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Long Island Brothers & Queens Man busted in \$2.3 Million call center scam



Page 2

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Story on
Page 18 & 19

Home Business Auto
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(See Full Page Advt. on Page 17)



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Long Island Brothers & Queens Man busted in \$2.3 Million call center scam



Long Island brothers Kamal Zafar, 51, and Jamal Zafar, 48, and Queens man Armughanul Asar, 68, were hauled before a federal judge in Central Islip, where they pleaded not guilty to charges of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and money-laundering conspiracy. “These defendants remotely used ruthless scare tactics and threatened innocent citizens, including the elderly, widows, and professionals, under the guise of having to pay off unfounded financial obligations to the U.S. government for their own personal gain,” said Jonathan D. Larsen, IRS Criminal Investigation special-agent-in-charge. Richard P. Donoghue, U.S. attorney for the Eastern District, said the defendants had operated a “transnational fraud scheme.”

(By our staff reporter) New York: Three men were busted Monday in New York for running an Indian call-center con that fleeced more than \$2 million from US victims — including a 76-year-old woman who lost her savings, prosecutors said. Prosecutors say the trio worked with “co-conspirators” at a call center in India, where scammers would badger Americans on their home phones by posing as employees of the IRS, the DEA or the Social Security Administration. The callers would tell the marks they had outstanding debts — then threaten them with arrest if they didn’t fork over the money quickly.

An initial call was often followed by another from a person impersonating a law enforcement officer and claiming they had an arrest warrant and would be at the victim’s home the next day, court documents say. Between January and September 2018 alone, the scheme bilked victims out of \$2.3

million, according to court papers. Among the victims were a Missouri man who lost \$70,000 out of a community memorial fund created after his wife and two teen daughters died in a car accident and a 76-year-old woman who was swindled out of her retirement savings, the feds said.

Kamal and Jamal Zafar were unrepentant con artists, prosecutors said. Kamal Zafar had been charged in a Brooklyn health care fraud case and was free on \$1.5 million bond when he allegedly committed the crimes described in federal court papers. Jamal Zafar had just completed probation in a 2015 fraud case,



the court papers said. It wasn’t immediately clear who was masterminding the operation. The New York-based trio’s role included recruiting people to incorporate businesses and then using those shell corporations to open bank accounts, according to prosecutors. The cash that was conned out of victims was then laundered through the accounts — with some forwarded to accomplices in China and Pakistan, prosecutors claim.

The brothers have a history of alleged fraud. Kamal was already out on \$1.5 million

bail in a health care fraud case in Brooklyn when he was collared, while Jamal was convicted for fraud in 2015, prosecutors said.

Prosecutors asked that all three be held without bail, but the judge allowed Asar to be released on \$500,000 bond and the brothers were released on \$750,000 bond with electronic monitoring.

All three men were born in Pakistan. The Zafar brothers are naturalized US citizens, while Asar is not a US citizen, prosecutors said. If convicted, the three men each face up to 20 years behind bars. Prosecutors Monday asked the judge to hold the three men without bail, saying they had the resources and contacts in Pakistan and China to flee the country. Locke ordered Asar held on \$500,000 bond, while Kamal and Jamal Zafar were released on \$750,000 bond with electronic monitoring. Asar is a citizen of Pakistan, according to court papers, while the Zafar brothers are U.S. citizens.

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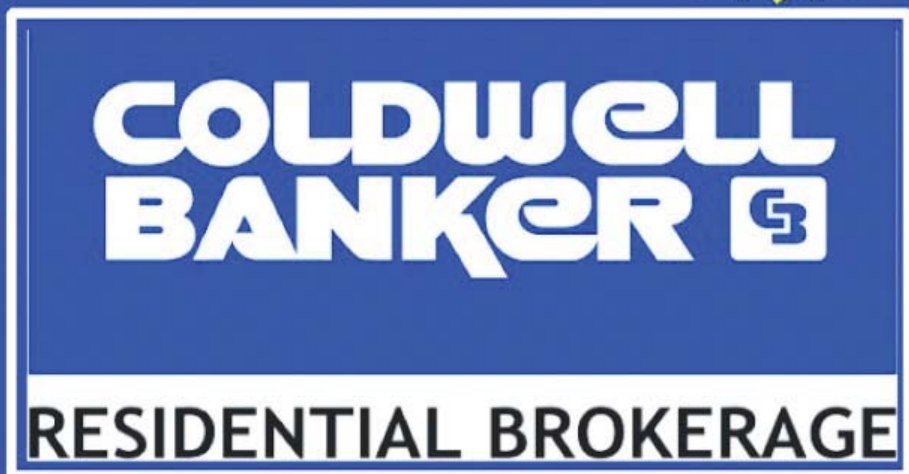
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Assembly Member Staffer arrested For allegedly embezzling \$80k

(By our staff reporter) - Maruf "Mitu" Alam, 29, had been working for Assembly Member Felix Ortiz's office for eleven years. Yesterday morning, the FBI arrested Alam for allegedly embezzling \$80k from the Assembly Member's campaign account. On Thursday, August 8 at around 2:30 p.m., Alam showed up to his arraignment wearing a blue Penn State t-shirt and jeans. He didn't say much except answer Magistrate Judge Sanket Bulsara's questions. He also said a few words to his mother in Bangla after the arraignment. He was

charged with wire fraud. If convicted, he can face up to 20 years in prison. According to the criminal complaint, Alam "knowingly and intentionally devise[d] a scheme and artifice to defraud the Campaign Committee... and donors thereto, and to obtain money and property from them by means of one or more materially false and fraudulent pretenses, representations and promises, and for the purpose of executing such scheme and artifice, did transmit and cause to be transmitted, by means of wire communications in

interstate commerce, writings, to wit: electronic mail messages attaching false campaign finance disclosure reports." Alam was released on a \$100,000 bond. At his arraignment were his mother and a man presumed to be his father. His mother, who said she was a nurse, sat quietly in the back of the courtroom in an olive green hijab, her body covered in a black abaya. A man sat next to her, wearing a white button-down shirt, topped with a white kufi on his head. The criminal complaint also states that Alam's alleged embezzlement scheme had been going on from January 2012 to January 2019. Alam was listed as treasurer for a campaign account. As treasurer, he allegedly disclosed inaccurate campaign contributions and expenses, stole campaign funds, and deposited the cash into his personal account.

"As alleged, Alam was caught red-handed using a New York State Assemblyman's campaign account as his personal piggy bank," United States Attorney Richard Donoghue said. "Alam betrayed the trust placed in him to act honestly as the treasurer for the account and then attempted to cover up his crime by filing false disclosure reports for years. Today's arrest makes clear that dishonest public employees will face the consequences of their crimes and be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law." After the arraignment, Alam refused to speak to reporters. His mother, though, approached Bklyner to ask what was going on outside the courthouse. She then told Bklyner, "He didn't do anything." Ironically, in December of 2017 (during the time Alam's own alleged



embezzlement was taking place), Bklyner spoke to Alam when he helped organize a rally outside a Kensington Mosque, Masjid Nur Al Islam, whose imam later resigned after claims of embezzlement. At the time, the Kensington community had raised about \$350,000 to purchase the property next door to the 21 Church Avenue mosque. It turned out, the imam never bought the building. What he did instead, was buy the community mosque (with his trustees), became the owner of it, and change the name to Islam Community Trust as Trustee. When people asked for the money, the money seemed to have disappeared. "The rights of this community were taken away by force, the rights of the people to congregate, to pray the five times prayer and the Friday sermon was taken away by one man," Alam told Bklyner at the time about the embezzlement. "We will not stand idle while this devastation is taking place."



Hema Patel, a Texas-based Bail Bondswoman Sentenced to Three Years' Imprisonment

She pleaded guilty of Smuggling Hundreds of Aliens into the United States

Defendant Ordered to Forfeit Her Texas Residence, Two Hotels, \$7.2 Million in Bail Bonds, \$400,000 in Cash and 11 Gold Bars



(By our staff reporter) - Earlier today, in federal court in Central Islip, Hema Patel, a Texas-based bail bondswoman, was sentenced by United States District Judge Denis R. Hurley to three years' imprisonment for her role in smuggling hundreds of illegal aliens into the United States. The Court also ordered Patel to forfeit her

Texas residence, two hotels, \$7.2 million in bail bonds, \$400,000 in cash and 11 gold bars, among other assets. On June 7, 2018, Patel pleaded guilty to alien smuggling for financial gain by fraudulently bonding illegal aliens from immigration custody and causing their release into the United States. Richard P.

Donoghue, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, and Angel M. Melendez, Special Agent-in-Charge, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), New York, announced the sentence. "For her personal financial gain, defendant Hema Patel arranged to have hundreds of aliens smuggled into the United States, completely bypassing the visa application and eligibility requirements," stated United States Attorney Donoghue. "She will now pay the price for placing the safety and security of the residents of our communities at risk. Border security is a top priority of the Department of Justice."

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ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ

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ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

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11 Defendants Charged in Credit Card “Bust Out” Scheme

Complaints Allege Access Device Fraud and Money Laundering Conspiracy

(By our staff reporter) - Five complaints were unsealed yesterday in federal court in Brooklyn charging 11 defendants in a scheme to defraud banks by using fake, or “synthetic,” identities to obtain credit cards, and making approximately \$3 million in charges that were never repaid to the issuing financial institutions. Three of the defendants were also charged with money laundering conspiracy, designed to conceal the source of the proceeds of their scheme. Nine defendants were arrested yesterday. Eight defendants made their initial appearances before United States Magistrate Judge Lois Bloom and were released on bond. One defendant will appear today before Magistrate Judge Bloom. Two defendants are not in custody.

Richard P. Donoghue, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, Angel M. Melendez, Special Agent-in-Charge, Homeland Security Investigations, New York (HSI),

and Linda A. Lacewell, Superintendent, New York State Department of Financial Services (DFS), announced the charges. “As alleged, the defendants operated a ‘bust out’ scheme using fraudulently obtained credit cards to finance expenses, ranging from furniture to real estate and totaling \$3 million. Now they will be held accountable,” stated United States Attorney Donoghue. “Together, with our law enforcement partners, we stand committed to protecting financial institutions from fraud.”

“Those arrested today allegedly engaged in fraudulent activities aided by shell companies and collusive merchants to carry out their ‘bust out’ schemes and the laundering of its proceeds, defrauding financial institutions of millions of dollars” stated HSI Special Agent-in-Charge Melendez. “As revealed in this investigation, synthetic identity fraud is ever evolving in sophistication and frequency, creating more challenges for law

enforcement and anti-money laundering professionals. HSI New York’s El Dorado Task Force and its partners remain vigilant for emerging criminal trends in its efforts to secure our country’s financial system.”

“While this alleged scheme may seem like a victimless crime, fraud hurts the entire financial system, including banks and credit card companies, with the costs passed down to consumers. DFS is pleased to have partnered with the U.S. Attorney’s Office to bring these defendants to justice, and we will continue to use all of the resources at our disposal to combat fraud,” stated DFS Superintendent Lacewell.

As alleged in court filings, between January 2013 and December 2017, the defendants used synthetic identities created by using various types of personal identification information (names, dates of birth and Social Security numbers) from different individuals to create a fake identity and obtain credit cards

...not a bustout but close! & that's...that!!



from financial institutions. They then used those cards for expenditures that they had no intention to repay, including mortgages on three residential properties in Queens, New York. The defendants also used shell companies, that did little or no legitimate business, to record hundreds of thousands of dollars on the fraudulently obtained credit cards, and then received payment for the sham transactions from financial

institutions and credit card processors.

Defendants Bahader Thiara, Hafeez Ali, Mohammad Akhtar, Nadezhda Epshteyn, Cyrus Shroff, Anis Khan, Daljeet Singh, Zainoelbaks Karimbux and Gursimardeep Singh Rai are charged with access device fraud. Bahader Thiara, Perminder Thiara and Shaila Khondkar are also charged with money laundering conspiracy.

Queens Storeowner Indicted for Setting Fire to Rival Supermarket in Brooklyn

Defendant Complained That a Competitor’s Low Prices Were Hurting His Business



Earlier today, a federal grand jury in Brooklyn returned an indictment charging Mamunar Khan with the February 3, 2019 arson of the Premium Supermarket in East New York. Khan was previously arrested on a complaint on May 6, 2019, and will be arraigned at a later date. If convicted, Khan faces a mandatory minimum sentence of five years’ imprisonment, and a maximum of 20 years’ imprisonment.

Richard P. Donoghue, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, and John B. DeVito, Special Agent-in-

Charge, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, James P. O’Neill, Commissioner, New York City Police Department (NYPD), and Daniel A. Nigro, Commissioner, New York City Fire Department (FDNY), announced the charge. “As alleged in the indictment, Khan set fire to a supermarket while it was open for business, demonstrating total disregard for the safety of employees, customers and the firefighters who responded to the blaze,” stated U.S. Attorney Donoghue. “Attempting to burn down your competition is an extremely

serious and violent crime and we and our law enforcement partners will ensure that such crimes are punished.”

“The alleged violent acts of the defendant against a fellow business owner could have resulted in substantial loss of property and cost the lives of innocent people to include first responders,” stated ATF Special Agent-in-Charge DeVito. “The ATF/NYPD/FDNY Strategic Explosive and Arson Response Task Force will continually work to prevent violent acts like this from occurring and to swiftly bring the perpetrators of such acts when they do occur, to justice. I would like to thank the United States Attorney’s Office for their work in prosecuting the case.”

“Mamunar Khan put personal profit before public safety and put people’s lives at risk,” said NYPD Commissioner O’Neill. “The NYPD and its law enforcement partners will never tolerate the kind of

recklessness and brazen criminality that was committed in this case.”

“The use of fire as a weapon to injure and intimidate is a callous crime, one that senselessly puts the lives of New Yorkers and FDNY members in danger,” stated FDNY Commissioner Nigro. “Thanks to our Fire Marshals, NYPD Detectives, ATF agents, and the US Custom and Border Patrol agents who brought to justice an alleged arsonist who sought to avoid responsibility for this crime.” Khan is the co-owner of Deshi Bazaar, located in Ozone Park, Queens. On February 3, 2019, video footage recovered from the Premium Supermarket, located at 1196 Liberty Avenue in Brooklyn, showed Khan pushing a cart filled with unknown flammable material down an aisle in the store. Khan, wearing blue latex gloves, used a lighter to ignite the material, and then exited the store. As the fire

spread through the store, a second video camera recorded Khan driving away in a Mercedes-Benz SUV. The fire caused substantial damage to Premium Supermarket and the structure of the building.

A witness told law enforcement agents that Khan had previously complained that the low prices at Premium Supermarket hurt business at his own nearby market. Khan was then interviewed by law enforcement agents. The following day, he left the country and traveled to Bangladesh. Khan was arrested three months later upon returning to the United States. The charge in the indictment is an allegation, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

The government’s case is being handled by the Office’s General Crimes Section. Assistant United States Attorney Andrew D. Grubin is in charge of the prosecution.

China revises law, opens door to cheap Indian generic medicines too

Until now, all foreign generic drugs not approved in China were clubbed under the counterfeit category and were illegal to use here.



(News Agencies)- Generic drugs approved in India and other countries but not in China have been removed from the country's "fake medicine" list and can be used by patients in small quantities from December

1, the newly revised drug administration law of the country says. Until now, all foreign generic drugs not approved in China were clubbed under the counterfeit category and were illegal to use here.

From December 1, these drugs can be used by patients and they will not be punished for doing so if used in small quantities. The revision was approved and announced at the end of the session of the National People's

Congress (NPC), the country's top legislature, on Monday.

The change in the law is good news for Chinese patients suffering from diseases like cancer.

They will now be able to access effective and cheap generic drugs from India especially to treat ailments like cancer.

The official announcement, however, didn't say how patients were expected to procure the drugs as they aren't available in pharmacies here.

The state-run Chinese news portal, thepaper.cn explained that the revision of the law means that generic drugs legal in other countries but yet to be approved in China have been removed from the category of "fake medicines".

"Article 124 of the newly revised drug administration law stipulates that the import of a small number of drugs that have been legally listed overseas (but) without approval (in China) can be exempted from

punishment in minor cases," the news portal reported.

The revision of the law doesn't, however, "...mean that China is ready to relax management on imported generic medicine. People who want to import generic drugs for profit still have to follow Chinese laws to register and get an approval in advance," the nationalistic tabloid Global Times reported.

The tabloid ran the story under the headline: "Revised law opens door to cheap Indian generic medicine".

It doesn't actually mean that Indian generic drugs will flood the Chinese market or be widely available in pharmacies in China anytime soon.

The NPC officials said that the decision to revise the law was partly because of public sentiment, which in turn, was influenced by last year's Chinese movie "Dying to Survive," which was partly shot in India and is about a person who procured and sold India-made anti-cancer drugs here.

Stranded for three weeks near Chilika lake, Malaysian vessel topples

(News Agencies)- Twenty days after a Malaysian tug on its way to Vishakhapatnam port from Bangladesh ran aground near the eco-sensitive brackish Chilika lake, the vessel finally toppled over Tuesday sparking concerns of possible oil leak. Puri sub divisional police officer Kishore Mund said the tug which ran aground on August 7 at Khirisahi near Rajhans island close to the Chilika mouth toppled over this afternoon. "However, there is no danger of oil spill as of now from the engine. We are monitoring it," he said.

Mund said two experts who came from Paradip port to repair the stricken ship, returned without doing so. The vessel, JIN HWA 32, has around 30,000 litres of diesel, 1,000 litres of lubricant oil and 200 litres of hydraulic oil and in the event of any leak, it could damage the sensitive ecosystem of the lake. Puri district collector Balwant Singh said the owner of the ship has been contacted and extraction of oil from the ship will begin from Wednesday. After unloading its cargo in Bangladesh, the ship with 7 Malaysians, 2 Filipinos and an

The tug has around 30,000 litres of diesel, 1,000 litres of lubricant oil and 200 litres of hydraulic oil and in the event of any leak, it could damage the sensitive ecosystem of Chilika lake.



Indian on board was on its way to Vishakhapatnam port when it was caught in a storm in the Bay of Bengal and drifted towards Odisha. It ran aground near Rajhans at Chilika lake on the night of August 7. All the 10 crew members were rescued by the Coast Guard. Earlier this month, the Coast Guard had asked the ship's owner Gimhawk

Enterprises, to take measures to prevent any leakage of oil into the water around it. "You are hereby warned under section 356(J) 1(B) of the Indian Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 to ensure all necessary measures are undertaken to prevent any leakage of oil from Tug JIN HWA 32 causing oil pollution in the area," the Coast Guard had said,

warning of action under section 356(K) of part XI of Indian Merchant Shipping Act, 1958.

Odisha's Chilika lake, Asia's largest brackishwater lake is a designated wetland site of international importance under the Ramsar Convention that hosts millions of migratory birds every winter in Nalabana bird sanctuary within its area.

We are facing a global emergency in the Amazon. Here's what we can do

Called "the lungs of the Earth", the Amazon rainforest and its lush trees make roughly 20% of the oxygen on Earth. Yet, right now, the skies of Sao Paulo, Brazil are black and the smoke can be seen from space. Flames are ravaging the Amazon Basin. Though climate change has catalyzed many devastating blazes in recent years, these recent fires, experts say, were intentionally set by farmers who, responding to calls from Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro to develop the region, wanted to clear their land so it could be used for agriculture.

As Bolsonaro put it, "the Amazon is open for business." But it's on fire, and as it burns, the Amazon drastically contributes to the climate crisis ---- both from the carbon released by the forest fires and from the loss of trees' ability to absorb carbon in the future. A healthy Amazon is critical to the survival of not only the local and about 400 indigenous groups that call it home but to our entire planet. The corporations and financial institutions that back the businesses Bolsonaro beckons drive this deforestation and destruction, and will generate tremendous short-term profits at the expense of the Amazon. It's a heartbreaking global emergency that requires immediate action.

Now that the world is finally paying attention to the Amazon Basin, it's important to also understand that governments and companies around the world are emboldening the Bolsonaro regime's toxic policies when they enter into trade agreements with his government or invest in agribusiness companies operating in the Amazon. Companies like BlackRock, the world's largest investment firm, which announced plans to expand its operations in Brazil after Bolsonaro was elected, is a key financier of the agribusiness giants implicated in deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon, according to the non-profit organization Amazon Watch. More money invested in these businesses means more forest clearing for industrial agriculture.

Moves like this signal strong support for Bolsonaro, who has advocated for opening new areas of the Amazon rainforest to agriculture and industry, and whose rhetoric can fuel hate against indigenous people and others. Many of the oil, mining, and agribusiness operations in which BlackRock allegedly invests contribute to the violation of indigenous rights and furthers the expansion of development into the Amazon, according to Amazon Watch.

Responding to Amazon Watch's accusations that it is contributing to the destruction of the rainforest, Blackrock told the Financial Times that "it makes investments on behalf of our clients, whose investment decisions we have a fiduciary duty to carry out. We do not own the assets our clients invest in. Our clients choose to invest in a wide range of assets and we endeavor to offer them a wide range of investment options, including sustainable investments." The indigenous

people of the Amazon have been calling attention to the consequences of failing to protect the rainforest for years. They have also been resisting the destruction, sometimes paying with their lives.

Thanks to the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Western science has confirmed what indigenous people have long known: Strong and organized local communities are a key defense against industrial destruction. It is imperative that we support them in their fight to protect the biodiversity on their lands and slow the effect of climate change immediately.

Since Bolsonaro gained power, there has been rapid deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon. His anti-environmental position, which erroneously frames forest protections and human rights as impediments to Brazil's economic growth, is fueling the fires. Illegally clearing land with fire is a horrible, corporate-driven practice that happens across the globe. Indonesia, for example, saw an estimated 2.6 million hectares of forest burn in 2015, and the resulting haze crisis caused an estimated 100,000 premature deaths. The daily global greenhouse gas emissions during the crisis exceeded that of the entire US economy. It's not hyperbole to say that the fate of a livable future is at stake and we must hold those betting against it to account. BlackRock must move its investments away from the industries destroying the vital Amazon rainforest and the homes of the indigenous communities that live there; shareholders and the public must push them to action.

The other corporations doing business with or investing in the destruction of the Amazon must also actively clean up their supply chains or divest. Global solidarity with Brazil's indigenous and environmental movements can make the difference at this critical moment. Bolsonaro's regime is sensitive to its image abroad and is increasingly reliant on international corporate and financial actors to rescue the nation's ailing economy. Thus the international community has a unique and urgent opportunity to pressure the companies most responsible for today's crisis. The acres of forest burning now are sadly lost, but these efforts can stop the rest of the Amazon from going up in smoke. This inferno is not a natural occurrence: the majority of forest fires were intentionally lit to further the business interests of a group of bad actors.

The Amazon is burning, the Arctic is burning, and the list of scorched lands seems to continuously grow: Alaska, Greenland, Siberia, across Europe, and again in Indonesia. We must take action, now.

Bolsonaro's ego stands in the way of saving the Amazon

Indigenous people face losing the Amazon rainforest Did I say that? Did I?" That was Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro talking to reporter Tuesday morning, apparently denying what his office had told CNN exactly one hour earlier, that he would reject a \$20 million pledge from the G7 countries to help fight the fires consuming the Amazon. It was a touch of gaslighting, Bolsonaro style.

The Amazon fires are scorching the Earth's most vital ecosystem at such a voracious rate that by the time you read this, thousands more trees will have turned to ashes. Brazil's space research agency calculates that one-and-a-half soccer fields worth of rainforest burns every single minute. That destruction includes more than trees -- it is engulfing everything that lives in the forest and cannot escape.

As the flames spread, the scale of the devastation could reach a point where the damage may become irreversible. Amid rising pressure from abroad, and from inside Brazil, Bolsonaro has instead busied himself with a childish (and sexist) dispute over whether he has a more beautiful wife than French President Emmanuel Macron and posturing that efforts to help from abroad amount to an assault on Brazilian sovereignty. Meanwhile, more rainforest burns.

Brazil should receive help not only because what happens in the Amazon will affect the entire world, but because it should not bear the cost of preserving the Amazon all alone. Whether or not Bolsonaro feels he has something to prove, Brazilians have much to be proud of. They have a spectacular country, and they have shown in the past that they are capable of protecting it. There is no shame in accepting assistance from a world that is eager to help. They have every

right to run the operation. It is their country. But their problem is affecting everyone. If everyone wants to help, why not let them? The obstacle, as often happens with demagogues, is their president. It's a perfect -- perfectly awful -- example of what happens when nationalist demagogues take power.

We are facing a global emergency in the Amazon. Here's what we can do

It is hardly a surprise that Bolsonaro has been described as the "Trump of the Tropics." There's much about his political style that echoes the US President, including his approach to the environment. Urged by foreign leaders to fight the fires - which open up more land for powerful Brazilian ranchers and miners to graze cattle and extract mineral wealth -- Bolsonaro declared, "You have to understand that the Amazon is Brazil's, not yours."

It was not unlike what President Donald Trump said in his press conference three days later, when he was asked if he is still skeptical about climate change. In his rambling answer, he said he is an "environmentalist," and went on to describe precisely the opposite, saying, "I feel that the United States has tremendous wealth. The wealth is under its feet," adding, "I'm not going to lose that wealth; I'm not going to lose it on dreams." The nationalists' creed is centered on some version of MAGA, Trump's Make America Great Again slogan, which is at its heart a call to mistrust cooperation with other countries and to reject the prospect of sacrifices for a common good shared with other nations.

(By Frida Ghitis for CNN)



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India's water crisis: All stakeholders must come together

While CSR activities have been geared towards water conservation, corporations must make it a top priority

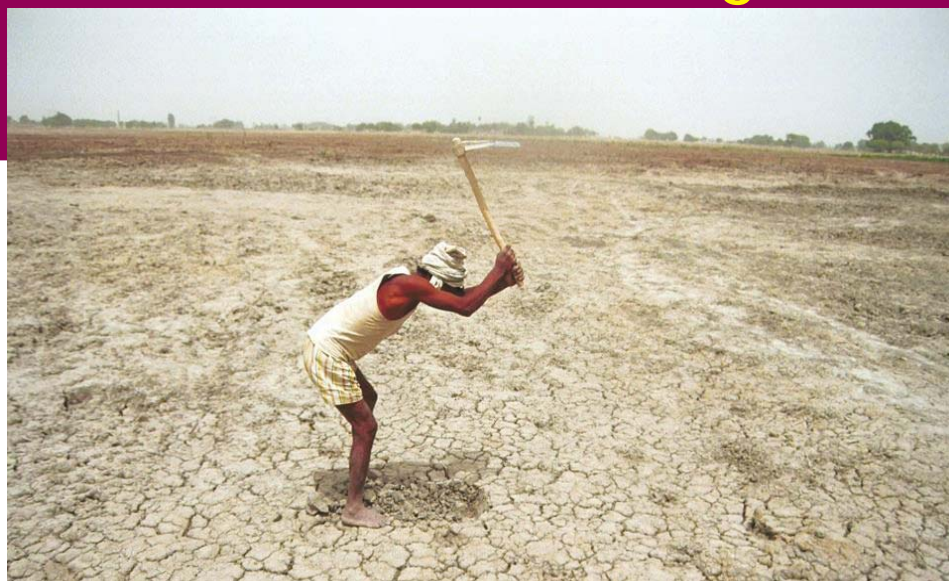
Water and its management will determine India's ability to achieve high economic growth, ensure environmental sustainability, and improve the quality of life. India is home to 17% of world's population, but has only 4% of the world's fresh water resources. At present, 75% of Indian households do not have access to drinking water, and close to 90% of rural households have no access to piped water. India is a water-stressed country, and with 1,544 cubic metre per capita annual availability, we are advancing towards becoming water-scarce. Five of the world's 20 largest cities under water stress are in India.

As per the Economic Survey 2018-19, by 2050, India will be extremely susceptible to water insecurity. There are some other aspects that pertain to the economic cost of

environmental degradation that India is faced with. A 2018 World Bank study pegged the cost of environmental degradation to India at approximately \$80 billion per year, which amounts to around 5.7% of our GDP. Further, an environment survey of 178 countries ranked India at 155. This is extremely worrying, especially since among the BRIC nations, India ranked last.

Community management of water will be crucial if India is to become water secure. From State-led initiatives to local community driven initiatives, work on community engagement has begun. State-led efforts to manage water have been assessed and shared by the NITI Aayog, which has developed the composite water management index (CWMI). States are ranked on the management of water and progress in 28 indicators relating to water

management. But given the magnitude of the challenge and the contribution of the corporate sector in driving innovation, there is a growing role for leading enterprises to help meet development targets. In water management, corporations must play a more active role in using their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts towards innovation and conservation of water, along with the dissemination of proven practices that help conserve and harness water recharge. For corporations, the community focus is often manifest in the sustainable efforts undertaken by their owners. The question remains as to whether CSR commitment and sustainability initiatives in the current scenario are effective and pervasive enough to make a substantial impact. India has access to only 4% of the world's usable water sources. If not addressed, water



scarcity is also likely to affect the GDP, accounting for almost a 6% loss by 2050. Around 600 million people are already facing a severe water shortage, according to reports. There are flag bearers for conservation efforts among Indian and multinational corporations, and their efforts must be emulated across the board. ITC's integrated water management approach is one which immediately comes to mind. It is now extended to implement four large-scale river basin regeneration projects for achieving water balance and year-round

environmental flows in select sub-basins in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Madhya Pradesh to strengthen water security--one of the most important priorities for India. Today, ITC's integrated watershed development programme covers over one million acres spread across 15,000 water harvesting structures, benefiting over 300,000 people in 43 districts across 16 states. This initiative has generated over six million person-days of employment within project villages, reducing levels of distress migration. In addition, a pilot

programme at scale on "water use efficiency in agriculture" is also being promoted to enable effective demand-side management. This initiative has yielded water savings of 20% to 45% in crops like sugarcane, wheat, rice and banana. Tata's Water Mission aims to provide better access to pure water for six million people spread across 7,000 villages in 12 states, by 2020. Key focus areas are to improve access to safe water and sanitation, and to make a difference through rigorous and technologically advanced interventions.

The unanimity on Pakistan



The government's decision to change the constitutional position of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) - by ending its special status, bifurcating the state, and turning it into a Union Territory - has evoked a vibrant democratic debate. There are differing views on the

desirability, constitutionality and implications of the move. A constitutional bench of the Supreme Court will take up the issue in October. All of this indicates that there is a process of checks and balances that remains in place. But on one question, there

is unanimity across India's political divide - the role of Pakistan. New Delhi has often swung between engagement with Islamabad and refusal to talk till it dismantles its terror networks and infrastructure, and proceeds to take action in cases like the Mumbai

Across India's political divide, there is no tolerance for terror

attacks. Ever since the changes in J&K, Pakistan has stepped up its rhetoric against India, painting it as "fascist"; mobilising international opinion - without much success; and even resorting to nuclear blackmail. To be sure, these pose diplomatic challenges for India. But if Islamabad thought that it can play within the internal fault lines that exist in Indian politics, it is mistaken. Pakistan's polemics have no takers within the Indian public sphere. Former Congress president and Member of Parliament Rahul Gandhi's tweet, on Tuesday, solely blaming Pakistan for

violence in the Valley, reiterating Kashmir is India's internal affair, is another instance of this unanimity. This convergence can be attributed to a range of reasons. For one, with its sponsorship of terrorism over the past three decades in multiple forms, Islamabad has hardened Indian public opinion. It has also undermined the cause of Kashmiri autonomy, and ensured there is little sympathy for it in the rest of India. Two, Narendra Modi's elevation as prime minister has been accompanied with, and is a reflection of, an upsurge

of Indian nationalism. The idea of a strong State, with no tolerance for violence and terror, is now an article of faith. The government has changed the rules of the game on terror - and decided that any attack will be followed by retribution, including by going across the border. This has widespread public support. And finally, even those who disagree with the government's move on Kashmir know that this is an internal contestation - with no room for an external player. Pakistan will continue to create trouble, but it would do well to know that it faces a united India.

How Delhi and Paris became friends



Alouette, Jaguar (it is Anglo-French), Mirage, and now Rafale. When the United States reneged on its agreement to supply nuclear fuel for Tarapur, citing domestic legal constraints in 1984, it was France that took on the role. Cooperation in the space sector goes back to the inception of Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro). France helped in setting up the Sriharikota launch site and shared the Centaure and Viking rocket technologies in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the Cold War imposed its constraints.

With the end of the Cold War, there was a growing political convergence between the two countries. France was the first major Western power to openly

promote the virtues of a multipolar world, even describing the US as a hyperpuissance (hyperpower). As a country that prided itself on its sense of 'exceptionalism', it was sympathetic to similar Indian claims based on its ancient civilisation. Post the Cold War, given its interests in the Indian Ocean (Reunion Islands), France decided on India as the preferred partner in the region. In January 1998, President Jacques Chirac described India's exclusion from the global nuclear order as an anomaly that needed to be rectified. It was, therefore, natural that France became the first country with which India elevated its relationship to "strategic partnership". After the nuclear

tests in May 1998, when India declared itself a nuclear-weapon State, France was the first major power to open talks with India. Within weeks, Brajesh Mishra was in Paris as special envoy of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, where he was received by President Chirac, who not only gave a patient hearing (more than what was given in London and Moscow), but also displayed an appreciation of India's political and security compulsions. While the India-US dialogue undertaken by Jaswant Singh and Strobe Talbott attracted far more media attention, the strategic dialogue between Mishra and his French interlocutor Ambassador Gerard Errera registered significant progress behind the scenes.

India and France launched their "strategic partnership" in 1998. Last week, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi concluded his bilateral visit to France, both he and his host President Emmanuel Macron could look back at the achievements of the last 21 years with satisfaction. Yet, as the two leaders must have

discovered during their discussions at Chateau de Chantilly, this partnership has far more potential, especially in today's uncertain times. The two countries had traditionally enjoyed good relations. Since the 1960s, French aircraft and helicopters have been part of the Indian air fleet - Ouragan, Mystere, Alize,

The unravelling of the Western Ghats ecology

At least 100 people have died in floods in three states in peninsular India - Kerala, Karnataka, and Maharashtra - in August due to monsoon floods. There are several reasons, as reported in a series of articles in Hindustan Times, for the havoc and deaths, such as changes in land-use patterns, excessive quarrying and unscientific plantations (Kerala), poor management of dams (Maharashtra), and lack of eco-sensitivity on the part of all the Western Ghat states. These existing issues have been aggravated because of one common factor - excessive rainfall during a short period, a

telltale sign of climate change - leading to death and destruction. A similar scenario has also unfolded in the northern states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

The disaster in the Western Ghat region is a reminder that the area is very vulnerable, and utmost care must be taken to ensure that the delicate balance between nature and development is not disturbed. For example, reports from Kerala have said that excessive quarrying and wrongly constructed pits for monocultures resulted in landslides. There has been enough warning of such disasters. In 2011, the Western

Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, also known the Madhav Gadgil Committee, had asked for a ban on mining and quarrying in the eco-sensitive zone. But the Gadgil report was criticised as biased against development, the government constituted another committee, the high-level working group or the Kasturirangan committee, which recommended a reduced zone of protection.

In an era of climate change, when such excessive rainfall and droughts are becoming almost a normal affair, state governments have to improve its service delivery when it comes to rescue and rehabilitation. It cannot be caught napping, like say,



Uttarakhand was in 2013. Kerala is a good role model to follow. Learning from last year's floods, this year the government has set up camps that are well stocked with food, water, and medical facilities. For climate-sensitive

governance, states must invest in climate-resilient infrastructure, build a cadre of skilled personnel at community levels, and also teach the people how to live sustainably and tackle climate-related climate emergencies.

An unsustainable trajectory



What does the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s transfer of ₹1.76 lakh crore to the Union government mean? Many see it as a bonanza for the government, while the

Opposition is terming it as a raid on RBI's reserves. The truth, especially when seen in a historical context, perhaps lies in the middle.

Of the ₹1.76 lakh crore, ₹1.23

lakh crore is RBI's regular dividend payment to the government. This is an exceptionally high figure going by previous transfers. It is unlikely that the government will get this kind of money next year. The rest of the ₹52.6 thousand crore is a one-time transfer. This is a result of shifting of goalposts on what should be the share of realised equity in RBI's balance sheet, and therefore, a one-time payment. It is to be noted that the RBI board decided to stick to the lower limit (5.5% to 6.5%) prescribed by the Bimal Jalan Committee, which was formed to look into this matter. This choice has made a difference of more than ₹41

thousand crore going to the government. The government had budgeted ₹90,000 crore in payments from RBI in this year's budget. The actual amount is almost double this figure. To put this in context, this figure is more than the entire cost of the PM-Kisan scheme.

This is not the first windfall the Narendra Modi government has reaped, or tried to reap, during its tenure. It gained a lot in taxes due to benign oil prices during its first term. There is reason to believe that the expected windfall gains through purged currency notes reducing RBI's liability were a primary motivation behind demonetisation. Statistics on

Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections for 2018-19 show that there was a shortfall of ~1 lakh compare to what was budgeted. This is not a minor slippage, but a windfall loss, or rather, a misplaced windfall gain. Surviving on the fiscal front via windfall gains, and faltering when they do not materialise, has been an integral part of India's fiscal trajectory in the last few years. This is unsustainable, and avoidable. RBI's mandate is to pump-prime the economy via monetary policy, while the government has to manage the fiscal front. RBI's extra transfer this year means it has effectively taken care of the fiscal task as well. This cannot be the norm.

To become a just society, strike a balance between firm and fair law enforcement

A study shows glaring gaps in Indian policing - from unfilled quotas of SC/STs to a dip in women officers.

The rule of law has two extremes: a failed State and a police State. A failed State loses control over law and order as its monopoly slips over the use of physical force. The latter commands complete control, but ends up abusing State machinery for repression. Both extremes suffer from a deficit of legitimacy.

A just society must strike a balance between firm and fair enforcement of the law. The police have to control crime, uphold the law and maintain harmony. But how do we know if the criminal justice system is fair and effective? Do we have access to accurate diagnostics to check if things are improving or flagging?

Most advanced democracies carry out satisfaction surveys to capture citizens' perceptions of police performance, competence and behaviour. It is routine in the Western world to carry out large surveys on citizens' trust in the

justice system. The New York-based Vera Institute of Justice has been using citizens' feedback since 1961 to make sense of what is and what ought to be. Another important study, the World Justice Report, measures the rule of law across 126 countries. It uses data and surveys to measure the perceptions and experiences of citizens on multiple parameters.

Sadly, India has slipped three points below its performance last year amid a global decline in the rule of law. Rising incidents of mob lynching and fake police encounters may have played a role in this decline. But within India, we need more research to measure the State's performance on the rule of law. We must first acknowledge that a prosperous and democratic nation cannot be built on an obsolete criminal justice system. The police forces are meant to serve the people, not parties or politicians in power. The next

step is to professionalise the force and make it responsive and accountable. It was with these objectives that the Status of Policing in India Report (SPIR) was conceived as a tool to monitor the impact of policing on the ground by Common Cause and its academic partners, the Lokniti programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. SPIR 2018 surveyed 20,000 respondents in 22 states on citizens' trust levels, discrimination, police excesses, infrastructure, diversity, state of prisons and disposal of cases. SPIR 2019 (launching today) builds on these findings. SPIR 2019 surveys around 12,000 police personnel inside police stations in 21 states and around 11,000 of their family members. It studies the working conditions of police personnel, their attitudes and infrastructure, crime investigation, diversity, people-police contact and police

violence. The study also uses the official data to construct the big picture of policing and exposes glaring gaps. For instance, police in India works at 77% of its sanctioned capacity. And yet, out of 22 states studied, only three have filled the Scheduled Caste quota and only six have filled the Scheduled Tribes quota, while all failed to fill the vacancies for women cops between 2012 and 2016. In fact, the proportion of women officers within their overall strength has declined. A silver lining is that, since 2006, when the Supreme Court fixed

the minimum tenure of two years for officers holding operational posts, the percentage of SSPs and DIGs transferred in less than two years has gone down from 37% in 2007 to 13% in 2016. But the flip side is that the transfers are unusually high during or just before the election years. In 20 out of 21 states surveyed, the police personnel said they work between 11 and 18 hours a day (except Nagaland), and 50% said they got no weekly rest. Maharashtra is the only state where all police personnel get at least one weekly off day.



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Centre working on new plan to create 50,000 jobs in Jammu and Kashmir

The measures include a paramilitary and military recruitment drive in the two newly-formed Union territories and efforts to develop the food processing and dairy industries, an official aware of the details said on condition of anonymity.



(News Agencies)-The Centre is set to announce a slew of development measures for Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh soon to boost the local economies and generate employment, according to officials aware of the development. The measures include a

paramilitary and military recruitment drive in the two newly-formed Union territories and efforts to develop the food processing and dairy industries, an official aware of the details said on condition of anonymity. The government is considering recruiting as many as 50,000 young people

for the paramilitary forces from Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla on Tuesday held a high-level inter-ministerial meeting to discuss the measures to be rolled out. "A meeting was held with various departments to access the

implementation of central schemes in Jammu and Kashmir and initiatives to be taken to expedite the return of normalcy," a home ministry spokesperson said without giving details.

The Centre stripped Jammu and Kashmir of its special status and divided it into two Union territories earlier this month. Restrictions were imposed on people's movement and telecom connectivity was suspended as a pre-emptive measure to prevent unrest and protests against the move.

The government has said that curbs are being removed in a phased manner. High schools in areas unlikely to witness agitations will be opened from Wednesday, the Jammu and Kashmir administration said.

Officials said the proposed development measures will be presented before the Union cabinet soon. The measures to be announced are primarily aimed at achieving fast-paced development, helping young people acquire skills for employment, they added.

Officials said a pilot project is being launched in seven districts of the Kashmir Valley and two in the Jammu region and Ladakh. They added district-level "skill planning" committees will also be formed and will comprise industry representatives, academics and corporate entities. Developing the food-processing and dairy industries will be one of the keys areas of focus, they added.

Officials said the Centre was keen that the people of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh understand the benefits of the removal of Constitution's Article 370 that gave the erstwhile state special status. "The Centre is keen that the people understand that removal of special status is not detrimental but on the contrary beneficial for them and the next generation," said a government official, who is a part of the exercise of rolling out the measures, on condition of anonymity. The government is also considering opening career counselling centres. And with the help of the corporate sector, it also wants to hold "job melas," or fairs, in the Union territories.

'Outlandish': Nirmala Sitharaman brushes off Oppn criticism of RBI payout

The RBI decision came on Monday after the Bimal Jalan Committee constituted by RBI to determine excess capital submitted its report to the federal bank.

(News Agencies)- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said questioning the credibility of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) after it passed on surplus Rs 1.76 lakh crore to the government was "outlandish" and "worrying". The RBI decision came on Monday after the Bimal Jalan Committee constituted by it to determine excess capital submitted its report to the federal bank. The decision also signals the end of the discretionary power enjoyed by the RBI on dividend payouts. In the current fiscal, the RBI will pay out Rs 1.23 lakh crore of surplus and Rs 52, 637 crore of excess contingency provisions lying in its books. Reacting to criticism, Sitharaman said, considering the fact that the committee was

appointed by the RBI, any suggestions about bank's credibility "seems a bit outlandish". She was addressing a press conference after meeting GST officials in the city.

"Comments being offered on the credibility of RBI, I am afraid to say, are comments on the RBI and its selection on the committee and is a worrying sign," said Sitharaman while responding to a question about further decline in the federal bank's ratings if transfer of surplus was made.

The additional amount of Rs 86,000 crore that the government will receive this year above its budgeted Rs 90,000 crore as transfers from RBI could be either used to provide fiscal stimulus to a sagging economy, reduce off-balance sheet borrowings or

meet the expected shortfall in revenue collections.

The minister also reacted sharply to former Congress president Rahul Gandhi's allegations that the government was "stealing RBI's reserves" and said she did not care about such charges. Earlier in the day, Gandhi had criticised the Centre over the record cash transfer from the RBI, saying that the prime minister and the finance minister were "clueless" about solving the "self-created economic disaster".

The government has set a fiscal deficit target of 3.3% of the gross domestic product (GDP) for the current fiscal, revised downward from 3.4% pegged in the Interim Budget in February.

Referring to the announcements made by her last Friday to push growth, Sitharaman said that,



starting October 1, 2019, all tax notices would be disposed off within three months from the date of reply. Sitharaman also said she has directed the tax administrators to be restraint in the tax collection process and also asked them to understand the businesses. She said that all the deadlines for tax collections have been decided in consultation with the authorities and, hence, these are not impossible to achieve. On GST related issues, the Minister specifically said that there was no discussions on rate reductions for agricultural items. Issues related to homebuyers were, however, discussed in the meeting.

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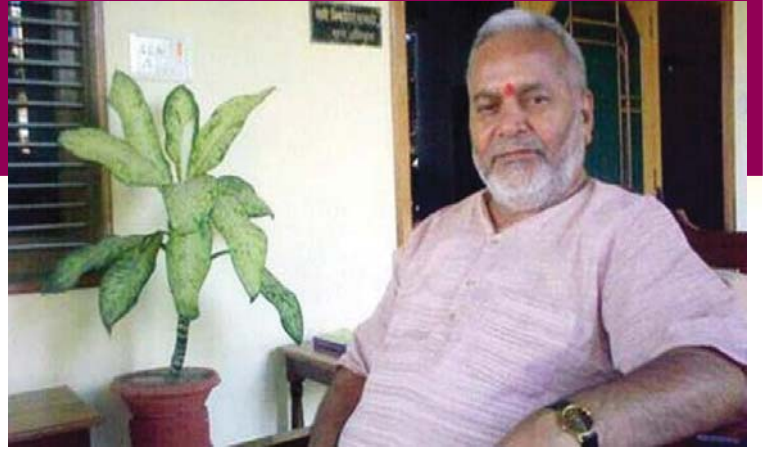


TO INDIA/WORLDWIDE



Ex-BJP MP Swami Chinmayanand booked for allegedly kidnapping UP law student

The woman, a student of SS Law College in Uttar Pradesh's Shahjahanpur, has been missing since she posted the video on her Facebook page on August 24. Three-time MP Chinmayanand is chairman of the college.



(News Agencies)- Former Union minister Swami Chinmayanand was on Tuesday booked for allegedly kidnapping a female law student after the woman, in a video that went viral on social media, accused "a big leader of the saint society" of threatening her and "destroying the lives of several girls." The woman, a student of SS Law College in Uttar Pradesh's Shahjahanpur, has been missing since she posted the video on her Facebook page on August 24. Three-time MP Chinmayanand is chairman of the college. The girl's father complained to the police, accusing Chinmayanand of putting his daughter through an

ordeal. Director general of police (DGP) OP Singh said, "On the basis of a complaint filed by the victim's father, we have registered a case against Swami Chinmayanand for alleged kidnapping, and threatening the victim's family." The DGP added that the UP Special Task Force (STF) had been asked to join the investigation and teams sent to different locations to trace the student. "We have some vital clues through electronic surveillance and are confident of tracing her very soon," he added. In the video she posted on her Facebook page, she said: "I'm from Shahjahanpur and am pursuing LLM from SS College.

A big leader of the saint society, who has destroyed the lives of several girls, has been issuing me life threats. I have all the evidence against him." She appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath for help. "I request Modi ji and Yogi ji to help me. He (the saint) has even threatened to kill my family. Only I know what I have been going through. Modi ji, please help me, he is a sanyasi and is threatening that the police, DM {district magistrate} and everyone else is on his side and no one can harm him. I request you all for justice." A policeman, requesting anonymity, said, "She didn't name Chinmayanand directly but hinted towards him. Her father has mentioned the former Union minister's name in his complaint." The father of the

woman said in his complaint that her mobile phone had been switched off since August 23. "My daughter is missing for the last four days. When I spoke to Swami ji, he did not talk to me properly. I request the government to do justice. Her mother had gone to see her room on the college campus but that was locked," he said. The father of the woman has demanded that her room be opened in front of the media and authorities. The mother of the woman said she met the family on August 15 but did not tell

them about any issues. "But my daughter said if her phone goes off, it means she is in trouble," she said, adding, "Though she did not tell me anything, she was looking a little upset." SS Law College principal Sanjay Kumar Baranwal said, "See, this is not a big issue. Her house is around 2 km from the hostel. She had been visiting her house off and on. So when she was not in the hostel, we thought she might have gone home." Now that her father has approached police, let the police find the woman, he added.

Pilot who flew in Kargil War impersonates senior to fly Amit Shah



(News Agencies)- The Border Security Force (BSF) and Delhi Police have begun an investigation against a now former BSF pilot who allegedly faked emails of his senior in a bid to fly the aircraft of Union Home Minister Amit Shah. A complaint has been registered against retired Wing Commander J.S. Sangwan at the police station at the Indira Gandhi International Airport here. According to informed sources, Sangwan is a decorated officer who also participated in the Kargil war. He was earlier a pilot with the BSF. As per the complaint, engineering giant L&T received several emails from the Air Wing of BSF two months ago recommending then Wing Commander Sangwan to fly the aircraft of Amit Shah. The emails recommended Sangwan saying

he had nearly 4,000 hours of flying experience. A minimum 1,000 hours of flying experience is required to fly a Home Minister in an aircraft. The L&T provides aircraft to the BSF Air Wing for VIP movement since the latter does not have any aircraft of its own. However, shortly before Sangwan was allowed to fly Shah from Chennai to Delhi, his attempt to impersonate a senior official came to light. Preliminary investigation has revealed that Sangwan did not have the necessary qualifications to be a pilot to fly VIPs, that he impersonated the email of a senior colleague and he also provided his own mobile number in the email for purposes of cross-verification. The sources said it was not yet clear why a senior officer like Sangwan had expressed interest to fly Shah's aircraft.



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How MP government has turned down Centre on PM Awas Yojana

The state's decision comes months after the Narendra Modi government expanded the scheme to ensure no rural poor remain homeless in the next three years.



(News Agencies)- The Madhya Pradesh government doesn't want to build as many as 232,000 houses for the rural poor under the flagship Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) scheme and, in a rare move, has surrendered its quota to the Centre.

The state's decision comes months after the Narendra Modi government expanded the scheme to ensure no rural poor

remain homeless in the next three years.

Every year, the Centre decides a quota on how many houses a state should build, based on the number of poor people left out from the scheme. This year, the Centre had allotted 832,100 houses for Madhya Pradesh, the second largest state in terms of area.

But the state, which had announced a loan waiver

package for farmers, has agreed to build 600,000 houses and surrendered another 233,000, or roughly 25% of the quota.

"For the FY 2019-20, a target of 8.32 lakh houses have been allotted. Now it has been decided that the state government will currently work with to achieve the target of 6 lakhs for the FY 2019-20. So, the remaining target of 2.33 lakhs against target communicated by Government of India is being surrendered," Madhya Pradesh development commissioner Gauri Singh said in a letter to the additional secretary of the Union rural development ministry.

Singh also assured that "the

state will work with similar zeal and enthusiasm as it worked for phase 1." "The state's share for 832,000 had become too large and therefore looking at the financial constraints and allocation of budgetary support, it was decided to keep the target at a slightly higher level than last year. Last year, the target was 560,000. This year, the target is 600,000," Singh later said while speaking to HT.

The PMAY has been one of the most popular welfare programmes along with Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana that provides free LPG connection to women in vast rural belts. All these schemes, which ended up creating a new vote base of 22 crore people, were also politically

significant for the ruling BJP.

Buoyed by the success of the first phase, the Centre had launched Phase 2 of the PMAY in February 2019, days before the Lok Sabha election schedule was declared. In PMAY, states (barring those in the northeast) pay for nearly 37% of the total expenditure. Under Phase 2, the total target for construction has been set at 1.95 crore house up to 2022."Gramin (PMAY-G) in Phase-II till 2019-20 as per the existing norms of PMAY-G Phase-I, with a target of 60 lakh houses involving financial implication of Rs.76,500 crore (Centre's share of Rs 48,195 crore and state share of Rs 28,305 crore)," a government release said in February.

Mobile phone services restored in 5 districts of Jammu

The districts that got back mobile services were Doda, Kishtwar, Ramban, Rajouri and Poonch, reports ANI. On August 17, mobile internet services were restored in five districts of Jammu region - Jammu, Reasi, Samba, Kathu, and Udhampur.

(News Agencies)- Mobile phone services were restored on Thursday in five districts of Jammu after remaining suspended for 25 days since August 5 when the Centre announced its move to scrap the special status granted to the state under Article 370 and to divide Jammu and Kashmir into two union territories. The mobile services, however, remain suspended in the Valley.

The districts that got back mobile services were Doda, Kishtwar, Ramban, Rajouri and Poonch, reports ANI. On August 17, mobile internet services were restored in five districts of Jammu region - Jammu, Reasi, Samba, Kathu, and Udhampur.

Earlier, last week landline phone services were restored at a few places in Kashmir -- Budgam, Sonamarg and Manigam areas of central Kashmir, in north Kashmir, the services were restored in Gurez, Tangmarg, Uri Keran Karnah and Tangdhar areas. But, consumers have complained of patchy connections.

The state came under security and communication lockdown after August 5 with restrictions on movement also in place. All top political leaders have been detained at the Centaur hotel and an opposition delegation attempting to enter the state was sent back from Srinagar airport.

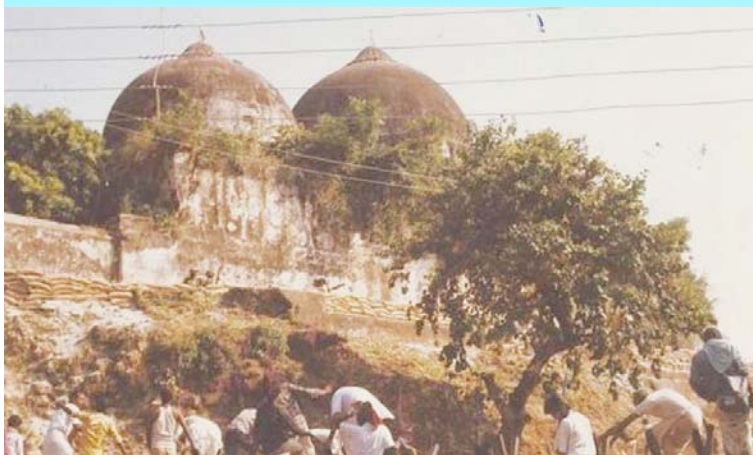
The scrapping of Article 370 has been challenged in the Supreme Court, which heard 10 petitions on Wednesday and allowed Left leader, one of the petitioners, to go to the Valley to check on his party colleague Yusuf Tarigami. CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, who was earlier part of the Opposition delegation that was sent back, will be the first political leader from outside Jammu and Kashmir to enter the Union Territory on Thursday since the nullification of Article 370 in early August.

"The Supreme Court has permitted me to go to Srinagar and see Com Yousuf Tarigami and 'report' back to them on the condition of his health. Once I meet him, return and report to the Court, I will make a more detailed statement," Yechury tweeted hours after he

got the permission to travel. When contacted, Yechury said he would file a detailed affidavit before the Supreme Court after his return from Srinagar. "Supreme Court has told me not to do politics. I will abide by the court order" he said.



There was temple in inner courtyard of Ayodhya disputed site, Nirmohi Akhara's counsel tells SC



(News Agencies)- Senior counsel appearing for Nirmohi Akhara, one of the parties in the Ayodhya title dispute case, on Tuesday told the Supreme Court that there was a temple in the inner courtyard of the disputed site.

Senior Advocate S K Jain told a bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi that Muslims were not allowed to enter the temple area.

"There was no mosque there. As per the revenue records, it can be said that the land was in

possession of the Nirmohi Akhara," the counsel claimed.

The constitution bench, also comprising Justice SA Bobde, D Y Chandrachud, Ashok Bhushan and S A Abdul Naseer, is conducting a day-to-day hearing in the Ayodhya title dispute case after the mediation panel failed to achieve an amicable settlement.

The apex court is hearing appeals against September 30, 2010 verdict of the Allahabad High Court in the case.

The High Court in its verdict had ordered equal division of 2.77 acre disputed land in Ayodhya among the Sunni Waqf Board, the Nirmohi Akhara and Ram Lalla.

All about PM Modi's Fit India movement

The launch of Fit India movement on National Sports Day will be telecast live on Doordarshan and will be simulcast on social media platforms YouTube and Facebook.



(News Agencies)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Thursday launch the "Fit India Movement", a nation-wide campaign to encourage citizens to take up physical activity and sports in their daily lives. The launch of Fit India movement on National Sports Day will be

telecast live on Doordarshan and will be simulcast on social media platforms YouTube and Facebook. Here's what you need to know about the Fit India Movement: * The Prime Minister will administer a fitness pledge in his address, inviting all Indians to

join in, and launch a fitness logo at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium in New Delhi. * The Fit India Movement will be a "multi-ministry effort", including the sports, HRD ministry, panchayati raj, rural development ministries, aimed at bringing about behavioural change and

introducing basic fitness practices in the daily lives of Indians, a majority of whom lack access to sports or fitness infrastructure in their neighbourhoods. * A special focus of the campaign will be on rural India that lacks basic facilities to improve physical well-being and awareness of fitness. * Awareness programmes through involvement of celebrities, sports activities undertaken in tier 1 and 2 cities, and other such events are being planned during the campaign. This will also be used to promote Yoga in a big way. * The University Grants Commission (UGC) has asked affiliated higher educational institutes to prepare and implement an institutional fitness plan incorporating sports/exercises/physical activities for fitness, into the daily routine. The commission has also asked institutes to encourage every person to walk 10,000 steps. * They have also been told to upload their fitness action plans on UGC's "Fit India Movement

Portal" which is under development. * A committee comprising government officials, members of Indian Olympic Association (IOA), national sports federations, private bodies and fitness promoters has been formed to advise the government on the "Fit India Movement". * The 28-member committee, under the chairmanship of sports minister Kiren Rijju, has 12 members from the government, including secretaries of sports, secondary education, AYUSH, youth affairs, among others. * IOA president and seven NSF heads, including those of boxing, athletics, football and cycling, are also a part of the committee. * Representatives of private bodies such as Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), Reliance Foundation, JSW Cement and JSW Paints, SE TransStadia Pvt Ltd, Tata Trusts, ASSOCHAM India, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), and actors Shilpa Shetty and Milind Soman will also be involved.

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नई दिल्ली ■ हम हिंदुस्तानी पुस्तकालय द्वारा आयोजित 'बूंद-बूंद को तरसेगा पाक' नामक कार्यक्रम का शुभारंभ किया गया। कार्यक्रम में मुख्य अतिथि के रूप में भारत के प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी और पाकिस्तान के प्रधानमंत्री इमरान खान शामिल हुए।

कार्यक्रम के दौरान दोनों नेताओं ने एक-दूसरे को संबोधित किया। मोदी ने कहा कि भारत और पाकिस्तान के बीच शांति और सहकार के लिए एक-दूसरे को समर्थन देना चाहिए। खान ने कहा कि पाकिस्तान भारत के विकास और प्रगति के लिए समर्थन देगा।

महिलें बाज आ रह
पाकिस्तान, तीसरे दिन भी मोदी की मोलीबर्दी, भारत ने दिया कटारा जवाब
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भारतीय-अमेरिकन कम्युनिटी द्वारा घोर निंदा

वाशिंगटन ■ हम हिंदुस्तानी पुस्तकालय ने भारतीय-अमेरिकन कम्युनिटी द्वारा जारी की गई 'बूंद-बूंद को तरसेगा पाक' नामक पुस्तक की निंदा की। पुस्तक में भारत के प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी के खिलाफ गंभीर आरोप लगाए गए हैं।

आईएस में शामिल हुई महिला को अमेरिका ने एंटी देने से किया इंकार

वाशिंगटन ■ हम हिंदुस्तानी पुस्तकालय ने अमेरिकन सरकार को अमेरिकन सरकार के द्वारा जारी किए गए 'बूंद-बूंद को तरसेगा पाक' नामक पुस्तक की निंदा की। पुस्तक में भारत के प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी के खिलाफ गंभीर आरोप लगाए गए हैं।

P&W engine issue: Aviation body says it will take harshest action, if need arises

About 40 per cent of the domestic seat capacity of India is powered by Pratt and Whitney engines and therefore, any knee-jerk reaction to completely shut their operations will have serious consequences, the regulator noted.

(News Agencies)- The DGCA on Wednesday said Pratt and Whitney has been asked to ensure easy availability of spare engines to airlines and the aviation regulator will take the "harshest action" if need arises.

About 40 per cent of the domestic seat capacity of India is powered by Pratt and Whitney engines and therefore, any knee-jerk reaction to completely shut their operations will have serious consequences, the regulator noted.

A total of 127 P&W engine-powered A320neo planes of the

two airlines -- GoAir and IndiGo -- have been facing glitches both mid-air and on-ground since their induction way back in 2016, which has also led to grounding of some planes.

"The DGCA assures all its stakeholders that we are alive to the situation and will take the harshest action, should the need arise," the regulator added.

At present, IndiGo and GoAir have 92 and 35 A320neo aircraft powered by Pratt and Whitney engines in India. A total of 436 such aircraft are operating globally. "Manufacturer

(Pratt and Whitney) has been directed to ensure more availability of spare engines for Indian operators to prevent grounding of aircraft due to removal of engines," the DGCA said in its statement.

"It is true that there have been cases of air turn back, in flight shut down or engine vibrations beyond the prescribed limits, but with strong mitigation measures in place and strict adherence to SOPs (standard operating procedures) by the airlines, the problem is being contained," the regulator



added. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) held a meeting with executives of IndiGo, GoAir and Pratt and Whitney on Wednesday afternoon to review the performance of aforementioned 127 A320neo aircraft in India. The DGCA said in its statement

that Pratt and Whitney currently is in the process of implementing mitigation actions in respect of the following issues: Main Gear Box (MGB) failure, Low Pressure Turbine (LPT) failure and engine vibration.

Asia's geopolitical chessboard is witnessing a power shift

(News Agencies)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Vladivostok next week as the chief guest at the Eastern Economic Forum, and for the annual bilateral summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin, comes at a time of Asian geopolitical flux. The US-China trade war has escalated, South Korea-Japan ties are under strain, Beijing appears poised to militarily crush Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement, and the deepening Sino-Pakistan strategic nexus has emboldened Islamabad to step up bellicose

rhetoric against India. The larger Asian challenges centre on ensuring respect for existing frontiers and establishing a pluralistic and stable regional order. India is wedged between two closely aligned, nuclear-armed and revanchist states that lay claim to large Indian territories. China is also the primary impediment to a stable balance of power. Asia's geopolitical landscape will be shaped by five key powers: America, China, India, Japan and Russia. Equations within this strategic pentagon will profoundly influence

Asian geopolitics. As Asia's geographical hub, China is especially vulnerable to the same geopolitical game it plays against India — strategic encirclement — if the other four powers cooperate with each other. A joint grand strategy to manage a muscular China could aim to put discreet checks on the exercise of Chinese power by establishing counterbalancing coalitions around that country's periphery. However, US President Donald Trump, with his unilateralist and



protectionist priorities, has still to provide strategic heft to his "free and open Indo-Pacific" strategy. Consequently, China still pursues aggression in the

South China Sea, as exemplified by its ongoing coercion against Vietnamese oil and gas activities within Vietnam's own exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Mothers of Rohit Vemula, Payal Tadvi move to SC seeking measures to end caste discrimination on campuses

(News Agencies)- Mothers of Payal Tadvi and Rohith Vemula who had committed suicide over alleged caste discrimination, have moved a petition in the Supreme Court seeking directions for strict measures to end caste discrimination in university campuses. Abeda Salim Tadvi and Radhika Vemula, mothers of Payal Tadvi and Rohit Vemula respectively, in their petition sought a direction for strict compliance of UGC regulation of 2012 which restricts such discrimination. Radhika Vemula had earlier this year vowed to fight the communal forces, which she alleged were responsible for her son's death. The petition also sought that a direction to be issued to



all Universities and HEI's to establish Equal Opportunity Cells on the lines of such other existing anti-discrimination internal complaints mechanisms. Tadvi, who belonged to the Scheduled Tribe community, had allegedly ended her life in her hostel room at BYL Nair Hospital here on May 22, allegedly after facing harassment

from her seniors due to her caste. On the other hand, Vemula, a PhD scholar at the Hyderabad Central University, was found hanging from a ceiling fan in a hostel room on January 17, 2016. He was allegedly upset over disciplinary actions that were taken against him by the university.

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As vaping-related lung illnesses spike, investigators eye contaminants

State and federal health authorities are focusing on the role of contaminants or counterfeit substances as a likely cause of vaping-related lung illnesses - now up to 354 possible cases in 29 states, nearly double the number reported to be under investigation last week, The Washington Post has learned.

Officials are narrowing the possible culprits to adulterants in vaping products purported to have THC, the component in marijuana that makes users high, as well as adulterants in nicotine vaping products.

The sudden onset of these mysterious illnesses and the patients' severe and distinctive symptoms have led investigators to focus on contaminants, rather than standard vaping products that have been in wide use for many years.

The investigation is "starting to point to what solvents are being used, and that can vary a lot" - especially in counterfeit or black-market products, including potentially mislabeled solvents that consumers buy themselves to make do-it-yourself "home brews," said an official at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is heading the investigation.

The CDC and Food and Drug Administration issued a statement Friday morning warning that "anyone who does use e-cigarette products should not buy these products off the street (e.g., e-cigarette products with THC or other cannabinoids) and should not modify e-cigarette products or add any substances to these products that are not intended by the manufacturer."

Vaping refers to the increasingly popular practice of inhaling vapor from an e-cigarette device, which frequently involves heating a liquid that can contain nicotine, marijuana or other drugs. Those active ingredients are delivered in solvents.

The national health alert about the illnesses - a sign of growing urgency about a health threat that has claimed one life, while hospitalizing scores of others - cautions that officials are a long way from understanding what exactly is making so many people sick. The victims report vaping different products, purchased in different places and used for different lengths of time. Many of those who have gotten

ill say they have vaped products containing marijuana, but some also used traditional nicotine e-cigarettes. Some report using both. The last week's dramatic increase in reported cases is probably the result of increased awareness, said the CDC official. The official, who was not authorized to speak on the record, predicted that state officials will eliminate some of the unconfirmed cases.

In the meantime, federal and state officials are urging the millions of Americans who use e-cigarettes to stop vaping until the cause of the illnesses is identified. They have suggested that those using e-cigarettes quit smoking conventional cigarettes and contact their doctors about alternatives, such as patches or nicotine gums.

Some of those warnings have drawn criticism from both industry and health groups for being overly alarmist and broad about which products might be dangerous.

"People need to stop using these illicit THC products now - and it's the CDC's responsibility to say what we do know," said Michael Siegel, a professor of community health services at Boston University, who believes that e-cigarettes can be helpful to those trying to quit smoking. "Yes, there are unknowns. Yes, there may be other products implicated as well. But a large number [of confirmed cases] seem to involve THC oils purchased from 'pop-up shops,'?" he said, referring to unlicensed shops that move frequently, advertise by word of mouth and often fail to follow safety regulations.

The complex investigation has also been hobbled by the patchwork of state and federal regulatory authorities involved and the sheer number and kinds of businesses, legal and illicit, selling vaping products. Nicotine vaping products are lightly regulated in the United States, although tougher rules are due to kick in over the next year. Yet e-cigarette use has surged, especially among teens and young adults who have embraced the sleek, high-nicotine model of Juul, the leading brand.

A growing number of Americans are also vaping marijuana, which is legal in some states but prohibited under federal law.

Some marijuana vaping devices, such as vape pens, are a fairly recent phenomena and among the most popular devices for vaping cannabis. The vape pens are a potential target for black-market sellers because they're cheap and easy to fill with counterfeit substances, according to officials and industry sources.

Former FDA commissioner Scott Gottlieb, a harsh critic of San Francisco-based Juul, said he believes it's unlikely that Juul - or other large national e-cigarette companies - are associated with the recent cases because the illnesses appeared to have developed suddenly and do not appear to be spread evenly across the nation.

Traditional vaping products could cause chronic problems, Gottlieb said, but these patients have acute illnesses.

"What's likely causing the harm is something that they are putting in to make it easy or cheap to mix," he added.

Some state health officials and clinicians are increasingly focused on contaminants in THC products. In a conference call Thursday, Utah health officials told physicians the state department is focusing on THC products, said one doctor who took part in the call. The physician spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak for the health department. Utah has reported at least 21 possible cases in recent weeks. A health department official said they are

looking at both THC and nicotine products.

Pennsylvania's UPMC health system, which includes 40 hospitals, including the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, has treated at least 14 individuals with acute lung injuries related to vaping in recent weeks, doctors said. Several patients told clinicians they bought THC products online from a popular brand called Dank Vapes. Industry sources say marketers often fill an empty cartridge with potentially unsafe ingredients and sell to unsuspecting customers.

"We suspect adulterated or contaminated products, because these [marijuana] products have been out there for some time, and we've not seen these cases until this summer," said Phillip Lamberty, a pulmonologist and critical care specialist at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, who cared for three patients in recent weeks. Two of them used products containing THC, he said. He wasn't sure what product the third was vaping. One patient purchased his product from an illicit drug dealer. Another patient told Lamberty he had previously smoked marijuana but bought an online product and vaped THC for the first time about a week before falling ill. In California's Kings County, all seven patients who had acute respiratory distress syndrome reported buying marijuana vape cartridges from "pop-up shops," said Nancy Gerking, the county's assistant

director of public health.

"The patients had switched from regular retailers to the pop-up shops," Gerking said. The patients "found a difference between the potency of the products," she said. "They had to use twice as much, so they were taking twice as much of the product into their lungs."

State health departments are sending samples to the FDA's forensic laboratory in Cincinnati, where an initial targeted analysis is testing for THC, CBD and nicotine, officials said. The FDA and other labs are also doing more broad-based testing for solvents and possible contaminants to look for any pattern. Friday's statement said that "the FDA has received about 80 samples and continues to receive requests from states to send more samples for the FDA to analyze. The samples represent a variety of different types of products and substances - a number of which contained incomplete information about the product. The FDA is analyzing those samples for their contents, whether they contain nicotine, substances such as THC or other cannabinoids, or other chemicals and ingredients." Among the possible culprits are oils and "cutting agents" being added to the liquid in vaping devices, especially those containing THC. State officials and marijuana industry sources said black-market dealers appear to be using new substances to thin out THC oil, which is thick, odorless and colorless.

New survey says vaping is an increasing trend among teenagers

Vaping is a popular trend among teens in the United States, according to a new survey.

Several Big Country schools said that they have also seen more students bringing some type of vaping device on to school grounds.

Health officials have said that vaping is very addictive and they are still learning how it can affect the body over time.

School is now in full swing, and with vaping becoming more popular, it is no surprise that students are now finding ways to sneak their vaping devices into classrooms.

"Vaping has definitely picked up, not only in our school, but our community," said Wylie High

School principal Tim Smith.

A new survey from the National Institutes of Health found an alarming increase in the number of teens who have tried vaping for the first time in the United States.

Smith added that during the last school year, Wylie ISD administrators confiscated about 12 vaping pens from students, compared to about eight from the school year before that one.

"Whenever we find a student with it, we don't just discipline them, we try to educate them on why we are doing these things because we are concerned about their health and peer pressure," Smith said. Wylie ISD has been working on

informing parents and students about vaping and the harmful health effects that it has on the body.

"We just want everyone to be on the same page of what we are trying to do," said Smith. "We want this to be a safe school environment and a fun environment for our kids to come and learn."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), at least 193 cases of lung illness linked to vaping have been reported in 22 states.

On Thursday, Milwaukee County in Wisconsin became the first county in the United States to urge people to stop vaping immediately.

Mom of teen with vaping addiction warns parents about the dangers of e-cigarettes: 'It's stealth by design'

At just 14-years-old, Phillip Fuhrman started vaping. Toward the end of 8th grade, Phillip went over to the house of a friend, who had the popular e-cigarette, Juul. "I just tried it," Phillip, now 16, tells Yahoo Lifestyle. "I tried it because they were doing it. I started with the mint flavor and liked it because it felt cool in my throat. It didn't really burn or hurt."

Phillip eventually started buying Juul on his own on eBay, asking the doorman in his family's New York City apartment building to hold the package so he could pick it up before his parents did. He later moved on to buying it at stores, noting how "easy" it was. "Not many places would actually check your ID," he says. Or else Phillip and his friends would slip the guy at the counter \$5 to let them buy it.

At first, Phillip's mom, Dorian Fuhrman, didn't suspect anything. She did notice that her son smelled slightly sweet. Was he using a new shampoo? Did he have a girlfriend? she wondered. She found out later she was smelling the flavors of

Juul. But then Phillip started to experience serious mood swings. "When you have teenagers, they are so moody anyway and it's such a difficult time for them," Dorian tells Yahoo Lifestyle. However, "it was darker and more intense. He had a quick temper, trouble sleeping, and night sweats."

She also noticed that her son was drinking a ton of water, a sign, she later learned, of the chemical propylene glycol in e-cigarettes pulling moisture from the mouth and nose.

Dorian watched as her "funny, outgoing kid" starting snapping at everyone around him. Even Phillip couldn't deny the changes in himself. "I noticed I'd have a short temper and get angry very often," he shares. "I think I sort of downplayed it in my mind - 'It's not because of this [vaping]' - because I wanted to keep doing it."

The mom eventually found a flash drive-like device ("it's stealth by design," she says) in her son's pocket, which turned out to be a Juul vape, the popular nicotine

delivery system.

"That obviously started to raise some red flags," she says, "but I still did not know what it was." So Dorian and another mom friend, whose son went to school with Phillip, started to do some research on vaping.

For Phillip, having his mom take away his Juul, was when he acknowledged his addiction.

"The first time my mom found it and took it away from me - I went a few days without doing it and I first noticed how dependent I was on it," he says.

His other wakeup call came when the teen, who had been a junior lifeguard and avid tennis player, tried out for basketball at school and found himself completely winded. For Dorian, the tipping point arrived when Phillip came home from school one day and mentioned that there had been a mental health and anti-addiction talk. Phillip said that a representative from Juul Labs showed up to speak to the teens - without the knowledge of teachers, administrators, or parents - and told them the product was "totally safe."

"And he said [the teens] shouldn't be worried about it because it would soon get FDA approval," says Dorian. (Juul is not FDA-approved and the U.S. Federal Trade Commission is currently investigating whether Juul Lab's marketing practices have targeted minors, according to the Wall Street Journal.)

Disturbed by a Juul representative telling teens that e-cigarettes are safe - countering the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which explicitly says e-cigarettes are "unsafe" for kids, teens, and young adults - Dorian tried to find an anti-vaping organization similar to Mothers Against Drunk Driving. But there wasn't one.

"So we decided to start our own organization," Dorian says. The grassroots organization, PAVE (Parents Against Vaping E-Cigarettes) was founded by Dorian, moms Dina Alessi and Meredith Berkman, and their teen sons to educate parents and teens about vaping and advocate for legislative change. The organization says that vaping is "the most serious adolescent

public-health crisis our country has faced in decades." In fact, high school students using e-cigarettes went up 78 percent in 2017-2018, according to the CDC. One in five high school students and one in 20 middle schoolers use e-cigarettes.

When e-cigarettes first came out, they were hailed as a safe alternative to smoking because they lack tar and other harmful gasses found in cigarettes. But several reports on teens suffering from severe lung damage and seizures after using the products have shed light on the dangers.

The problem is that the nicotine in e-cigarettes is just as addictive as the one found in regular cigarettes, according to the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General. Vapes also contain ultrafine particles that are inhaled deep into the lungs, as well as the chemical diacetyl, a flavoring that has been linked to lung disease, according to the U.S. Surgeon General and the U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

City of Milwaukee urges residents to stop vaping 'immediately'; 89% of Wisconsin sick cite THC

The city of Milwaukee issued a health alert Wednesday urging residents to stop vaping "immediately," after at least 16 people were hospitalized with severe lung disease this month.

The individuals all reported using vape products or dabbing -- which is the vaping of marijuana oils, extracts or concentrates -- in the weeks and months prior to being hospitalized. They were diagnosed with severe chemical pneumonia, an inflammation of the lungs due to aspirating or inhaling of irritants, according to

a press release from the city's health department. The specific products used were unknown. Milwaukee's health commissioner, Dr. Jeanette Kowalik, said she is "committed to protecting the public from the dangers of secondhand exposure" to vaping devices or electronic cigarettes.

"We continue to learn more about the health effects associated with e-cigarettes," Kowalik said in a statement Wednesday. The city's health department again "strongly encouraged" residents against

using any THC products containing e-liquid. THC, or tetrahydrocannabinol, is the main active compound in cannabis.

In 27 cases of lung disease in Wisconsin, the state's Department of Health Services said 89% cited vaping THC products. The state said it is still investigating another 32 cases.

"As someone who has worked diligently to eliminate access to tobacco and e-cigarettes among youth, I urge residents pay close attention to the poor health effects from using these products," Alderman Michael J.

Murphy, the co-chair of the Milwaukee City-County Heroin, Opioid, Cocaine Task Force, said in a statement Wednesday. The warning in Wisconsin's largest city comes as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration investigates at least 127 reports of people suffering seizures or other neurological symptoms after using e-cigarettes. All of the reported cases occurred between 2010 and 2019, and many involved youth and young adults. It remains unclear whether there's a direct link between

vaping and the reported cases of neurological events, according to the agency.

Meanwhile, a mother in Missouri is suing Juul Labs, Inc. in federal court, accusing the California-based e-cigarette company of developing a marketing strategy that targeted unwitting teenagers, including her daughter. The Kansas City Star reports that Juul released a statement denying the allegation, saying it has "never marketed to youth" and even launched "an aggressive action plan" last year to combat underage vaping.

Vaping-related lung disease cases surge to nearly 300 nationwide

At least 298 people have been hospitalized nationwide with severe lung disease apparently related to vaping.

The new number - a more than 50 percent jump from what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced last Friday - is the result of data collected from state health departments by NBC News.

And now the health department in Milwaukee is taking the bold step of telling its residents in a health alert to stop using any kind of vaping device -

immediately.

The department cites 16 people in Wisconsin who have been diagnosed with what health officials there are calling "severe chemical pneumonia" after vaping either nicotine or marijuana oils, extracts or concentrates.

Another 15 cases in that state are under investigation. There has been no single product or device linking all of the cases either in Wisconsin or in the 22 other states looking into cases.

The states with cases either confirmed or under investigation:

Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia and Wisconsin.

The number of cases is likely an underestimate because the disease is so new to doctors. There isn't even an official name for it yet.

"We believe, looking back through our cases, that we

probably have seen this in the past," Dr. Robin Deterding, chief of pediatric pulmonary medicine at Children's Hospital Colorado, said in a news conference Thursday.

"I think we're going to learn that different variations and degrees of these conditions have been present before," she said.

Currently, there's no standardized way for physicians to report these kinds of illnesses to state or federal health officials who track diseases. The CDC and states are now scrambling to devise

such a system. "We are working with the CDC to develop a reporting mechanism consistent with other states and hope to have this in place in the upcoming days," a spokeswoman for the North Dakota Department of Health wrote in an email to NBC News.

What's more, some states, like Louisiana and Massachusetts, just this week sent what are called "health alert networks" to their providers with information on identifying lung diseases related to vaping.

The time a jet-lagged Elon Musk made Alibaba's Jack Ma sound grounded

that people are essentially dumb creatures circumscribed by genes.

But Musk, who appeared discombobulated at times following a late trans-Pacific flight, met his match in a fellow billionaire who parried him at every turn. The Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. co-founder espoused a focus on life on Earth and argued that machines will never surpass their makers. Ma, the more polished and down-to-earth speaker, also invoked familiar stances on education and the need for "Love-Q" or LQ in addition to IQ to survive the future. But overall, the Alibaba honcho came across as more

reasonable than the erratic Musk, who several times trailed off into poorly articulated tangents such as the timeline of civilization or pace of technological change ("It does seem like a long time... Is that good or bad? I dunno.")

Just about the only thing they agreed on was that the global population was on the brink of collapse thanks to current birth rates -- a looming disaster the planet is ill-prepared to tackle. "Most people believe that we have too many people on the planet. This is an outdated view," Musk told the World AI Conference in Shanghai, as Ma nodded. "Assuming there's a

benevolent AI, the biggest problem the world will face in 20 years, is a population collapse. Not explosion. Collapse."

The showdown was the highlight of the conference, which kicked off on a rainy Thursday in the shadow of a U.S.-Chinese conflict that has at times appeared to pull the world to the brink of chaos. The Tesla and SpaceX founder's very presence at a government-backed conference on artificial intelligence was a signal to Washington, which is trying to contain China's ascendancy and growing prowess in cutting-edge technology.

From Jack Ma to Tencent

Holdings Ltd. founder Pony Ma, the leading lights of China's internet industry gathered in Shanghai this week to showcase the country's latest advances in artificial intelligence. And Musk, whose moment on stage brought droves of camera-toting spectators out of their seats, effectively lent credence to China's vision of becoming the world leader in the technology by 2030 just as Donald Trump wages a campaign to rein in the world's No. 2 economy.

While the billionaire entrepreneur was careful to steer clear of the trade war or longer-term geopolitical tensions, he spoke freely on almost everything else

-- including the possibility that life as we know it may end abruptly. "We don't have much time," Musk said. "This is the first time in the 4.5 billion-year history of Earth that we'll be able to extend life beyond Earth," he added. "Let us secure the future so the light of consciousness is not extinguished." The debate at times turned heated, especially when Ma questioned his opponent's belief that AI may someday prevail over the human race. "The biggest mistake I see people making is to assume they're smart," Musk countered. AI will be "much smarter than the smartest human you will ever know."

Ex-NYPD detectives to get probation for having sex with young woman in custody

While scientific evidence in the case was "very compelling," Chun said there was a possibility of a jury convicting only on the misdemeanor charges. The offer of probation without jail time was not "unjust or unfair" since the former officers had resigned from their jobs and had accepted felony convictions with their pleas, the judge said, according to the transcript.

Chun expanded on his reasoning for the plea deal, arguing that by law, their accuser could be charged for offering a bribe to the two former police officers.

"The other party offering a bribe could also be charged... which is the same level of felony as bribe-receiving," Chun said, according to the court transcript.

"Given that there are criminal activities on both sides, however, there is one critical difference here: both the defendants before me are police officers and police officers are sworn to uphold a higher standard of ethical code, behavior or higher standard, period, than other people engaged in criminal activity."

The former officers pleaded guilty Thursday to two counts of bribery in the third-degree and nine counts of official misconduct, the district attorney said.

Martins and Hall were originally arraigned in November 2017 on 50 counts, including first-degree rape, first-degree criminal sexual act and second-degree kidnapping, prosecutors said.

"These defendants engaged in a

shocking abuse of power, which they finally acknowledged," Gonzalez said. "While I would have preferred to see them serve prison time, they are no longer members of our police department and with today's plea are convicted felons."

The district attorney said the case resulted in New York passing a law prohibiting police officers from having sex with people in custody, closing a loophole that allowed police to claim the sex was consensual.

"We could not apply the new law retroactively, and serious credibility issues in this case precluded us from proceeding on additional charges, yet we remained committed to holding these defendants accountable,"

Gonzalez said. The woman's attorney, Michael N. David, said the sentence was unacceptable and sent a bad message to victims about police violence. "We're outraged. It's complete injustice what happened today. You can't consent when you're 5'3, 100 pounds and they're both over 6 feet and very muscular. They had her in handcuffs. These cops got a free pass," he said. The attorney said he will represent the woman in a federal lawsuit against the city and will ask the US Attorney for the Eastern District of New York to prosecute Martins and Hall.

Defense lawyers say case could

have been resolved long ago Martins' attorney, Mark Bederow, called the plea agreement "a fair outcome." He said the case was "botched horrifically" by prosecutors following "the political climate at the time" rather than the "credible evidence." "Let me be clear, I'm not criticizing the 'Me Too' movement. I'm criticizing the DA's office," he told CNN. "They had evidence that the victim had repeatedly lied under oath about virtually everything and, rather than presenting that evidence, they -- given the climate -- brought forth first-degree rape charges."

Pak Sikh girl forcibly converted, married off; family seeks Imran Khan's help

forcibly taken away at gunpoint on night of August 27-28. In a video message, her brother said, "Our family has faced a tragic incident as some goons forcibly entered our house and abducted my younger daughter. They tortured her and forcibly converted her to Islam." He added, "We went to a police station to register a complaint. We met many senior officials but they have not listened to our complaint. The goons again came to our house and forced us to withdraw our complaint and threatened that they will also force us to convert to Islam if we persisted with the complaint." The family also appealed to Prime Minister Imran Khan and Chief Justice of Pakistan Asif

Saeed Khosa for help in the matter.

India's foreign ministry spokesman Raveesh Kumar said: "We have, time and again raised the issue of persecution, abduction, treatment of minorities and conversions in Pakistan." They have an obligation towards these people, they must fulfil it," he added. "They must check themselves before saying anything to others, their home is burning, so they must first focus on it," India's foreign ministry spokesman said.

The members of the Sikh community in Pakistan have condemned the horrific incident and conducted a meeting at Gurudwara Nankana Sahib. They have decided to organise a

protest on Friday at Governor House while an international conference related to Kartarpur Corridor is scheduled to be held there.

President of Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee (DSGMC) and Akali Dal leader Manjinder Singh Sirsa also condemned the incident. He urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to take up the matter.

"I urge @narendramodi Ji & @DrSJaishankar Ji to raise this issue at global level bcos forced conversions happening in Pakistan have angered all the Sikhs. This issue must be taken up at @UN as it threatens Sikhs freedom of religion," he tweeted.

Ilhan Omar Denies Alleged Affair with Democrat Political Consultant

aspect of her personal life. "Are you separated from your husband? Are you dating somebody?" WCCO reporter Esme Murphy asked Omar.

"No, I am not," the lawmaker tersely replied, before adding, "As I said yesterday, I have no interest in allowing the conversation about my personal life to continue and so I have no desire to discuss it."

Although Omar refuses to speak on accusations of an affair with Mynett, questions have arisen regarding their close business dealings. Since 2018, the lawmaker has paid nearly \$230,000 in campaign funds in consulting fees and travel expenses to Mynett's E Street Group. During the interview with WCCO, Omar refused to address whether she married another man, Ahmed Nur Said Elmi, for

U.S. immigration purposes. Elmi has faced allegations that he is Omar's brother, a claim that Omar has repeatedly denied.

Nonetheless, Omar's marital history continues to attract heavy scrutiny. Omar has faced scrutiny stemming from a joint tax return she filed with Hirsi in 2014 and 2015 - before they were actually remarried and while Omar was legally wed to Elmi. Omar has claimed that she married Hirsi, who then went by Ahmed Aden, in an Islamic ceremony in 2002, though never married legally. The pair split up in 2008 and she married Elmi, legally, in 2009. Although the lawmaker broke up with Elmi in 2011, she remained married to him while she filed tax returns with Hirsi. Records show she divorced Elmi before marrying Hirsi.

Brazil rejected millions in Amazon aid. Hours later, Bolsonaro hinted at a reversal

(News Agencies)- The Brazilian government walked back its rejection of \$20 million in foreign aid to help fight fires blazing in the Amazon rainforest on Tuesday, saying it would take international aid after all.

Acceptance of the funds, however, would hinge on the Brazilian government being able to administrate the aid, clarified presidential spokesperson Otavio Rego Barros.

Earlier this week, Brazil escalated its war of words with global powers over the Amazon fires, which now number 80,626 this year -- a 79% rise on last year.

On Tuesday morning, the special communications office for President Jair Bolsonaro told CNN that Brazil would turn down the money that was pledged for the Amazon at the G7 summit in France the day before.

But just an hour later, Bolsonaro appeared to cast doubt on the matter. "Did I say that? Did I? Did Jair Bolsonaro speak?" he asked reporters outside the presidential residence.

He added that he would only

respond to the offer once French President Emmanuel Macron withdrew his insults against him. Macron had accused Bolsonaro of "lying" to him about climate commitments during trade negotiations.

The Amazon blazes have caused a public spat between Bolsonaro and Macron, who has been vocal about the need for an international response to the fires. The latter has spearheaded the effort and announced the aid package at the G7 summit he hosted in Biarritz.

Later on Tuesday, during a meeting with governors of states affected by the fires, Bolsonaro struck a more conciliatory tone, announcing that no one in his administration was opposed to negotiating with France.

"We even thank the G7 for its work," he said. However, he added that Macron "should think two, three times before he attempts to get out of the complicated situation he is in, with huge disapproval within his own country, by messing with us." On Monday, Bolsonaro's

chief of staff had suggested that the money should instead be used "to reforest Europe."

"Macron is unable to avoid a preventable fire in a church that is at a World Heritage Site and he wants to show us what is for our country? He has a lot to look after at home and the French colonies," Onyx Lorenzoni was quoted as saying by G1 Globo late Monday night. He was referring to the Notre Dame Cathedral fire in April.

For days, Bolsonaro had been saying the idea of creating an international alliance to save the Amazon would be treating Brazil like "a colony or no man's land," calling it an attack on the country's sovereignty.

Satellite data provided by European monitoring service Copernicus (CAMS) on Tuesday now shows that fire activity over the Brazilian Amazon has decreased in recent days and is trending at or below normal levels for the last week of August, according to data records that go back to 2003.

"Over the last few days, fire



activity seem to have in general been below average compared to the previous 16 years in the GFAS dataset," CAMS scientist and fire expert, Mark Parrington, said.

Brazil's Defense Ministry said Tuesday that its data showed a decrease in the number of regions affected by the fires in the Amazon in Brazil over the weekend.

The ministry said around 2,500 troops have been involved to help fight the fires and that the operation would continue until September 24. Bolsonaro originally tweeted Saturday that he was mobilizing more than 43,000 troops to fight

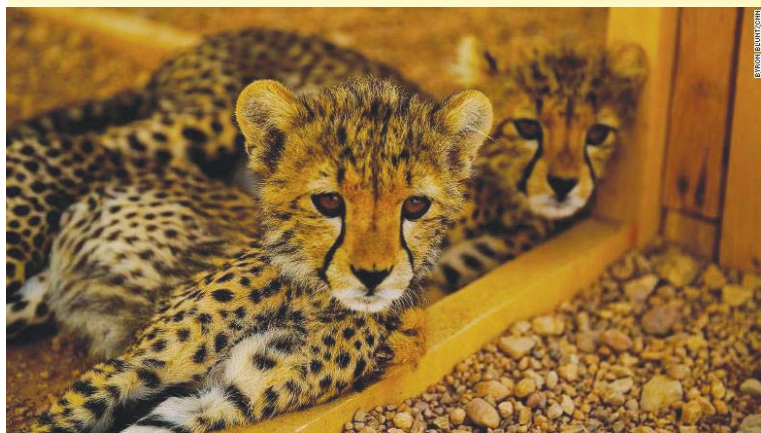
the rainforest fires.

International help Speaking alongside Macron at the G7 on Monday, Chile's President Sebastián Piñera announced a new two-step process for fighting the Amazon blazes.

He said the first step was to cover the emergency and collaborate with Amazonian countries in fighting the fires.

The next phase would be focused on protecting the forest's biodiversity then working on reforestation. Piñera said this would be agreed at the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September.

The ultra-rich are illegally buying cheetahs as pets and it's leading to their extinction



(News Agencies)- Three tiny balls of fur huddle together for warmth inside a cardboard box. The baby cheetahs are just a few weeks old, but they've had a traumatic start to life.

A smuggler was attempting to spirit the cubs out of Somaliland, a breakaway state from Somalia, when he was caught red-handed by the authorities.

The cubs, who will soon be taken to a safehouse, are the lucky ones. Some 300 young cheetahs are trafficked out of Somaliland every year -- around the same

number as the entire population of adult and adolescent cheetahs in unprotected areas in the Horn of Africa, according to the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF).

The trend is of "epidemic proportions," according to CCF, an organization devoted to saving cheetahs in the wild. At the current rates of trafficking, the cheetah population in the region could soon be wiped out.

"If you do the math, the math kind of shows that it's only going to be a matter of a couple of years

[before] we are not going to have any cheetahs," said Laurie Marker, an American conservation biologist and founder of CCF.

Somaliland is the main transit route for cheetah-trafficking in the Horn of Africa. The animals are smuggled across Somaliland's porous border, then stowed away in cramped crates or cardboard boxes on boats and sent across the Gulf of Aden towards their final destination: the Arabian Peninsula.

Status symbols for the rich There are less than 7,500 cheetahs left in the wild, according to CCF. Another 1,000 cheetahs are being held captive in private hands in Gulf countries, CCF estimated, where many are bought and sold in illegal online sales.

While many of these states -- including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia -- ban the private ownership and sale of wild animals, enforcement is lax.

The overwhelming majority of these cheetahs end up in Gulf Arab mansions, where Africa's most endangered big cats are flaunted as status symbols of the ultra-rich and paraded around in social media posts, according to CCF and trafficking specialists. In one such post, a video shows a "pet" cheetah watching a National Geographic show and becoming visibly agitated when it sees one of its own on the screen. "She's fixated on her family," reads the caption. Other posts show cheetahs laying on luxury cars, being shoved into pools, getting force-fed ice cream and lollipops, and being taunted by a group of men. One cheetah is seen getting declawed; another is dying on camera.

For cheetahs, a life in confinement can be deadly, if the journey doesn't kill them first. Many of the smuggled cubs arrive in the Gulf with mangled and broken legs after a rough journey. Three out of four

cheetahs die during the trip, according to Marker.

As the world's fastest land mammal, cheetahs need space to run and a special diet. Most Gulf owners do not know how to care for the cats, and the majority of captive cheetahs die within a year or two, experts told CNN.

"Those people who have cheetahs as a pet are causing the species to go extinct," said Marker.

Veterinarians in Gulf countries confirm this grim picture. They spoke to CNN on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

"(Cheetahs) do terribly in captivity," said one vet, who has treated dozens of pet cheetahs over the past five years. Many of those he cared for did not survive.

The vet said he has seen cheetahs suffer from metabolic and digestive disorders because people don't know what to feed them.

Boris Johnson just took a huge step to ensure Brexit happens on October 31

(News Agencies)- Opponents of a no-deal Brexit just got royally outflanked.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's wheeze of getting the Queen to order a five-week suspension of Parliament means his critics have much less time than they thought to prevent the UK leaving the European Union without a deal on October 31. Downing Street, however, believes it has taken a decisive step towards achieving Johnson's stated aim of taking Britain out of the EU by the end of October.

Why did Johnson suspend parliament?

Before today, the preferred option of lawmakers who oppose a no-deal Brexit was to pass a law requiring the government to seek an extension to the Brexit

deadline and hold a second referendum, should negotiations with the EU fail to result in a deal.

Those legal moves -- cemented at a highly unusual display of opposition unity in the office of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn on Tuesday -- were due to begin when Parliament returns from its annual summer break on September 3. The anti-no-deal brigade planned to block the traditional three-week break for the main parties' annual conferences, which was due to begin around September 14. Time, and House of Commons Speaker John Bercow, were on their side, they believed.

But Johnson's move now means they've only got a handful of days to engineer the required legislation before the suspension approved by the Queen -- which

cannot be voted down -- takes effect.

That could force them to fall back on Plan B -- a vote of no-confidence in the government. The trouble is, for that to succeed, they need Conservative lawmakers to vote against their own party, which was always thought to be a tall order. No surprise, then, to hear all the howls of "constitutional outrage." What's the Queen's role in all of this? British governments usually arrange for a new parliamentary session every year or so. According to convention, this happens when the Privy Council, a body of senior politicians who act as the Queen's official advisers on the exercise of her limited executive powers, request that she "prorogue" (or suspend) parliament. It would be



an act of extraordinary rebellion on the part of the monarch to decline such a request. After all, the Glorious Revolution of 1688, when James II was overthrown and replaced by his daughter Mary and her husband, William of Orange, was fought over the fundamental issue of the supremacy of parliament. Indeed, the Queen accepted Johnson's request and approved

the five-week suspension of parliament Wednesday. The new session will begin with the State Opening of Parliament and all of its associated pageantry (carriage processions, trumpets and the like). At the center of it all is the Queen's Speech, when the monarch reads a text that lays out her government's legislative priorities for the upcoming session.

Fitbit Versa 2 smartwatch with Amazon Alexa launched, priced at \$200



(News Agencies)- Fitbit Inc on Wednesday launched its latest smartwatch, Versa 2, adding Amazon.com Inc's voice assistant Alexa,

online payments and music storage in a bid to compete strongly with Apple Inc's smartwatches. Shares of Fitbit rose as much as 5.6% to \$3.01.

Pre-orders for Versa 2, which is priced at \$200, will start later in the day, the company said, adding that the smartwatch would be available in stores on September 15.

Fitbit has struggled to gain a foothold in the smartwatch category as Apple and Samsung have cornered a bigger share of the market with more sophisticated devices, while its dominant share of the fitness tracking sector continues to be chipped away by cheaper offerings from China's Huawei and Xiaomi among others.

Fitbit last month cut its 2019 revenue forecast, blaming disappointing sales of Versa Lite smartwatches, a cheaper version that lacked features such as the

ability to store music.

"While Versa Lite received good present consumer reviews, we saw that consumers were willing to pay more for a smartwatch with additional features," Chief Executive Officer James Park said on an earnings call with analysts earlier this month.

The company separately launched Fitbit Premium, which will give its users personalized coaching including health reports, workouts and sleep features at a cost of \$9.99 per month, beginning September. Versa 2 and Fitbit Premium are steps to upsell to its existing base of 27 million users by adding more features, according to Scott Searle from Roth Capital Partners. Searle added that

Fitbit Premium provides sleep guidance and insights enabled by 10.5 billion nights of sleep data gathered from its previous models that give it an edge over Apple's watches.

Fitbit provides five days of battery life on an average against Apple's watches that only have a day of battery life and loses sleep data as it is charged overnight, he added. The San Francisco-based wearables pioneer, which has seen its shares sink in the past two years, has been looking for new avenues to boost sales.

Last week, it signed a contract with the Singapore government to provide fitness trackers and services in a health program it said could reach up to 1 million users.

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Boris Johnson Is Suspending Parliament. What's Next for Brexit?

The British prime minister's latest move effectively dares his opponents to unite against him.

(News Agencies)- With two months to go before Britain is due to exit the European Union, the country is mired in political dysfunction; its political leaders agree on little, if anything; and the terms on which Britain will leave the EU are yet to be agreed on.

Now, then, seems like the perfect time for Boris Johnson to up the stakes even further.

The prime minister went to the queen today to request that Parliament be suspended, a rare move that tightens the political calendar, reducing the number of days lawmakers have to debate Brexit and other measures. The House of Commons returns from its summer recess next week, and Johnson has effectively dared his opponents to unite against him in a matter of days-or cede control of the Brexit timetable to him.

Johnson says he is willing to see Britain leave the EU without a deal entirely, a scenario that his government's own analysis

states would lead to interruptions in food and medicine supply chains. His opponents have raised the possibility of a temporary national-unity government to postpone the October 31 deadline for Britain to withdraw from the bloc. Both are willing to face another election, Britain's third in four years.

How might the coming weeks play out? Here are three of the main scenarios.

No Confidence Leading to Caretakers

Among the main options available to anti-Brexit lawmakers and the opposition is to pass a vote of no confidence in Johnson's government. Were the prime minister to lose, then the parliamentary arithmetic would be vital to deciding what happens.

Under the Fixed-Term Parliaments Act, which outlines the government's next steps if a no-confidence-vote motion is passed, the government would

grind to a halt for 14 days, during which it would fall on the leader of the opposition-in this case, Labour Party Leader Jeremy Corbyn-to try to form a government.

This wouldn't be easy. Corbyn would need the support of a host of smaller parties such as the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National Party, the Green Party, and the Welsh nationalist party Plaid Cymru-all of which, like Labour, oppose Britain leaving the EU without a deal. None of these groups has ruled out establishing a temporary unity government to prevent a no-deal exit by requesting more time to negotiate.

But not all of them are keen on putting Corbyn, who is popular with his party's base but attracts skepticism among the wider public, in charge. In a letter to the Labour leader this week, Liberal Democrat Leader Jo Swinson warned that putting Corbyn in Downing Street would alienate lawmakers who oppose



a no-deal Brexit, and urged him to consider nominating an alternative leader, such as the longtime Conservative lawmaker Ken Clarke or the longtime Labour lawmaker Harriet Harman. Since the Fixed-Term Parliaments Act doesn't stipulate who should lead a temporary government-only that they be able to command confidence in the House of Commons-this would be possible. (If 14 days pass and no government of national unity is formed, it then falls back to Johnson to call for an election.)

A government of national unity-even an explicitly temporary one-is extremely rare. "The last time

it was done was in 1940, when there was a coalition formed in order to fight the Second World War," Tim Bale, a politics professor at Queen Mary University of London, told us. Whether the prospects of preventing a no-deal Brexit can overcome party politics is still unclear.

A Fall Election

In a second scenario, either Parliament or the courts manage to bind Johnson's hands, preventing him from pursuing a no-deal Brexit. Unable to chart his own course, the prime minister could, then, trigger an election. Lawmakers have limited time and few constitutional means to do this, though.

What the Amazon's fires mean for its animals



(News Agencies)- As flames burn through Brazil's rainforest, its inhabitants are at risk of losing their homes. The fires pose a serious threat to the Amazon's delicate balance of ecosystems, putting pressure on already endangered species of animals.

Expect a significant loss of wildlife, says Roberto Troya, Vice President for Latin America and the Caribbean at the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). The Amazon contains one in 10 known species on earth, including at least 40,000 plant species and more than 400 mammal, 300 reptile, 400

amphibian and 3,000 freshwater fish species, according to the WWF.

Not adapted to cope with fire While it is impossible to know which species are at risk until scientists assess the size and distribution of the fires and animal populations, we already know that animals native to the Amazon are not adapted to cope with such blazes.

Mazeika Sullivan, an ecologist and environmental scientist from Ohio State University who has done fieldwork in the Colombian Amazon, tells CNN that many of the animals that inhabit the rainforest "have not evolved with

fire in their evolutionary backdrop." This will make it harder for them to cope, compared to some North American species who have adapted to ecosystems where fires are commonplace, he says. The North American black-backed woodpecker, for instance, is a fire-adapted bird which preys on wood-boring beetles which inhabit burned trees. "We know (the Amazon fires) will have a large effect on multiple populations of different animals," Sullivan tells CNN, adding that the fires could put pressure on species that are already endangered, such as the white-cheeked spider monkey, Milton's titi monkey and Mura's saddleback tamarin.

As hollow standing trees burn, the mammal and bird species that nest in their cavities are displaced, with nowhere to go, according to Germán Mejía, a biologist with the Amazon Conservation Team, a non-profit organization that works to conserve the Amazon's biodiversity.

The destruction of trees with fruits that serve as a food source will

also translate "into a reduction in the number of species of birds, primates and other animals that feed on them," says Mejía.

Not all can run away, either. "There will be so many organisms that just can't get out of harm's way, or that are caught up in the smoke and the flames," Sullivan says. Whether or not an animal can escape depends on the unique traits of each species. Those that are more mobile will do better in the short-term, such as large cats, capybaras, birds of prey.

But in the long-term, even the more agile species will suffer when species lower down the food chain disperse or perish. Passing loss up the food chain One example is the jaguar, which preys on a range of animals from capybaras to aquatic organisms, according to the WWF. All of those are at risk of habitat loss due to the fires, threatening the jaguar's food supply.

Even before the fires began this year, the WWF estimated that the Amazonian jaguar was in danger. Jaguars in the Amazon have been killed by ranchers because they prey on cattle,

according to the WWF. Ranchers have also been known to start fires in the Amazon to clear land for agricultural purposes, shrinking the big cat's territory.

"The jaguar is losing a lot of its habitat," Troya says, blaming "the expansion of the agricultural frontier." Lincoln Muniz Alves, a researcher at Brazil's Space Research Center's Earth System Science Center, previously told CNN that man-made fires can be difficult to stop, because fire is "a traditional part of tropical agriculture to clean agricultural land, grazing land."

In 2014, when Brazil's Environment Ministry updated the Official National List of Endangered species, it estimated that 1,173 animal species were threatened, 318 critically endangered, 406 in danger, and 448 vulnerable. The ministry also said that one of the main threats to was "habitat loss due to agricultural expansion." According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species, the jaguar is "near threatened."

What Happens When You Don't Pay a Hospital Bill

As Americans sink under medical expenses, debt collectors go to great-and-sometimes strange-lengths to collect.

On March 8, 2011, Joclyn Krevat, an occupational therapist in New York, was sitting at her computer when she received a most unusual LinkedIn request. The wording was the familiar: "I'd like to add you to my professional network." The sender was familiar, too, but not for the reason Krevat expected. It was from a debt collector.

Karen Pollack, the head of a debt-collections practice called KP Recovery Solutions, had been trying to collect on some medical bills Krevat had recently incurred for a heart transplant. Krevat's debts, which were reviewed by The Atlantic, made up plot points in the worst kind of American health-care horror story. In December 2009, Krevat, who was 32 at the time, thought she was coming down with the flu. Instead, she was admitted to the hospital and diagnosed with giant cell myocarditis, a severe

inflammatory heart disease that can lead to heart failure. After seven weeks on life support, a heart became available, and she had a transplant. For a year afterward, she wasn't able to return to work.

Krevat's husband was a teacher, and Krevat had good insurance through him. But some of the doctors who treated her turned out to be out-of-network-a situation she couldn't control, because she did not know when a new heart would become available. She estimates that if she had paid every bill that was sent to her, the total would have been about \$50,000. The LinkedIn request was an extreme example of what happens when medical bills go unpaid. Even bills incurred in an emergency can be sent to debt collectors or sold to debt buyers, who will attempt to collect on them however they can-including,

perhaps, through America's largest professional social network. (Pollack claims the request was an error.)

To Krevat, the LinkedIn request was almost funny, in the laugh-till-you-cry sense. She remembers thinking, Is this lady stalking me or does she really think we'd be good in each others' professional networks? "It was just more evidence that I was in this bizarre world of receiving bills I shouldn't be responsible for," Krevat told me.

Krevat's bills were just a drop in the American medical-debt ocean. About 43 million Americans have unpaid medical debt ding their credit, and half of all overdue debt on Americans' credit reports is from medical expenses, according to a Consumer Financial Protection Bureau study from 2014. The debt typically comes from out-of-network doctors who people



thought were in-network, hospital stays, or ambulance rides. About one in six Americans received a surprise out-of-network medical bill in 2017 after being treated in a hospital, even though they had insurance, according to Kaiser Health News.

In an emailed statement, the American Hospital Association told me, "Hospitals and health systems treat all patients who come through their doors, around the clock and regardless of their ability to pay. They work closely with uninsured and low-income patients on their individual bills, including discussing financial-assistance options with them."

Krevat's bills began to arrive while she was still being treated at Columbia University Irving Medical Center. One came from one of the hospital's doctors, Mathew R. Williams, for \$9,000. Another came from a doctor named Aziz Ghaly for \$17,418. A few months later, a separate invoice from Weill Cornell Physicians said she owed \$22,464. Williams, who now works for New York University Langone Health, told me over email that decisions about billing and insurance participation were made by Columbia University Irving Medical Center, not by individual providers.

Ground reality in Kashmir



Since August 5, when the government revoked Jammu & Kashmir's special status, all landline and mobile phones and Internet connectivity has been snapped across the Kashmir Valley.

Is there a curfew in the Kashmir Valley?

Security personnel on the ground often talk about a "curfew" and the need for "curfew passes" but officials insist there is no curfew. Restrictions under Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which bars the assembly of four or more people in public places, are in force in most places and authorities are issuing what are known as "movement passes" to media personnel, government employees, health care professionals, and those who need to travel for urgent reasons. However, it is not easy to obtain these "movement passes".

How extensive is the communications blackout?

Since August 5, when the government revoked Jammu & Kashmir's special status, all landline and mobile phones and Internet connectivity has been snapped across the Kashmir Valley. Landlines have been restored in some parts of Srinagar and other places that haven't witnessed any disturbances but function only intermittently, for a few hours every day. There are no indications that mobile Internet connectivity will be restored soon.

Advertisements in local newspapers have become a popular means of conveying information including announcements such as deaths, postponement of weddings or

business activities. Arrangements have made for making brief phone calls at the deputy commissioner's office and police stations and for people to receive information about travel arrangements.

Cable television networks have been snapped at some places and people are facing difficulties in recharging their direct-to-home (DTH) services.

Are shops and business establishments open in the Kashmir Valley?

There are no official restrictions on the functioning of business establishments but most shops and commercial outlets, except pharmacies, doctors' clinics and small grocery stores and vegetable and fruit kiosks, are not open. There are reports of protestors forcibly closing shops though HT reporters saw several shops open in the interior areas of some suburbs of Srinagar over the past weekend. Some outlets, such as restaurants, are functioning with a "half shutter"

- the front entrance is only partially open to facilitate the entry of customers.

Are schools and educational institutions open?

Only about 190 of the 930-odd schools in Srinagar have been reopened but attendance has been as low as 10%. Parents are reluctant to send their children to school and many prominent privately run schools in the city remain closed. Students were expected to return to Kashmir University this week after the summer break but there is uncertainty about students from rural areas returning to the city for classes.

Is there public transport?

Dozens of auto-rickshaws can be seen on the roads of Srinagar though other forms of public transport are yet to return. It is also not easy to travel from Srinagar to other parts of the Kashmir Valley as very few owners of taxis or other vehicles are willing to make long journeys,

especially through areas that have witnessed stone-pelting and other protests.

The government has declined to share official figures, citing non-availability of centralised data. However, information from multiple independent sources suggests that between 2,500 and 3,000 people have been detained, including three former chief ministers, a host of political leaders, prominent citizens and businesspeople. Most of the political detainees are under house arrest in their homes or are being held in hotels such as Centaur Hotel.

What is the casualty figure?

There is no data from the administration on casualty figures. Again, information from people familiar with the matter suggests some 60 to 130 people have been injured, including some who sustained pellet injuries during skirmishes between local residents and security forces in some areas of Srinagar.

Rs 1.76 lakh crore bonus from RBI gives govt options on budget



The Reserve Bank of India's board approved the record payout on Monday, which includes a dividend of 1.23 trillion rupees and 526.4 billion rupees from its surplus capital, according to a statement.

The government is deciding whether to use a 1.76 trillion-rupee (\$24.4 billion) windfall from the central bank to reduce its borrowing or provide a stimulus to an economy that's slowing sharply.

The Reserve Bank of India's board approved the record payout on Monday, which includes a dividend of 1.23 trillion rupees

and 526.4 billion rupees from its surplus capital, according to a statement. The dividend payment includes 280 billion rupees already transferred to the government in February.

The transfer -- which rivals the stimulus that some Group of 20 nations pumped into their economies during the global financial crisis -- comes amid a

slowdown in India's growth to a five-year low, depressed consumer spending and reports of tens of thousands of job losses in the auto industry.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman last week announced various measures to spur growth, including hastening the capital infusion into state-run lenders. At the same time, she's trying to stick to a narrower fiscal deficit goal of 3.3% of gross domestic product for this year.

The Finance Ministry is keen to use the transfer to cut its budgeted borrowings, though it's yet to make a final decision on how to spend the amount,

people with knowledge of the matter said.

The government could cut its planned borrowings if it uses the funds to plug a revenue shortfall in its budget, helping Sitharaman keep the deficit under control. Or it could use the money to finance new spending, like a stimulus package, to help lift growth that's decelerated to 5.8% in the three months to March.

Sonal Varma and Aurodeep Nandi, economists at Nomura Holdings Inc., estimate India has a tax revenue shortfall of 1 trillion rupees, or 0.5% of GDP.

"Gains from excess RBI

dividends are likely to be utilized to bridge the revenue shortfall rather than engage in stimulus measures," they said in a report. Bonds rallied on the news of the RBI payout, with the yield on the benchmark 10-year security down four basis points to 6.44% after dropping 13 basis points at the market's open.

The RBI pays dividends to the government every year, based on the profits from its investments and printing of notes and coins. A snapshot of its balance sheet is due Friday, when the central bank will release its annual report.

The Amazon Is Not Earth's Lungs



As tongues of flame lapped the planet's largest tract of rain forest over the past few weeks, it has rightfully inspired the world's horror. The entire Amazon could be nearing the edge of a desiccating feedback loop, one

that could end in catastrophic collapse. This collapse would threaten millions of species, from every branch of the tree of life, each of them-its idiosyncratic splendor, its subjective animal perception of the world-

irretrievable once it's gone. This arson has been tacitly encouraged by a Brazilian administration that is determined to develop the rain forest, over the objections of its indigenous inhabitants and the world at large. Losing the Amazon, beyond representing a planetary historic tragedy beyond measure, would also make meeting the ambitious climate goals of the Paris Agreement all but impossible. World leaders need to marshal all their political and diplomatic might to save it. The Amazon is a vast, ineffable, vital, living wonder. It does not, however, supply the planet with 20 percent of its oxygen. As the

biochemist Nick Lane wrote in his 2003 book *Oxygen*, "Even the most foolhardy destruction of world forests could hardly dint our oxygen supply, though in other respects such short-sighted idiocy is an unspeakable tragedy." The Amazon produces about 6 percent of the oxygen currently being made by photosynthetic organisms alive on the planet today. But surprisingly, this is not where most of our oxygen comes from. In fact, from a broader Earth-system perspective, in which the biosphere not only creates but also consumes free oxygen, the Amazon's contribution to our planet's unusual abundance of the stuff is more or less zero. This is not a

pedantic detail. Geology provides a strange picture of how the world works that helps illuminate just how bizarre and unprecedented the ongoing human experiment on the planet really is. Contrary to almost every popular account, Earth maintains an unusual surfeit of free oxygen-an incredibly reactive gas that does not want to be in the atmosphere-largely due not to living, breathing trees, but to the existence, underground, of fossil fuels. Shanan Peters, a geologist at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, is working to understand just how it was that our lucky planet ended up with this strange surplus of oxygen.

The Land Battle Behind the Fires in the Amazon

Over the past week, as fires have sent up enough smoke to darken the skies of São Paulo, the world has rallied concern for the fate of the Amazon. At the G7 summit, leaders pledged support and \$20 million to help fight the fires, only to have that amount rejected by Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who claims that the Amazon belongs to Brazil and that the country's "sovereignty" is under threat.

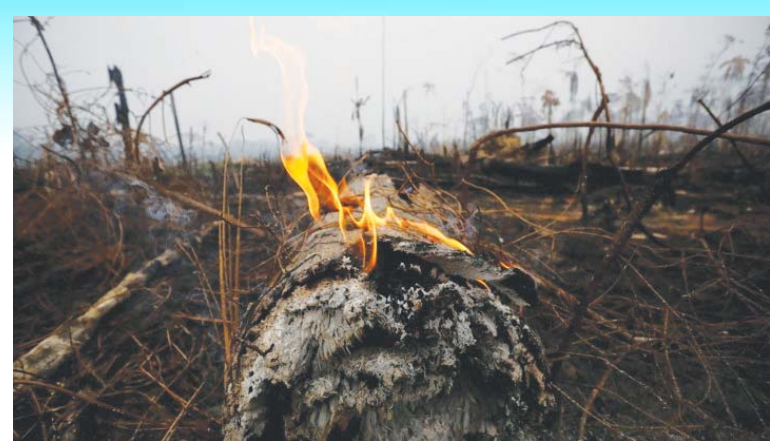
Fundamentally, this is a fight over who controls this land and how it will be treated. And for the indigenous people who live among the forests now burning, the fires are not only an acute crisis, but the vivid illustration of

a long struggle for autonomy.

"The fires could have been set criminally, yes," says Sônia Guajajara, one of the most well-known indigenous leaders in Brazil. Guajajara, like many other Brazilians, suspects that farmers and ranchers could have set the fires to clear the land, or burned indigenous territories to send a threatening message. But just as easily, she points out, in the dry season the fires could have been started by recklessness. "Right now any cigarette butt could turn into a fire," she says. Guajajara, the coordinator of the Articulation of Indigenous People of Brazil, a prominent organization that lobbies for

indigenous rights, blames the fires, in part, on weakened environmental protections and new roads, which have left the forest fragmented and even more vulnerable to flames. But she also blames Bolsonaro's policies toward the 306,000 Amazonian indigenous people, whose 422 demarcated territories, according to the Instituto Socioambiental, which monitors indigenous populations, make up 23 percent of the Brazilian Amazon.

During his campaign, Bolsonaro promised to push indigenous people to "develop"-arguing that



marking out indigenous territories for indigenous people only serves to separate them from the rest of the population, like "animals in a zoo." During a televised national address Friday night, he repeated that sentiment. "To

protect the Amazon, command and control enforcement actions are not enough. We need to give opportunity to all of this population so they can develop like the rest of the country," he said.

Cabinet eases norms for FDI in retail, allows 26% in digital media

Union Cabinet decided to allow 100 foreign investments under the automatic route for coal mining and contract manufacturing.



frequency indicators, including automobile sales.

Most analysts expect the economy to slow further in the June quarter, GDP data for which will be released on Friday. Last week, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a number of measures to boost investor sentiment and spur economic growth. "This government since 2014 has kept reforms as a part of the agenda. It is an ongoing process for us. It is not as if in this tenure, post 2019, we have forgotten the reform agenda. Not at all. Reform is a continuous process and we are treating it as a continuing

endeavour," Sitharaman said on Friday. The reforms are part of India's strategy to become a part of the global supply chain amid its disruption due to the US-China trade war. In her first Budget speech on July 5, Sitharaman proposed examining suggestions to open the doors wider to FDI in the aviation, media and insurance sectors. In single brand retail, the government on Wednesday allowed companies to conduct online retail trading prior to opening of physical stores, subject to the condition that brick and mortar stores come up within two years from the date online operations begin.

"Online sales will lead to creation of jobs in logistics, digital payments, customer care, training and product skilling," the statement said.

To provide greater flexibility and ease of operations to foreign single brand retail entities with more than 51% FDI, the Cabinet decided that all procurements made from India by the entity for that single brand shall be counted towards local sourcing of 30%, irrespective of whether the goods procured are sold in India or exported. The current cap of considering exports for five years only was removed to give an impetus to exports.

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a raft of changes to foreign direct investment (FDI) rules, easing the local sourcing norms for overseas single-brand chain stores and permitting FDI through the so-called automatic route in contract manufacturing and coal mining for open sale.

"The changes in FDI policy will

result in making India a more attractive destination, leading to benefits of increased investments, employment and growth," a Cabinet statement said. The changes come in the aftermath of a deceleration in economic growth a five-year low of 5.8% in the quarter ended March and a consumption slump signalled by high-

70 arrested in QNET scam in Telangana



Section 271 of the Companies Act-2013 for winding up Vihaan Direct Selling.

"It is informed to the public that the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) has initiated winding up proceedings against Vihaan Direct Selling Private Limited company, which is a franchise of Qnet Company and runs the Direct Selling/Multi Level Marketing Schemes in India.

The public are hereby requested not to join or enroll members into the Qnet Schemes and also not to promote its illegal scheme by remitting any money to it or its sub franchise or its

members or upliners of the scheme.

If remitted, they will be doing it at their own risk," police said in an official release on Tuesday. So far about 70 people have been arrested in about 38 cases registered against Vihaan Direct Selling Pvt. Ltd in different police stations of the Cyberabad Commissionerate.

Apart from the above, several cases have also been lodged against Vihaan Direct Selling Pvt. Ltd and its promoters in different states in India, Cyberabad police said. Qnet, in a statement refuted the police charges, saying "We

state that the subject report (by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, in respect of Vihaan Direct Selling (India) Private Limited) is fallacious and without merit and has been prepared without basis and understanding of the business we undertake. "We have challenged the said report in the appropriate judicial forum." Qnet claims to be an e-Commerce based, leading Asian direct selling company marketing a high quality products in the categories of Home Care, Personal Care, Skin Care, Health Food Supplements, Watches and Holiday Packages.

Police have warned the public not to join or enroll in any schemes offered by Vihaan Direct Selling Pvt. Ltd (sub franchise of Qnet) as the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) has initiated proceedings to wind up the direct

selling company, a charge refuted by Qnet.

Police said the Registrar of Companies (ROC) Bengaluru - had filed a petition in the National Company Law Tribunal (Bengaluru Bench) under

At 60, Fevicol sticks to quirky advertising to woo consumers

Fevicol, the adhesive brand which promoted the concept of strong bonds, has launched a heartwarming campaign after touching the 60 years milestone in its quintessential humorous execution.

Conceptualized by Ogilvy, the agency partner for over three decades, the new television campaign follows the journey of a well-made sofa which is handed over to many generations. The film showcases the strength of Fevicol while drawing parallels with the changing paradigms of Indian social and cultural scenario. The ad film is the longest by Fevicol ever and is to be aired on leading

general entertainment channels (GECs), digital platforms and supported by radio and cinema. It will also be run on video streaming platforms such as Zee5, SonyLiv and Hotstar.

Bharat Puri, managing director, Pidilite Industries Ltd said, "Fevicol is one of the rare adhesive brands to feature in the most trusted brands in Indian households. It is loved by Indians for its reliable performance as well as its earthy, humorous and contemporary advertising. The 60-year Fevicol campaign celebrates its unbreakable bond with generations of Indians."

Born in 1959, Fevicol made its television debut in 1997 with its first television ad 'Dum laga ke

haisha' featuring filmmaker Rajkumar Hirani. The tug of war visuals along with the elephant for an added effect became synonymous with the brand. The initial leg of advertising was focused on the functional aspects and it was followed by campaigns with humorous real-life scenarios and contextual references.

"The brand advertising of Fevicol has always been heartwarming bringing smile to your face. The idea was always to bring out small cultural nuances and mix it well with the bonding proposition of the brand. The simplicity of the Fevicol advertising has resonated well with consumers over the years,"



said Piyush Pandey, chief creative officer worldwide and executive chairman India, Ogilvy. Barely with dialogues, Fevicol commercials conveyed its point with strong humorous storyline and an equally strong background

score. "Fevicol's commercials often transcend languages and are submitted to the jury at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity without subtitles as well," added Pandey.

Comfort food: When you're hungry for nostalgia

There is a strong link between scents of food and emotional memory. And so, our learning history predisposes us to enjoy certain food that improves the mood and produces feelings of social connectedness, say experts.



Indian cricket captain Virat Kohli is one of the fittest athletes in the world. But even the star sportsman, whose daily diet includes grilled chicken and salmon, mashed potatoes, green vegetables, spinach, can't stay away from an occasional cheat meal from Ram's chole bhature in Rajouri Garden, Delhi. "That too I'll go to his shop and have it, not take away. By the time it comes home, it's not a bhatura

anymore. It feels like stale bread. Fresh bhatura's where you pop a hole with your finger along with some onions, mint chutney and some pepper pickle," he said during a TV show in 2017. His loving description of the dish, a combination of chana masala and bhatura (a fried bread made from flour), makes it not just his cheat meal, but also his comfort food.

There are various definitions of

comfort food, but roughly it's the kind of food that provides you with a sense of well-being, and is associated with childhood or home cooking. "Corporate life is difficult and sometimes can be all consuming... after a hard day's work, I often eat a plate of simple dal-chawal that I would often eat at home before exams while watching some soap on TV. I instantly I feel much better and re-energised," says Deepti



Srinivas who is with a consulting company in Gurgaon.

Why does Kohli or Srinivas feel good after they polish off a plate of their respective comfort food? A study conducted by Lukas Van Oudenhove of the University of Leuven in Belgium show that there are certain areas of brain that are activated by our moods response to fatty acids. So most comfort foods, such as junk food, contain a large amount of fatty acids. There is also a strong link between scents and emotional memory. "Smell of foods can evoke vivid and detailed emotional memories of our past.

Our learning history predisposes us to enjoy certain foods.... Because odour-evoked memories tend to be positive, the smell improves the mood and produces feelings of social connectedness," writes Shahram Heshmat in Psychology Today.

While there is a lot of discussion on nature's own anti-anxiety product (comfort foods), there are some foods that should not make the grade, warn nutritionists, even if they lift your mood: Junk food and sweets. "Junk foods are designed to create cravings and addiction.

Going the 'eggs'tra mile: How healthy is a meal containing eggs?

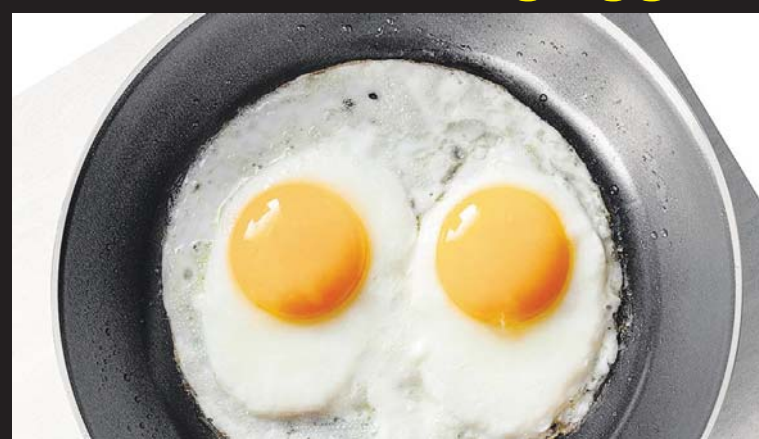
Rich in nutrients or high in cholesterol? A healthy snack or a guilty pleasure?? As research continues to fuel confusion, HT attempts to decode the egg conundrum

Why is Taron Egerton's character in the 2014 release Kingsman (also starring Colin Firth) nicknamed Eggsy? Sadly, the film doesn't ever explain. But wouldn't it be the perfect nickname for many around us, simply because of their love for eggs?

Take Delhi resident Prithvi, for example. Last month the 38-year-old returned to the treadmill after a gap of 10 years. What prompted him was not his weight - which was touching 100 kg - or any real concern over the fact that he was beginning to pant every time he negotiated the flight of stairs to his second-floor apartment in south Delhi. Nor was it with any idea to lose the growing paunch that his wife had been cribbing about for years. "I had a routine medical check-up and my blood

cholesterol level was high. Considering my weight issues, the doctor put all kinds of dietary restrictions on me, including cutting down my meat and eggs intake," says Prithvi. "I don't eat meat daily. But not having eggs was like a punishment. So I thought maybe if I lost some weight and became healthier, I could continue to have eggs," he adds with a laugh. Medical journals define cholesterol as a waxy substance in the blood, needed to build cells, among other things. It is of two kinds - high-density lipid (HDL) and low-density lipid (LDL). The problem arises when there is too much cholesterol in the blood (especially of the sticky LDL kind called bad cholesterol), which can then accumulate on the artery walls, choking them and increasing risks of heart attacks and other cardiac problems.

Root Of The Evil In his 1906 novel Love Among The Chickens, PG Wodehouse asks, "Have you ever seen a man, woman, or child who wasn't eating an egg or just going to eat an egg or just coming away from eating an egg? I tell you, the good old egg is the foundation of daily life." For years, however, this 'nature's multivitamin' as it is often referred to, for its rich store of nutrients, has been maligned because of its association with that dirty, scary 'C' word - cholesterol. A big egg (weighing about 50 gm) has about 184 mg of cholesterol, which is concentrated in the yolk. "The simplistic reasoning was that cholesterol is not good for health, it gets deposited in the arteries, egg yolk contains a high level of cholesterol, so avoid eggs," explains Dr Vikram Jaggi, director, Asthma, Chest & Allergy



Centre, Delhi. Scientists in America began researching the links between lifestyle, diet and cardiovascular diseases in humans from the 1940s. The Framingham Heart Study, under the direction of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (formerly known as the National Heart Institute) is considered as one of the pioneering researches in this field. It began in 1948 in Massachusetts to identify factors that contribute to cardiovascular disease and is still on. In 1968, the American Heart Association (AHA) announced a dietary recommendation that all

individuals should consume less than 300 mg of dietary cholesterol per day and not more than three whole eggs in a week. This American apprehension then spread to the rest of the world, depriving many an egg-lover of their favoured source of nourishment. In a 2015 article, The 50 Year Rehabilitation of the Egg, available on the National Center for Biotechnology Information website, Donald J McNamara (former director of the Egg Nutrition Center) recalls the effect the AHA guideline had on consumption.

Fashion's Isabel Toledo, creator for Michelle Obama, dies

Isabel Toledo, the Cuban American fashion designer with an avant-garde flair who created former first lady Michelle Obama's standout lemon grass-coloured sheath dress and matching overcoat for her husband's 2009 inauguration, has died.



served briefly as creative director for Anne Klein, from 2006 to 2007, put out her own scent and once designed shoes in a collaboration with Payless, among other accessories projects. The Toledos won a Cooper-Hewitt National Design Award in 2005. A more recent endeavour was the Labor of Love exhibition at the Detroit Institute of Arts, a collection of new sculptures, paintings and drawings focused on the connections between fashion and art. The colour of Obama's Toledo-created inauguration look took on a life of its own in the fashion world. Descriptions of the colour changed all day during the inauguration, leaving those who had to write about it wondering how to describe it. Was it yellow? Apple green? Toledo called it "lemon grass," a grass grown in tropical regions that has lemon-scented foliage. The plant, a favourite in Thai cooking, can be green at the top, fading toward the root into shades of pale green and yellow. "I called it 'lemon grass' because it's not yellow, it's

Isabel Toledo, the Cuban American fashion designer with an avant-garde flair who created former first lady Michelle Obama's standout lemon grass-coloured sheath dress and matching overcoat for her husband's 2009 inauguration, has died. She was 59.

Toledo died of breast cancer, her studio said in an email Monday. Further details were not immediately available.

Though she presented her first collection in 1985, Toledo's work grabbed attention after Obama wore some of her looks at the inauguration, including the lemon grass shift dress in wool and

lace. Obama had been a fan of Toledo before donning the famous outfit. Demi Moore, Debi Mazar and Debra Messing are among celebrities who have worn Toledo's creations, both on screen and on red carpets.

Toledo arrived in West New York, New Jersey, from Cuba as a teenager, later attending but not graduating from fashion college in New York. She met her collaborator and husband, the illustrator and painter Ruben Toledo, in high school.

She was an independent designer who later eschewed runways for museum exhibitions, starting in the late 1990s. She



not green," Toledo told The Associated Press at the time. She said she preferred "non-colour" colours. The fact that colours on textiles can take on changing tones is an important element when making clothes, Toledo added. "The idea that the coat and dress are gold to some, pale yellow to others ... gives that moment you happen to catch sight of it that much more depth," she said. "It gives the

wearer and the viewer much more of an individualized experience." The inauguration outfit was a big moment for Toledo, who took care at the time to praise the historic nature of the event itself. "There is nothing that comes close to this moment," Toledo told the AP. "It's not just my moment and hers, but it's the world's. It's not only what she's wearing. It's what the moment represents."

Style Trends 2019: Intriguing interplay of sheer and texture

Transparency is reigning in fashion like never before! Here's how you could carry off this tricky trend.

In 1959, when Marilyn Monroe sang I Wanna Be Loved By You, she wore a see-through, silver sequined dress that became quite a rage. She said, 'The body is meant to be seen, not all covered up.' True to the

fashionista's word, an interesting interplay of transparency and opacity - is making rounds in the fashion spectacle this season. From skin bearing sheer panelled dresses accentuated with feather to fantastical lace dresses and separates, this diaphanous fabric has made a mark on the global runways. From Valentino to Victoria Beckham, Roksanda Ilincic to Ralph and Russo, Pallavi Mohan to Anita Dongre sheer in myriad forms has been used to construct panoply of ensembles this season. Bollywood stars such as Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Alia Bhatt have all joined the bandwagon of this ecstasy and psychedelic trend.

Burgeoning in Indian high-street and luxury sector

both, this trend is feminine, sensual, romantic and classic. However, getting it right is tricky say designers. "The most important attribute to consider when it comes to acing sheer is the innerwear. It can make or break a look. Don't wear the same sheer fabric inner, avoid a net bralet with a mesh top - go for Lizibizi or knit inners. Also, make



sure that the quality of the inner fabric is good," explains designer Shruti Sancheti. Agreeing to this designer Pallavi Mohan adds, "The length of the inner is equally important. A mid-thigh inner works well or a short dress but not for a long one. Also, the fit of the bralet or lower should be good. One can wear a lace bra or a sports bra below a sheer top." Best sheer fabrics one should go for are organza, tulle, chanderi, net and lace. Moreover, the colours used inside a see-through top should be thought through. "If the top is detailed

with embroidery or prints, the inner should be cohesive to it. The easiest is to go tone on tone while layering the inner, in case you are up to experimenting, trying prints or textures underneath," suggests Sancheti. If not a full sheer dress, one can go for transparent accents and separates similar to the likes of Ralph and Russo and Alexandre Vauthier. "Sheer accents can be balanced with sheer sleeves or neckline rather than an all-transparent look. Make sure you wear the right kind of sheer on the right occasions."

Les Misérables review

Not revolutionary, but BBC show makes up for Hugh Jackman's unbearable film

Les Misérables review: The BBC's new miniseries, starring Dominic West, Lily Collins and David Oyelowo, erases the foul stench of Hugh Jackman's unbearable 2012 musical. Rating: 4/5.

Les Misérables

Director - Tom Shankland

Cast - Dominic West, David Oyelowo, Lily Collins, Olivia Colman, Adeel Akhtar

Rating - 4/5

The new BBC adaptation of Les Misérables is a dependably handsome period drama; one that brings an unexpected intimacy to Victor Hugo's sweeping epic about redemption and revolution.

Starring an excellent cast lead by Dominic West, David Oyelowo and Lily Collins, the new Les Mis instantly erases the foul stench of director Tom Hooper's unbearable 2012 adaptation, which remains, even years later, one of only four films I have walked out of in my entire life.

As with most television (and even film) adaptations of classic novels - especially ones that have been adapted previously as

well - I spent a significant amount of time wondering why we need a new Les Misérables at all. How is a story about the rich at war with the poor, the young at war with the old, and men at war with women; all set against the backdrop of possible war, relevant to the modern world? But then, I answered my own question. At one point, a character even says, "It is a very serious matter making accusations against important public figures." And I wondered no more.

By forcing these timeless characters to relive their tragedies yet again, Davies and director Tom Shankland have provided a necessary lesson in morality for a modern audience in severe need of one. And a tremendous reason for its success is the performances of its central trio of actors.

As Jean Valjean, Dominic West is impossible to take your eyes

away from. Because of his epic character arc, West essentially gets the opportunity to play not one, but five different people. As a prisoner sentenced to two decades of hard labour, simply for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his hungry sister, West brings a feral mania that feels all too real, especially after the Broadway unbelievability of Hugh Jackman's performance in the 2012 film. And as an older, guilt-ridden man trying to make amends for his past sins, West is heartbreaking, and ultimately inspirational.

As Valjean's eternal foil, Inspector Javert, David Oyelowo brings a much needed emotional complexity to a character that has largely been reduced to a symbol of villainy over the years. Javert in the show is a man conflicted by his own moral code, and is shown to be in a constant struggle with it, as the world around him evolves. It must also



be pointed out that the roles of Javert and the dunce Thénardier as any to point out that Les Misérables is, by no stretch of colour; we shouldn't miss a chance to applaud race-blind casting when we see it.

But as terrific as West and Akhtar and the Academy Award-winning Olivia Colman as the cruel Thénardiers), it was Lily Collins' gut-wrenching performance as Fantine that left me completely gobsmacked. With such little screen-time and not a note to sing, Collins injects an admirable dignity into a character that has been summarily stripped off it.

And now would be as good a time as any to point out that Les Misérables is, by no stretch of the imagination, a pleasing experience. If it doesn't send you into a spiral of disillusionment, it will, almost certainly, put you in a thoroughly bad mood.

Anyone can show kindness to good people; but it takes a special selflessness to show decency to monsters - especially when you know, for certain, that you cannot expect the same from them. This begs the obvious question: Do monsters deserve kindness at all? Can they be redeemed? Are human beings inherently decent?

Angel Has Fallen movie review

Gerard Butler returns in a less bloated but just as boring sequel

Angel Has Fallen review: This sequel to Gerard Butler's films Olympus Has Fallen and London Has Fallen may be a little more woke but is just as unimaginative and boring as before.



Angel Has Fallen

Director: Ric Roman Waugh

Cast: Gerard Butler, Morgan Freeman

Rating: 2/5

Going into Angel Has Fallen, having watched the first two films in the franchise, you'd wonder why the studio decided to release this film one month and 19 days after July 4. The franchise is just what a deluded American needs and hopes to watch over US' Independence Day weekend-a righteous president, his loyal subjects, brown and yellow terrorists,

soldiers unquestioningly laying down their lives, and all of it wrapped up with a sweet speech about how God should bless America no matter what godforsaken things it does to others.

However, it seems a lesson has been learnt in the last three years since the last iteration released. The same old, John Abraham brand of nationalism will no longer cut it with the new woke crowd. It's time to self reflect and introduce a more realistic villain-capitalist greed and corruption. But even with a white villain and

a half-hearted attempt to humanize Gerard Butler's immortal special agent Mike Banning, the film still feels shallow and quite a drag to sit through. The special effects and the action has come a long way since the days of Olympus Has Fallen (2013) or London Has Fallen (2016) but in its essence, the film is still very predictable. This time, America proves it's loyal to no one when it turns its back on Banning, accusing him of attempting to murder the President, played by Morgan Freeman who has risen in ranks considerably since the last time we saw him.

Like Ethan Hunt recently or Jason Bourne before him, Banning decides to go rogue. He gets backstabbed, finds friends in unexpected places and throws a few grenades here and there.

The film often turns into a pyromaniac's wet dream with giant explosions, helped with the Dolby Atmos surround sound. Ah but don't lose hope, ye seekers of substance in dumb action films. To give our Bhai-like special agent hero a little more character, director Ric Roman Waugh gives him insomnia and

PTSD. The flinching and the shaking doesn't let him stand straight in normal life. However, all of it suspiciously goes away as soon as he is dodging bullets, firing guns at terrorists or stabbing someone a dozen times. Your issues may be worse and more troublesome than you are showing it to be, Banning.



Kareena Kapoor serves up sizzling, smoky new look as she shoots for Dance India Dance

Check out Kareena Kapoor's latest pics as she gets all decked up for another episode of Dance India Dance.



Kareena Kapoor is the hottest woman on television right now and she leaves no opportunity to keep the title. The actor shot for her dance reality show Dance India Dance again on Wednesday and debuted another stunning new look.

Kareena looked ravishing in a blue off-shoulder dress, held together by a large green drape, tied at the waist. She opted for dark, smoky make-up and let her hair loose. The dress is by Beirut based designer, Ziad Germanos and her look is styled by Mohit

Rai. The actor judges the show with rapper Raftaar and choreographer Bosco Martis. When Kareena was shooting for Angrezi Medium in London, she would fly to Mumbai every week to shoot for the show. She is now back in

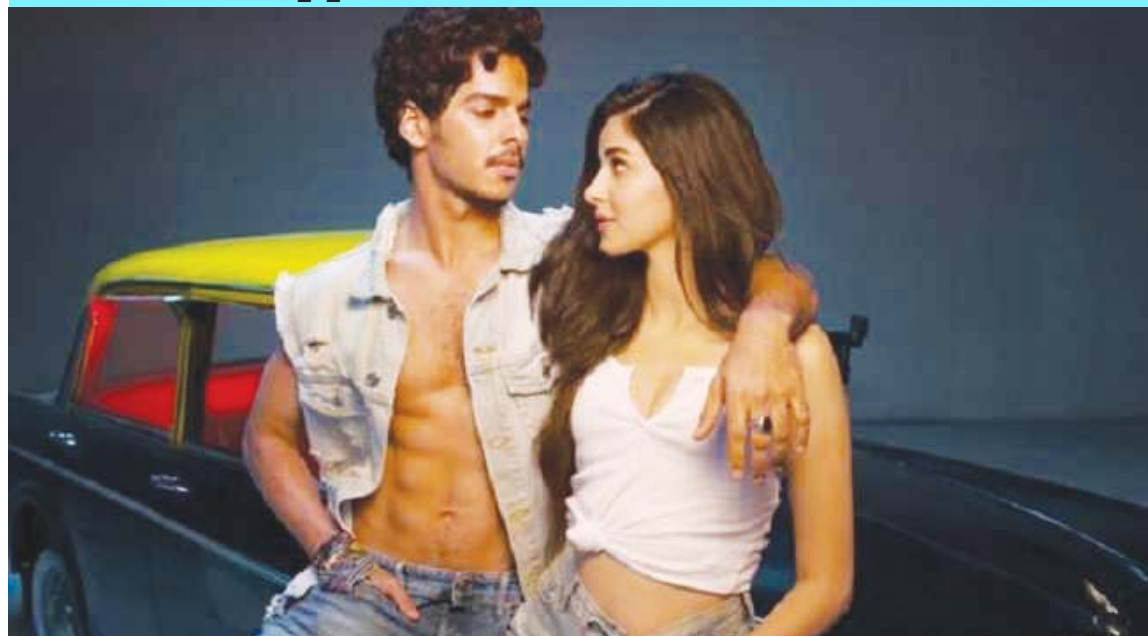


Mumbai full time after wrapping up the film. Kareena closed the Lakme Fashion Week in Mumbai on Sunday as she turned showstopper for designer duo Gauri and Nainika. She wore an all-black off-shoulder ensemble with layers of silk and net. She completed the look with bold lip colour to emphasize on Lakme's theme this season #FreeYourLips focused at freedom of expression. "The theme, for me, is about freedom for women to make the choice of

what they want to do, what they want to wear or how they want to live their life. I think first thing that comes to my mind is freedom," Kareena said at the fashion week.

Kareena will next be seen in Good News, starring opposite Akshay Kumar and slated to release on December 27. The film will bring back the actor to the silver screen after a year-long break. The film is about a couple who are trying to conceive.

Khaali Peeli first look: Ananya Panday to play 'an item' opposite Ishaan Khatter in her next

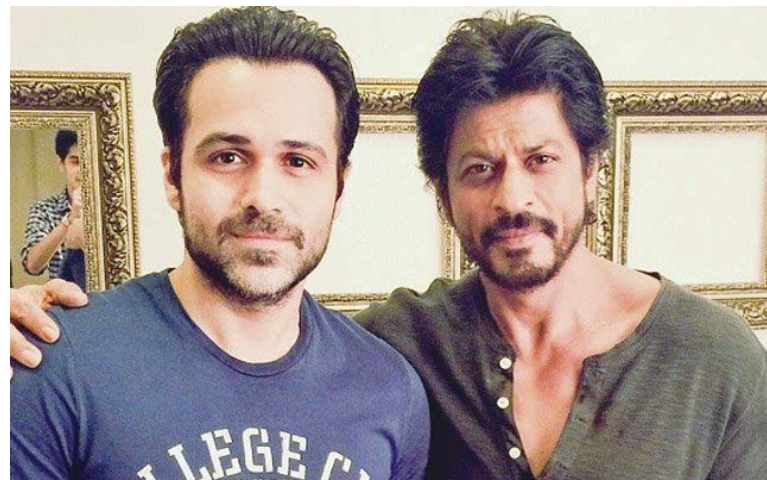


Actors Ananya Panday and Ishaan Khatter are set to be paired opposite each other in their next film titled Khaali Peeli. The film will be co-produced by Ali Abbas Zafar of Bharat fame. Ishaan shared the first look of the film on Instagram with the caption in Hindi, "Ek dedh shana, ek item, ek taxi aur ek raat ki kahani. Apun la rahe hain 2020 ki sabse rapchup picture. Its time for It's time for #KhaaliPeeli (A street-smart guy, an item, a

taxi and the story of one night. We are bringing the most awesome film of 2020. Its time for Khaali Peeli)." Ishaan can be seen flaunting his six pack abs with a stern look on his face as he stands with his hand around Ananya's shoulder, who is in a crop top and shorts. The two are leaning on to a taxi parked behind them. The film seems to be based on the lead pair's one night journey. It is expected to be set in Mumbai, where the

taxis are popularly called 'kaali peeli (black and yellow cabs)'. The film will go on the floors on September 11 and is scheduled to hit theatres on June 12, 2020. Maqbool Khan will direct the movie to be co-produced by Zee Studios, Ali Abbas Zafar and Himanshu Mehra. Ananya made her Bollywood debut with Student of the Year 2 this year, opposite Tiger Shroff. She is currently working on her next, Pati Patni Aur Woh.

Shah Rukh Khan on Bard of Blood 'Wanted to transform Emraan Hashmi's image from serial kisser to serious kicker'



Actor Shah Rukh Khan, who has backed the upcoming Netflix India original Bard of Blood, says the team wanted to turn around the image of its lead star, Emraan Hashmi. The seven-episode series, based on Bilal Siddiqi's bestselling book of the same name, features Emraan as an Indian intelligence agent. "Initially, we were joking about how Emraan's image is going to turn a serial kisser to a serious kicker. Emraan is a tough guy. Kabir Anand's character is that of someone who is not in-your-face tough, but has a macho personality and works with his mind plus there is a physical

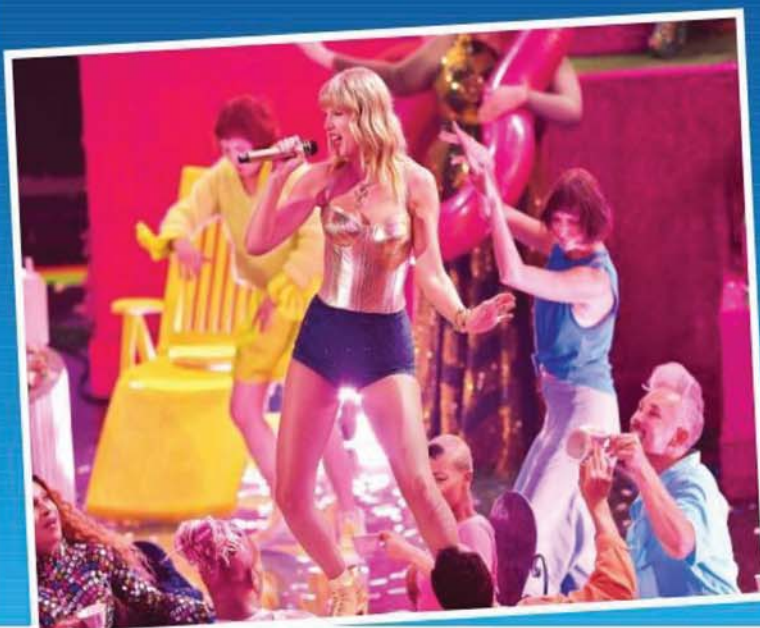
ability of an action hero and I think that mix perfectly fits Emraan," Shah Rukh said in a statement. The 53-year-old star believes Emraan is a wonderful actor and said he "likes his zone of being extremely underplayed easy when he does it". A brilliant agent who served under the recently murdered Sadiq Sheikh, Kabir was expelled from IIV because of a disastrous mission in Balochistan a few years ago. He must now revisit those ghosts, avenge his mentor and face his deadliest enemies back in Balochistan while racing against time to save the four agents of IIV who are held as hostages.

STYLE'S LOUD PITCH

Stars put their best leg forward at MTV Video Music Awards 2019



US-Cuban singer-songwriter Camila Cabello.



US singer-songwriter Taylor Swift performs on stage during 2019 MTV Video Music Awards at the Prudential Center in Newark, New Jersey.



Taylor Swift



Normani Kordei Hamilton

THEY'RE among the most fashion-forward stars in showbiz.

And Taylor Swift, Gigi Hadid, and Bella Hadid led the red carpet style at the 2019 MTV Video Music Awards.

All three ladies hit a fashion high note as they made their way inside the Prudential Center in Newark, New Jersey on Monday, for a night of honoring the best music videos of the year.

Taylor, 29, rarely disappoints on the fashion front, and Monday was no different for the superstar.

The exceptionally stylish hit-maker strutted her way down the red carpet in a pair of skin-tight black boots, accented with tiny glittering specks.

She teamed the ensemble with an extra skimpy hot pink romper, which was largely masked by her eye-catching multicoloured jacket, covering the majority of the tiny one-piece.

The artsy blazer brought an extra playful touch to the look.

Designed in a colorful pattern of gold buckles and pins, the boxy blazer cinched into her svelte waist while modestly dropping to her upper thigh.

Taylor was definitely not the only guest putting their wild style sense on display, with the red carpet becoming a who's who of fashionable celebs.



US model Gigi Hadid (L) and her sister model Bella Hadid (R)

Golden goddesses Gigi, 24, and Bella Hadid, 22, looked absolutely breathtaking.

Accentuating her svelte figure, Gigi wore a nude tube top, glossy trousers, and a string of gold necklaces.

Bella, meanwhile, wore a summery two-piece dress with over-



Miley Cyrus

alls that put her toned torso on display.

Bringing the va va voom to the red carpet was Heidi Klum, who got heads turning in a busty black mini with strappy heels.

The newlywed flashed a huge smile while showcasing her fabulous legs in the extra short ensemble.

Juice hit-maker Lizzo was among the many stars mixing fun with fashion for the awards show.

The *Good As Hell* songstress sizzled in a red 'Siren' dress complete with matching feather boa.

The VMAs is the place where stars can take their fashion game to the next level, and Halsey was among the many red carpet highlights embracing their chance to do just that.

—Daily Mail

The time a jet-lagged Elon Musk made Alibaba's Jack Ma sound grounded



(News Agencies) - Elon Musk and Jack Ma matched wits publicly for the first time. And boy, they didn't disappoint. An onstage debate between China's richest man and the Tesla Inc. boss left a largely Chinese audience both awestruck and dumbfounded as the pair sparred over everything from the existence of aliens to the preservation of human consciousness. Musk, alternating between tech visionary and larger-than-life Bond villain, argued that AI will soon surpass the human race; that civilization may end and hence humankind needed to explore the cosmos (specifically Mars); and

Cond Page on 20

Ilhan Omar Denies Alleged Affair with Democrat Political Consultant



(News Agencies) - Freshman Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN) on Tuesday denied allegations made by a Washington, D.C., mother that her Democrat consultant husband engaged in an extramarital affair with the far-left "Squad" member in recent months. According to divorce filings obtained by the New York Post, Dr. Beth Jordan Mynett alleges her spouse, Tim Mynett, confessed to having an affair with Omar in April. Further, Dr. Mynett alleges her cheating husband made a "shocking declaration of love" for the Minnesota Democrat and dumped her soon after, show filings submitted to the Superior Court of the District of Columbia on Tuesday. The development follows after a Daily Mail report stating Omar no longer lives with her husband, Ahmed Hirsi, who once worked as a senior policy aide for her. In a sit-down interview with WCCO, Omar denied Dr. Mynett's explosive claims and refused to address any

Cond Page on 20

Senior DOJ official resigns after viewing porn on work computer



(News Agencies) - A senior Justice Department official resigned after being found to have watched porn on a government computer, according to newly released summary of an investigation by DOJ's inspector general. The summary does not name the now-former deputy assistant attorney general, nor does it say when the actions occurred. According to the summary released Thursday, the official was seen watching porn and the inspector general later found a number of sexually explicit images had been accessed on the two computers issued to the official. The official initially lied to investigators about having viewed the material on his work computer, the IG stated, but in a second interview "ultimately admitted" that he "may have intentionally accessed pornographic websites using government computers." The Justice Department decided not to prosecute the official, who resigned before the investigation was concluded, the summary says.

Pak Sikh girl forcibly converted, married off family seeks Imran Khan's help



(News Agencies) - A Pakistani Sikh girl, who was missing for a number of days, surfaced on Thursday after she was forcibly converted to Islam and made to marry a Muslim man in Nankana Sahib area of Lahore. Her family has lodged an FIR and in a video appeal urged Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan to take action against the culprits. A video of the girls has also surfaced where she was forcibly converted to Islam and named as Ayesha. The 'maulvi' also arranged her marriage with a Muslim man. In Pakistan, many such incidents are regularly reported where Hindu, Sikh and Christian girls are forcibly converted to Islam and married to Muslim men. The 19-year-old, who is the daughter of a 'granthi' (priest) of Gurudwara Tambu Sahib, was allegedly

Cond Page on 20

Ex-NYPD detectives to get probation for having sex with young woman in custody



(News Agencies) Two former New York detectives will serve no prison time after pleading guilty to bribe taking and official misconduct for having sex in a police van with a young woman they arrested and released, prosecutors said Thursday. Prosecutors had requested that Eddie Martins, 39, and Richard Hall, 34, receive sentences ranging from one to three years in prison, Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez said in a statement. But State Supreme Court Justice Danny Chun indicated each defendant will be sentenced in October to five years probation, according to Gonzalez. The plea agreement was offered by the court -- without prosecutors' consent -- because the defendants pleaded guilty to the entire indictment, the district attorney said. In court, the judge said he agreed to probation because prosecutors had demonstrated that violent felony counts against the defendants -- including rape charges that were eventually dismissed -- couldn't be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. "The credibility of the victim, or the complainant, in this case was seriously, seriously questionable, at best," said Chun, according to a court transcript obtained by CNN.

Cond Page on 20