits



before even considering finalising the project. The Chinese report highlighted many high technical risks. Engineers would need to build ramps along the northern and southern slopes leading to Lake Paiku, near Kyirong, to connect the tracks to the Kathmandu section to overcome the huge difference in elevation between the southern and northern edges of the Himalaya. The Kathmandu section of the railway is in the "collision and splicing zone" along the Eurasian Plate, presenting six major geological problems. First, the hard rock burst and the large deformation of soft rocks would cause extremely high stress. Second, the problems associated with the fault effects of the deep, active fractures lying in high-intensity seismic areas. The level of seismic activities could present problems with high ground temperatures, slope stability, debris and water erosion. Given that depressing assessment, Nepal understandably took heart from an annex attached to the Joint Communique of the Leaders' Roundtable of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation signed on April 27, 2019.

(News Agencies)- Nepal in recent years. Beijing's commitment to build a railway link to Kathmandu has become the symbol of this new dynamic. But while many in New Delhi may think this is a done deal, the truth is more complicated. Nepal's Prime Minister, KP Oli, is not a man to be modest in his claims and promises. In a public speech on June 3, 2018, just before a visit to China, he stated, "While the Indian rail would take four years to materialise, a metro rail by China would reach Kathmandu within three years." Clearly, his top priority on the trip was to get an absolute commitment from China to build the railway. On his return, there was a striking difference in tone. A newspaper article on June 24, 2018, significantly headed,

"PM Oli applies brakes on his railway dream", quoted him as saying, "Materialising rail is not like waving a magic wand." The reasons for his uncharacteristic restraint soon became clear. Following an agreement signed during his visit, the China Railway First Survey and Design Institute conducted a month-long technical study of the proposed 121-km railway from Kathmandu to Kyirong. The Chinese invited the Nepal side to come to the north central city of Xi'an on August 21 to be briefed on the technical results of the study, but key details had already appeared in The Kathmandu Post on August 16. The essence was that both governments would have to consider very significant technical and financial hurdles

PM in Bhutan, EAM in China next month



(News Agencies)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and external affairs minister S Jaishankar will make crucial visits to Bhutan and China respectively next month to boost relations with both countries and identify new areas of cooperation, people familiar with developments said on Tuesday. Jaishankar's visit to Beijing during August 11-12, yet to be officially announced, will see him co-chairing the second meeting of the high-level mechanism on cultural and people-to-people exchanges with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, two people said on condition of anonymity. He will also hold talks to prepare the grounds for the second informal summit between Modi and President Xi Jinping in India on October 11, the people said. The first informal summit at

Wuhan last year helped reset bilateral ties after the 2017 military stand-off at Doklam, which took relations to a fresh low. Modi will travel to Bhutan during August 17-18 for talks with Prime Minister Lotay Tshering, the people cited above said. Several agreements are expected to be signed during the visit, which will signal India's commitment to its "neighbourhood first" policy, they said.

This will be Jaishankar's first substantive engagement with the Chinese leadership since he assumed office last month and will offer an opportunity to engage on issues ranging from the long-standing border dispute to the India's concerns about a trade deficit that has ballooned to \$58 billion.

Hit By Worst Water Crisis, Why India May Die A Thirsty Death

The red light has been blinking and now the government has acknowledged that India is facing the worst water crisis in its history with about 60 crore people facing high to extreme water stress

Farmers in Kurukshetra's Thanesar, a paddy-growing region of Haryana, are faced with a peculiar dilemma. Over the past few weeks, acres and acres of standing paddy have been destroyed by flood water from the Ghaggar and Markanda, two of the main rivers in the state. Gurmel Singh, 42, for one, is at his wit's end. With depleting groundwater levels, the government has been asking farmers to switch to other crops which consume less water. "Our paddy fields are under two-three feet of water. The crop has been destroyed. What other crop would survive here?" he asks, surveying his hard labour going waste within days. Floods have occurred here earlier too, but not with such ferocity. Crisis on the surface, crisis below the surface, Kurukshetra's water woes now

has a paradoxical character. Ask Jayanta Sharma about such contradictions. Sharma, 33, buys nearly 300 litres of water daily from a private firm, delivered by tankers directly to the overhead tank in his apartment in Guwahati. Yet, he and his family of three cannot step out of their homes on many days during the rainy season as even brief showers flood the entire locality. "We are having a tough time with water. The irony is that the roads are flooded with water and we are buying in trucks," says Sharma, who works in a private company. Over the past decade or so, Guwahati has seen an unplanned growth of housing apartments, leading to fast depletion of its groundwater level. And floods in Assam's capital are now a recurring problem, an urban nightmare that also blights Mumbai and other cities

annually. Across the length and breadth of India, millions of people are grappling with water—more often for the lack of this life-sustaining elixir. It's an unequal—some say, losing—battle. The conundrum was never so prominent, or puzzling. Every year, around this time, while parts of the country reel under droughts, there are others that are flooded. Taps run dry in cities, including the major ones, and rural areas that get enough rains depend on faraway sources. Cities like Chennai, which were once self-sufficient, now face water shortages. It was the same city that came to a standstill for days due to floods. In both urban and rural India, the crisis is acute. We are in the midst of shortages, toxic contamination, raging disputes between states over water



sharing, and heightened cross-border tensions in the subcontinent. The red light had been blinking for a while. Now, it's official. Government think-tank NITI Aayog said in a 2018 report that India is facing "the worst water crisis" in its history, with about 60 crore people facing high to extreme water stress. About two lakh people are also dying every year due to inadequate access to safe water, the report titled 'Composite Water Management Index' said. This

happens in the same country where hundreds die every year due to floods. Last month, Union water resources minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat sent out another warning. The water shortage could impact agriculture and thereby cut food exports from India. The country urgently needs to revive its reservoirs, lakes and other traditional water bodies, he said in a statement (see interview). For a country where a majority rely on the farm sector, this almost sounds catastrophic.

Donald Trump's Bluff On Kashmir Creates Unexpected Diplomatic Challenge For Itchy India



Post Donald Trump's unsolicited, mediatory hand in 'solving' the Kashmir issue, India has to frame its Pakistan policy in the light of the Afghan talks and the FATF ruling

The stream of misinformation, to put it mildly, befuddled the world, and it started right from January 2017, when Donald Trump assumed office as president of the United States. Since then, he has shown an endless appetite for creating controversy through deceit and rude comments, mostly through tweets directed both at leaders he claims are 'close friends' and at a long list of bêtes noires. The marvel is how impervious he is to howls of derision and protest, of being called a peddler of barefaced lies, a willing victim of delusional urges. Those beady eyes and upturned chin conceal a stone wall of the highest integrity.

His latest salvo from Washington early this week targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Trump's claim that Modi had sought his mediation on the Kashmir dispute with Pakistan sparked angry debates, speculation and an adjournment of Parliament's proceedings, along with a hurried and categorical rebuttal from the Indian foreign minister. The sharp reaction in India is understandable. 'Third party' mediation involving Pakistan and Kashmir evokes a long list of bad memories. On most such initiatives in the past decades—many of which continue to haunt political leaders—India had ended up holding the 'wrong end of the

diplomatic stick', while the gains were mostly extracted by its obdurate western neighbour.

"We have suffered every time we sought outside help to resolve issues with Pakistan," says former foreign secretary Kanwal Sibal.

The furore in Parliament over Trump's claim and the alacrity with which foreign minister S. Jaishankar assured the agitated MPs that there had been no shift in India's stated position and, likewise, not an iota of truth in Trump's statement, clearly indicates the sensitivity of the issue.

The fact that the foreign ministry had dug out the minutes and records of the Osaka meeting between Trump and Modi in which the 'request' was allegedly made, showed that the government is leaving no scope for speculation on not only a 'third party' mediation but also on expectations that India might return to the talks table with Pakistan soon.

The spur to Trump's claim was,

of course, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's maiden visit to Washington, which generated hope that a positive outcome of the Trump-Khan meeting might result in an early resumption of India-Pakistan dialogue. "If I can help, I would love to be a mediator," Trump told Imran in the White House. "If I can do anything to help, let me know," he added. Then came the bombshell, as Trump went on to say, "I was with Prime Minister Narendra Modi two weeks ago (on the G20 sidelines in Osaka)

and we talked about this subject and he actually said, "Would you like to be a mediator or arbitrator," I said, "Where," he said 'Kashmir'." The Pakistani PM's response was on expected lines: "The prayers of over a billion people will be with you if you can mediate and resolve the situation." Trump, by now puffed up in self-importance, went on to say that since both Indian and Pakistani leaders wanted him to mediate it was time he spoke to Modi to see how it can be taken forward.



Truecaller under fire after app signs up for UPI without consent

In a statement, the developers of Truecaller - known for its crowd-sourced caller identification feature - said the fault was in "the latest update of Truecaller that affected the payments feature, which automatically triggered a registration".

Popular mobile application developer Truecaller was caught in a privacy controversy on Tuesday after several users in India reported being signed up to use the company's UPI-based mobile payments service without opting for it - an occurrence that the company said was due to a bug.

Some of these users believed they were target of a fraud and took to social media platforms such as Twitter to post screenshots of text messages their phones automatically sent out, prompting privacy experts to criticise the company for what they saw as breach of trust.

"I woke up and checked my Android phone, which auto-updated a few apps, including Truecaller. It automatically, immediately sent an encrypted SMS from my phone to an unknown number,

following which ICICI Bank sent me a text message saying my UPI app registration has started," said Bengaluru-based software developer Dheeraj Kumar, who was among the first to report it on Twitter.

In a statement, the developers of Truecaller - known for its crowd-sourced caller identification feature - said the fault was in "the latest update of Truecaller that affected the payments feature, which automatically triggered a registration".

The company did not give a number on how many were affected, but said that a majority of its 100 million users were on the Android platform. "This issue has affected only a small fraction of Android users and not iOS users," said Manan Shah, the marketing director for Truecaller's India operations.

"We are extremely sorry for the inconvenience caused to our users. This was not our intent," he added.

UPI, or United Payments Interface, is a realtime payments service that underpins a growing number of mobile applications that people can use to send money across banks or use for purchases on websites. Concerns over its potential for misuse are not new, since there have been instances where people were targeted by fraudulent "collect" requests and fooled into making payments by callers pretending to be bank officials.

An official of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) said action will be taken if needed. "There was an issue in the app observed today... We understand that it has been fixed and till then, user on-boarding has been stopped in this app," said



Dilip Asbe, MD and CEO of NPCI. Privacy experts said the controversy raises larger questions. "What Truecaller essentially did was a breach of user expectation that their privacy will be safeguarded. They used personal details to sign up for a service users did not choose. This raises worrying questions, because if a service provider can potentially carry out financial transactions," said Apar Gupta, founder of Internet Freedom Foundation, a privacy and online liberties advocacy group.

"Truecaller gave no details of the error or the impact, which just points to a larger problem in the

context of data protection and privacy. As a policy, we have no mechanism to hold service providers accountable in such a scenario," he added, saying the problem was not confined to companies like Truecaller alone and that the government must expedite the rollout of a stringent data protection policy.

According to Truecaller executive Shah, the users who were automatically signed up for UPI were being de-registered. "The new update was rolled out yesterday [Monday] evening and we started noticing user complaints today afternoon. The update rollout was immediately stopped," he said.

Russia Instagram influencer Ekaterina Karaglanova found dead in suitcase

A prominent Russian Instagram influencer was found dead from knife wounds on Friday in a suitcase in her rented Moscow apartment, police said.

Ekaterina Karaglanova, 24, was discovered after her family reported that she had failed to contact them for several days. Ms Karaglanova, who had more than 85,000 followers on Instagram, had recently graduated as a doctor.

Police said they were investigating jealousy as a

possible motive.

Ms Karaglanova had recently started a new relationship and had planned a holiday to The Netherlands to celebrate her birthday on 30 July, according to Russian daily Moskovsky Komsomolets (MK).

But her parents grew concerned when attempts to contact her in the days leading up to her trip had failed.

They then contacted her landlord and requested access to her apartment, where they found a

suitcase containing her body in the hallway. Her father requested an ambulance, but Ms Karaglanov was reportedly already dead with a slit throat.

Police said there was no evidence that any struggle had taken place at the apartment, and no weapon was found at the scene, MK reported (in Russian). They added that CCTV footage had captured a former boyfriend of Ms Karaglanov briefly visiting her property in the days around her disappearance, but did not say if this was being investigated further.

"The teenager whose murder was exploited for clicks Ms Karaglanov regularly posted images of herself on Instagram. Her followers likened her appearance to the film star Audrey Hepburn.

In this post from March, she wrote about her plans for redecorating her flat, trips abroad and "another important activity



"I'm thinking about, which I'm not going to talk about for now". Her posts also included various European locations as she travelled throughout the continent. In her final post, which featured a picture captured on the Greek island of Corfu, she wrote that she liked to "travel often, but in each country I spend no more

than 3-5 days".

As well as her Instagram account, Ms Karaglanov also maintained a popular travel blog, which had thousands of subscribers.

She also held a residency at a medical school in Moscow and practised as a doctor specialising in dermatology.



Sustainable eating: Forget synthetic meat, lab grown dairy is here



The search for sustainable, healthy alternatives to meat currently has two paths: the meat-mimicking veggie burger and lab-grown proteins. But in the land of dairy, there's only plant-based alternatives like cashew "butter" and almond milk.

The search for sustainable, healthy alternatives to meat currently has two paths: the meat-mimicking veggie burger and lab-grown proteins. But in the land of dairy, there's only plant-based alternatives like cashew "butter" and almond milk. Whether you're milking them or slaughtering them, industrial cattle husbandry is bad for the planet. Studies show it to be a key culprit in the climate crisis and a source of localized environmental damage. The refrigerator aisle has been full of plant-based dairy for some time, but now there are a few startups who, like the purveyors of cultured

meat, want to take dairy one step further. Already under siege by falling milk sales, Big Dairy lobbyists have been lashing out at makers of plant-based rivals as they grow market-share. But their next enemy may be coming from the laboratory, in the form of synthetic whey, and investors are already lining up. While fewer people are drinking cow's milk, they're still eating yogurt and cheese, and a crucial protein that comes from making those products is whey. It's relatively flavorless and incorporates well into a range of food formulations for everyone from infants to adults. There's already a huge

market for it, as demand for whey protein and whey-based products is on the rise thanks to consumer demand for protein in everything, from bars to shakes. The U.S. is the single largest exporter of whey products, with estimated sales of \$10 billion last year. BCC Research said the category will grow by 6% annually through 2023. But for all its popularity, all that whey still comes from cows, a fact increasingly seen as a liability for climate- and health-conscious dairy and protein lovers. Ryan Pandya saw an opportunity in this consumer conundrum. He wants

to be the first to market a non-animal whey protein through his San Francisco area-based company, Perfect Day. Like other food startup founders, Pandya and partner Perumal Gandhi are both vegan. Rather than forego the taste of real cheese and dairy for poor vegan substitutes, the pair decided to invent their own version of the real thing. The startup focused on the well-worn food path of microbial fermentation—harnessing custom yeast and bacteria to grow the proteins that make milk taste like milk. But first, the company and others like it face some big hurdles: consumer squeamishness and regulatory reviews that may end up focusing more on the genetically modified organisms [GMO] used to make lab-grown whey. Five years ago, Perfect Day joined the synthetic biology accelerator IndieBio as it searched for microbes that could be engineered to make functional milk proteins. Today, it has more

than 60 employees, \$60 million in funding and says that it's produced one metric ton of lab-grown whey (for scale, the U.S. uses more than 200,000 metric tons of all types of whey annually). Late last year, agriculture giant Archer Daniels Midland agreed to invest in Perfect Day as the startup seeks to lower the cost of making whey. "When you're creating something that already exists, there is already an established price point," said Victoria de la Huerga, vice president of ADM Ventures. "The goal for companies that are leveraging new technology to make new food is you have to make it affordable." Though it's still early days, Perfect Day contends its proteins require 98% less water and 65% less energy than that required to produce whey from cows. The company said it hopes to one day license its ingredients so they can be used by food manufacturers in a range of products—but those involved concede that scaling the effort won't be easy.

Can pizza be healthy? The answer lies in the toppings

Use mashed cauliflower for the base, opt for fresh toppings and say no to processed cheese. And if you're ordering in, always get the thin crust, say nutritionists.

Think pizza and you think dough, cheese, meats. The way most people do it, it's the ultimate junk food. But it doesn't have to be. One of the first principles of healthy eating is carbohydrates in proportion with physical activity. "Pizza is unhealthy if you are chained to your desk five or six days a week or lead an otherwise sedentary lifestyle," says nutritionist Shikha Gupta. What you put on your pizza, of course, decides whether it's healthy or not. "Make it with more thought; skip refined flour for bajra flour, add sliced

tomatoes instead of canned tomatoes, don't use processed cheese and... ta da, you just made it healthy," says dietitian Zubeda Tumbi. Of course, it's best if you swap the dough with cauliflower; the meat with broccoli and greens. But even if you don't, you can make a middle-of-the-road treat that's actually not bad for you—as long as you have it as a meal and not a snack. "At the very least, if you're ordering in and all you have around you are pizza chains," Tumbi adds, "always, always, get the thin crust."



Homegrown fashion emerges in Somalia

A creeping cosmopolitanism is challenging entrenched conservative attitudes and many Somalis are undaunted by wanting a look that stands out.

Every time young fashion designer Hawa Adan Hassan makes a new gown for a paying customer, she also makes her dreams come true.

"My whole life, fashion design was a dream," says the 23-year-old university student, who last year began running a cottage business out of her family's home in Hamarweyne, the historic heart of Somalia's coastal capital Mogadishu.

For Hassan, it began with art, when she found herself drawn to sketching clothes rather than the animals and landscapes preferred by her peers.

Then she set to work on tailoring to turn her images into reality.

"I realised this could be my field of expertise," she says.

For decades, war and upheaval left ordinary Somalis focussed on the daily matters of life, death and survival.

Bombings by Al-Shabaab jihadists still dog Mogadishu today.

But a creeping cosmopolitanism is challenging entrenched conservative attitudes and many Somalis are undaunted by wanting a look that stands out. Somalia's clothing stores traditionally adhere to a simple formula: imported garments for the well-to-do, locally-made clothes for the rest.

But Hassan and others are starting to alter that picture with locally-designed, handmade attire for the high end of the market.

In such a nascent industry, Hassan is, by necessity, self-taught. "I used to watch fashion design shows on TV, and every time I watched one, I tried to grasp the ideas by drawing what I saw," she says.

Her favourite was Project

Runway, a US-made reality programme fronted by German model Heidi Klum.

"When I started I had no-one as a role model. It is just something I dreamed up," she says, adding that she now finds inspiration in the likes of Lebanese fashion designer Elie Saab.

In her home studio, Hassan sketches and inks new designs of abaya gowns and hijab headscarves, in a variety of black or bright colours, tight and loose fittings, with plain or embroidered finishes.

Fashion has also become a family affair, with Hassan's father -- a tailor by trade -- and older sister helping cut and sew the clothes.

Visitors to the workshop can hear children playing in nearby rooms and cooking smells waft in from the kitchen.

Her elder brother has been an



investor, helping to buy sewing machines and other equipment. Now the business is taking off, she says.

"In the beginning, it was my father, elder sister and brother who helped me start but now I'm self-reliant and can make a living out of my work," she says proudly.

Like many Mogadishu residents who have become inured to violence, Hassan dismisses the city's frequent bombings and shoot-outs, describing them as an "inconvenience" that can mess up her delivery schedules. Muna Mohamed Abdulahi,

another start-up fashion designer, is on a mission to encourage local people to take pride in products made in Somalia.

"Some people come to my shop and, when they realise that these clothes are designed and made locally, they run away because they have a negative impression about locally-made clothes," says the 24-year-old.

Like Hassan, Abdulahi is self-taught -- "I was my own role model," she says -- and insists she is more than just a tailor aping the work of others.

Pyer Moss designer, Kerby Jean-Raymond to helm new fashion line for Reebok

Jean-Raymond rose to fame at New York Fashion Week in late 2015 when Pyer Moss's spring 2016 collection took inspiration from the Black Lives Matter movement, which campaigns against racism towards black people.



Acclaimed Haitian-American designer Kerby Jean-Raymond will create a new fashion line for Reebok, his label announced Tuesday, as the struggling sportswear manufacturer seeks to revive its brand.

Jean-Raymond, whose work has highlighted police brutality against African-Americans, will serve as artistic director of a new division called Reebok Studies, Pyer Moss said in a statement. Jean-Raymond rose to fame at

New York Fashion Week in late 2015 when Pyer Moss's spring 2016 collection took inspiration from the Black Lives Matter movement, which campaigns against racism towards black people.

He is considered one of the best fashion designers of his generation and his designs regularly feature references to African-American culture and the community's role in the history of the United States. Reebok, a subsidiary of German sportswear giant Adidas, has teamed up with several high-profile designers over the years including Victoria Beckham and Demna

Gvasalia, now with Balenciaga. The tie-ups have come with the growing athleisure trend, which has seen sportswear take over the fashion landscape.

Reebok's turnover fell 3.0 percent on-year in 2018, data showed in March, continuing a struggle for growth that has persisted since Adidas took it over in 2005.

It has been collaborating with Jean-Raymond since 2017.



Arjun Patiala movie review

Diljit Dosanjh, Kriti Sanon can't make up for lack of jokes

Arjun Patiala movie review: Diljit Dosanjh, Kriti Sanon's parody film fails to take off despite its talented cast. The punches don't land as stuttering and belching stand in for jokes. Rating: 1.5/5.

Arjun Patiala

Director: Rohit Jugraj

Cast: Diljit Dosanjh, Kriti Sanon, Varun Sharma, Ronit Roy, Seema Pahwa

Rating: 1.5/5

Pankaj Tripathi's movie producer drops the most audacious joke in Arjun Patiala during the first five minutes of the film. Appropriately dressed in a white safari suit and covered in gold, he asks the aspiring director why he is bent on telling him the film's story. "I have been making films for decades without once listening to any of the stories," he says with a bemused expression. Arjun Patiala is designed as a movie-within-a-movie, a satire on ridiculousness of cinematic clichés and done-to-death genres, with cop films as its area of focus. The Diljit Dosanjh-Kriti Sanon film couldn't have chosen more wisely - there

is a lot there to be mocked; or as suits will tell you, it is a low hanging fruit. It is a pity then that the film falls into the same trap, but is far less fun than a Simmba or a Dabangg, or even a south Indian dubbed cop movie - a genre that has kept more than one Hindi film channel afloat over the years. Diljit Dosanjh plays the eponymous Patiala who has just snagged the job as a sub-inspector in the Punjab Police via a sports quota. His lifelong idol has been Ronit Roy's DSP Gill who enjoys the hero status that is normally accorded to cricketers and actors in Arjun's sleepy village. Once he is in the force, Gill asks Arjun to clean up the district and make it crime-free. Arjun goes about setting up encounters between the various criminals in his area with the able help of constable Onidda Singh (Varun Sharma), and romances

an intrepid reporter Ritu (Kriti Sanon) in his downtime.

It is not that the film doesn't have self-aware moments and jokes. It takes enough time exploring the trope of a corrupt police officer with a heart of gold and how the man is a beacon of hope for women - something that Simmba, Dabangg, Singham and countless others have shown in various troubling ways. Arjun, when he sees two men molesting a woman, ties a 3.2 kg load to their stomachs and makes them clean up the police station. He then delivers a homily about how their pregnant mothers must have carried the same load and that they should respect women. This is followed by him taking a picture of Sunny Leone without her consent and then doing an item number with her, as the film informs us, "for absolutely no reason". However,



for a parody to work, the script has to be razor-sharp and the jokes even more so. What we get is, at best, half baked. After a bit, belches and stuttering stand-in for comedy and slapstick takes over. At 106 minutes, the Rohit Jugraj film is hardly a stretch but feels like it anyway. Ritesh Shah and Sandeep Leyzell's script fails to rise to the occasion and Arjun Patiala loses its way between a parody and just another run-of-the-mill film despite its fancy graphics and video game treatment in the climax.

It is left to Diljit Dosanjh's boy-next-door charm and spot-on

comic timing to make the film relatable. The actor has earned his stripes in Punjabi cinema and needs better roles than what Arjun Patiala or the excruciating Welcome to New York have offered him in Hindi till now. Kriti Sanon and Varun Sharma are effective but are let down by mediocre material. It is Pankaj, Seema Pahwa and Ronit Roy who are truly wasted in the film. Spoof as a genre has rarely been tried in Hindi cinema and someone needs to crack that egg - heaven knows there is a lot waiting to be explored; Arjun Patiala, alas, isn't that film.

Family Of Thakurganj movie review

Jimmy Sheirgill's movie suffers from familiar Bollywood hang-ups



Family Of Thakurganj movie review: Jimmy Sheirgill, Mahie Gill and Saurabh Shukla tries to borrow and steal from several films but fails to be half as good as any of them.

Family Of Thakurganj

Cast: Jimmy Sheirgill, Mahie Gill, Saurabh Shukla, Nandish Singh

Director: Manoj K Jha

Rating: 2/5

The first thing you notice about Family Of Thakurganj is the sheer number of influences that overshadow its effort at storytelling. It is almost as if director Manoj K Jha was trying to cross the thematic essentials of Gangs Of Wasseypur with the small town spiff of Dabangg and the humour-violence cocktail of Satya, in order to set up a

Deewar-style disparity in ideals among two brothers.

By turns, the film seems like a grim gangland saga that inadvertently becomes funny, and an attempted spoof of a gangland saga that is far from funny.

This is the story of Nannu (Jimmy Sheirgill) and Munnu (Nandish Singh), brothers who live in Thakurganj, an Uttar Pradesh small town. After their father dies, Nannu takes to crime. He soon becomes a gangster who works for the powerful Baba Bhandari (Saurabh Shukla).

Among Nannu's many

transgressions is a thriving extortion racket he runs with his wife (Mahie Gill). His mother supports his criminal ways, but law-abiding younger brother Munnu, who runs a coaching class, resents Nannu's exploits.

The stage is set for a crusty small town tale that promises to build its drama around conflict, intrigue and suspense, with apt doses of humour and violence thrown in. Sadly, writer Dilip Shukla, who carved his niche as commercial Bollywood's small town specialist scripting the Dabangg films, is out of form here. As the initial interest wanes, the film fails to hold audience's attention. The screenplay moves along undecidedly, and you realise what is wrong. The narrative has no USP. Standard melodrama takes over, reminiscent of numerous similar attempts,

salvaged only by the odd bursts of humour.

Lack of USP is evident in the casting too. Jimmy Sheirgill as the goon and Mahie Gill as the plotting wife would by now seem like clichés in a film's credits. Saurabh Shukla's

local don and Yashpal Sharma's corrupt cop suffer the same setback. If these

actors of proven talent somehow manage to rise above the film's overall mediocrity, the relatively greenhorn Nandish Singh, seen last week playing Hrithik Roshan's brother in Super 30, clearly struggles to hold his own.

This is one family whose story suffers from the familiar Bollywood hang-ups.



PAPA BONEY RUBBISHES JANHVI-ISHAAN LINK-UP



REAMS of newsprint have been dedicated to Janhvi Kapoor and Ishaan Khatter's budding romance. According to the grapevine, their onscreen romance spilled over into real life during their debut *Dhadak*.

However, Kapoor's father Boney Kapoor has rubbished the reports doing the rounds. "Yes, Ishaan and Janhvi have done a movie together and they must have become friends. I respect my daughter and her friendship with Ishaan," he told an entertainment website.

A source close to the Kapoor family also laughed off reports Khatter is frequenting the Kapoor house and Boney approves of their relationship. "Ishaan has, in fact, never visited the Kapoor residence after *Dhadak* released. There is nothing more than friendship."

Meanwhile, it was being said Kapoor and Khatter were roped in for the Hindi remake of the Telugu hit *Dear Comrade*, which will be produced by Karan Johar. However, Johar clarified the pair is not part of the film and the cast is yet to be finalised. "All the best and big success to the team of #DearComradeOnJuly26th! Also a CLARIFICATION! No lead actors have been considered or approached for the film as yet! The planning for this lovely film is underway!" Johar tweeted.

—Mail Today Bureau



Filmmaker Boney Kapoor (top left) said he respects Janhvi Kapoor and Ishaan Khatter's (above) 'friendship'.



From left: MasterChef Australia judges Gary Mehigan, George Calombaris and Matt Preston.

MasterChef judges 'felt like Johnny Depp' in India

IT IS one of Australia's most popular cooking shows. But MasterChef is among India's highest-rating English language shows. As reported by TV Tonight, MasterChef's popularity in India is attributable to the many nations and cultures represented by its contestants. Meanwhile, the departure of veteran judges Matt Preston, Gary Mehigan and George Calombaris last

week has also been making headlines in India. Preston spoke of his experience of travelling to India without realising he was a celebrity. "I went to India the year before last and the boys [Gary and George] went there last year and we had the same experience," he said. "We felt like Johnny Depp, it was very freaky to a level that we haven't seen here."

—Daily Mail



THE ROCK JOKES BORIS JOHNSON IS HIS COUSIN

HOLLYWOOD actor Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson has jokingly claimed Boris Johnson is his cousin.

The actor, 47, appeared on *Good Morning Britain* on Monday to promote his new film *The Fast And The Furious: Hobbs And Shaw*. But when the new British Prime Minister was spoken of, he made the outlandish claim the pair are related, as they share the same surname. "He's family, by the way... It's like looking

in the mirror, every time I see Boris." Johnson followed this up with a tweet he later deleted in which he commented on what the Tory politician said in the first speech as prime minister.

"Breaking: PM Boris Johnson is in fact my cousin [though we clearly look more like twins]. Jokes aside, PM did say something in his speech I liked - 'the people are our bosses'. 100 per cent agree."

—Daily Mail

Big break for Kidman's kids



Sunday Rose (bottom left) will voice Lily (top left) and Faith Margaret (bottom right) is Beatrice (top right).



NICOLE KIDMAN'S youngest daughters with husband Keith Urban made their big television debut on the second season of *Big Little Lies* this year. And now Sunday Rose, 11, and Faith Margaret, eight, have landed an even bigger role for the children's film, *The Angry Birds Movie 2*.

In a trailer for *Angry Birds* sequel, the voices of the girls can be heard as baby bird hatchlings, who come under attack by the green piggies. Sunday's character Lily is a small yellow hatchling, while Faith's Beatrice is a purple baby bird.

The two girls made their TV debuts on episodes 2 and

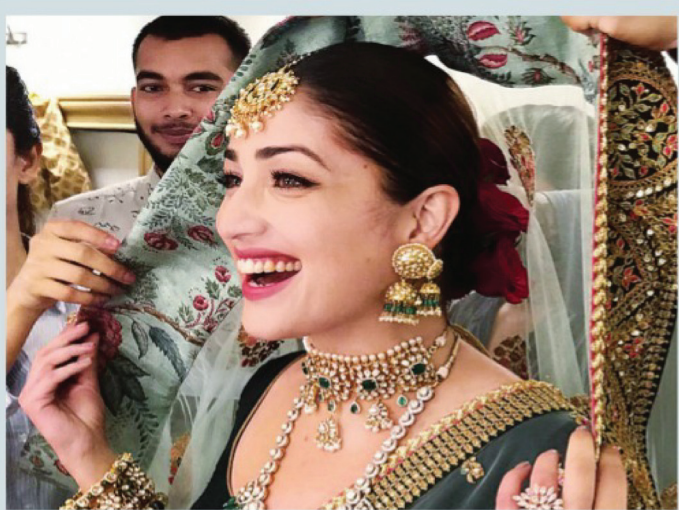
3 of *Big Little Lies* Season 2, playing school students. They were even listed in the credits as "school children" by their full names.

Kidman first revealed the news her daughters would appear on the HBO series on the *Ellen DeGeneres* last October. In June, she discussed their cameo on *Good Morning America*. "There's something wonderful about bringing your children to work and them seeing what you do and them being a part of it," she said.

The *Moulin Rouge* star also has two adopted children with ex Tom Cruise.

—Daily Mail

Sunday Rose and Faith Margaret debuted in 'Big Little Lies' with mum



Ashley Iaconetti and Jared Haibon **EXCLUSIVE**

The Bachelor In Paradise stars show off their bodies after losing a combined 20lbs before their wedding

Ashley Iaconetti and Jared Haibon posed in their swimsuits by a swimming pool this week. The couple, who met on Bachelor in Paradise, is crediting South Beach Diet for helping them look their best before their wedding, which will take place later this summer.

'What I love about South Beach Diet is that it promotes a healthy lifestyle. When you're eating really healthy, well balanced meals that are super high in protein and low in carbs, you're going to feel better,' Ashley, 31, told DailyMail.com.

The couple said earlier this year they each wanted to lost about 10lbs. And they have met their goal, which means together they have shed 20lbs.

'On my wedding day, I want to look and feel my best and have energy to last from morning 'til night. That has been so important to me. It's going to be a really long day and I want to enjoy every single second,' she added.

'My goal was to get back into the shape I was in during Bachelor in Paradise, and I can confidently say I have achieved that.'

For 30-year-old Jared - who was born in Rhode Island - energy is

also key to feeling his best, especially as he says 'I do.' 'Since starting South Beach, I have more energy. It's made me want to go to they gym and work out more and be more active. I feel better. I feel more confident. I feel a little bit more muscular and stronger and a little bit more toned.'

'Because of the South Beach Diet, I'm finally at the point where I want to be before the wedding. And with the wedding right around the corner, the two can't help but gush about their excitement for the day.

She also said she is looking forward to her dream day.

'When people ask me what I'm most looking forward to about the wedding day, it's definitely for the church doors to open, have my dad on my side and then see Jared at the end of the aisle,' says Ashley.

'I think the groom's face when the bride walks down the aisle is the best part of the wedding, so I can't wait to see how he looks and I can't wait to have that feeling.

'I don't even think I can imagine what that feeling is going to be like, but I'm sure it's going to be overwhelming and I've been looking forward

to it for my entire life.' Jared also said he can't wait to see Ashley in her dress. 'I've thought about that moment a lot, whether I'm going to cry, whether I'm just going to smile, what emotions will be running through my head.

'It's certainly a moment that I'm very excited for. And it's also exciting because I'll be in one room with the people I love. To be able to celebrate my love with everybody I love is something that really doesn't happen all that often.'

Ashley and Jared started the South Beach Diet as a couple earlier this year to get in shape for the wedding.

In February Ashley said she wanted to lose 8lbs before her wedding.

'When I first started dating Jared in March 2018 we didn't stop, we were eating a lot because we were in a blissful phase,' she told DailyMail.com exclusively.

'We had pizza, burgers, Chinese food. We were just enjoying it all.' But they have been careful with their for over a year.' 'I want my arms to be super toned so I look good in my white princess ballgown wedding dress,' the beauty - who has written the children's book Lucy & Clark: The Story Of Puppy Love - said.



Eva Longoria dazzles in leggy white dress while Renee Zellweger sports a pink mini



Some of Hollywood's biggest names converged Wednesday night at the Regent Beverly Wilshire Hotel in Beverly Hills. The Hollywood Foreign Press Association held its annual Grants Banquet to distribute funds to entertainment-related charities. Celebs like Eva Longoria, Renée Zellweger, Kerry Washington and James Corden were present at the star-studded event. Longoria dazzled in a white dress with padded shoulders and thigh slits on both sides, revealing her toned legs. The sexy dress was intricately patterned with jeweled flowers, which were illuminated by the flashing cameras. She paired it with some six-inch white stilettos that featured a white strap around the ankle and a clear strap above the toes. The Desperate Housewives complemented the

ensemble with a fresh white manicure. Renée Zellweger was also present, sporting a fun and sexy look in a pink mini dress. The off-the-shoulder number featured exaggerated puffy sleeves and was also adorned with beaded floral designs. She completed the look with a pair of pointed black pumps, which accentuated her trim legs. Also in attendance was Kerry Washington, who showed less leg and more cleavage. She stunned on the red carpet in a plunging black sequined jumpsuit with flared pants. The look was double belted with two black leather belts that cinched for a feminine silhouette. Regina Hall sported a gorgeous off-the-shoulder white dress that tied at the chest, paired with some gold open-toe heels and matching hoop earrings.

James Corden looked sharp in a navy blue suit with crimson and white polka dots and a blue-trimmed lapel. He finished the ensemble with a blue skinny tie that featured a subtle embroidered red snake and a pair of leather crimson dress shoes embellished with a blue and red striped ribbon and a gold accent. Ali Wong arrived in a red ankle-length ribbed maxi dress that folded at the top into a long hanging sash and featured one exposed arm. She paired the look with some large gold-framed cat-eye glasses, gold hoop earrings and a pair of black strappy stilettos. Justin Hartley sported a classic black suit with a silk royal blue skinny tie, a powder blue dress shirt, matching pocket square and brown leather dress shoes.



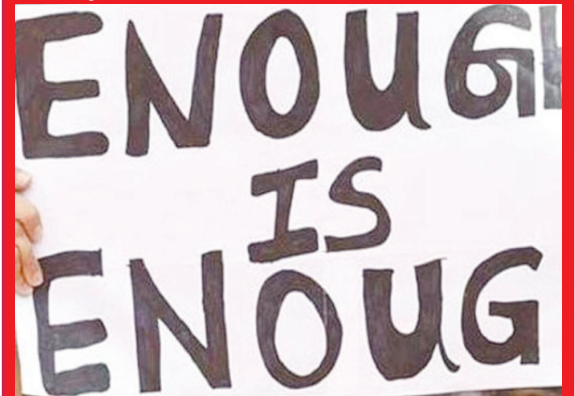
Nirav Modi and Vijay Mallya's extradition cases pushed to next year



(News Agencies) - The trial in the Westminister Magistrates Court on India's request to extradite fugitive diamantaire Nirav Modi will be held in May next year while the high court of England and Wales is scheduled to hear businessman Vijay Mallya's appeal against his extradition in February 2020, court officials said. Modi, 48, who is lodged in the Wandsworth jail in southwest London, has been denied bail on four occasions and Mallya, 63, remains on bail after his application for permission to

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German devotee accuses 'babas' of molestation in Varanasi



(News Agencies) - A 32-year-old woman from Germany was allegedly molested by three people, including two "babas", at a dharmshala (hostel) in Varanasi on Tuesday, police said. A case was registered in this regard and one person was arrested, they said. Additional superintendent of police (ASP), Anil Kumar, said, "A case has been registered against three persons under Section 354 (assault or criminal force on a woman with intent to outrage her modesty) of the IPC, following a complaint in this regard. One person has been arrested, while two accused are on the run. They will be arrested soon." "On Tuesday morning, the sadhwi [the German woman in question] and her guru bhai [fellow disciple] reached the Shivpur police station and filed a complaint. They said three persons had molested her," said the ASP. In their complaint, the duo said the three accused reached the woman's room and started touching her in an "indecent manner".

Three of family in Punjab killed over inter-caste marriage



(News Agencies)- Three relatives of a man who married a Dalit woman around a month-and-half ago were allegedly hacked to death by the woman's kin in a hate crime in Naushehra village, 40 km from the district headquarters, on the intervening night of Monday and Tuesday, local police said. According to them, the man, Harman Singh, a 22-year-old from the Jat Sikh community, married Bavy, a 20-year old from the neighbouring village, despite opposition from her family. The deceased have been identified as Harman's father Joginder Singh (65), his brother Pawandeep Singh (16) and his sister Prabhjit Kaur (20). Police have identified the accused as Bavy's father Beer Singh, her three brothers Sukh Singh, Arshdeep Singh and Vardeep Singh of Dhala village; her cousins Happy, Mani, Govinda of Attari in Amritsar; Bikram Singh, Bachitter Singh and Joban Singh, and her brother-in-law (sister's husband) Jagga Singh of Amritsar city.

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The alleged schemes took millions of dollars from financially distressed consumers

(News Agencies)- At the request of the Federal Trade Commission and the State of Ohio, a federal court in El Paso, Texas shut down two schemes that allegedly bilked millions of dollars from consumers struggling with credit card debt. The court issued temporary restraining orders against Madera Merchant Services and B&P Enterprises and Educare Centre Services and Prolink, halting their operations and freezing their assets.

"This case is another reminder for consumers to stay away from any company promising to reduce debt for an advance fee," said Andrew Smith, Director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection. "The FTC will continue to pursue such schemes aggressively, and hold accountable payment processors that are complicit in the illegal conduct."

The Rogue Payment Processor In their complaint against Madera Merchant Services and B&P

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CBI books Rolls Royce over 'contract with PSUs'



(News Agencies) - The CBI has booked London-based Rolls Royce and its Indian subsidiary said. Singapore based company M/s Aashmore and Royce and its Indian subsidiary unknown officials of HAL are for allegedly engaging services also named in the First Information Report (FIR). Between 2000 and 2013, Public Sector Undertaking Rolls Royce got contracts Hindustan Aeronautics worth Rs 4,736 crore from Limited (HAL), Oil and HAL, besides contracts for th Natural Gas Corporation e supply of spare parts to GAIL (ONGC) and GAIL, a and ONGC, CBI has said in the spokesperson of the CBI FIR.

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