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Why we love Shah Rukh Khan: He's one of us



STORY ON page 30

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How the British impoverished India

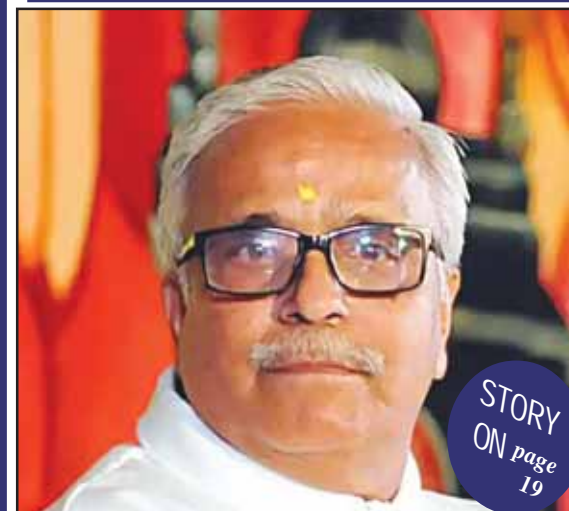
When the Crown took over from the Company, from 1861 a clever system was developed under which all of India's financial gold and forex earnings from its fast-rising commodity export surplus with the world, was intercepted and appropriated by Britain



STORY ON page 18

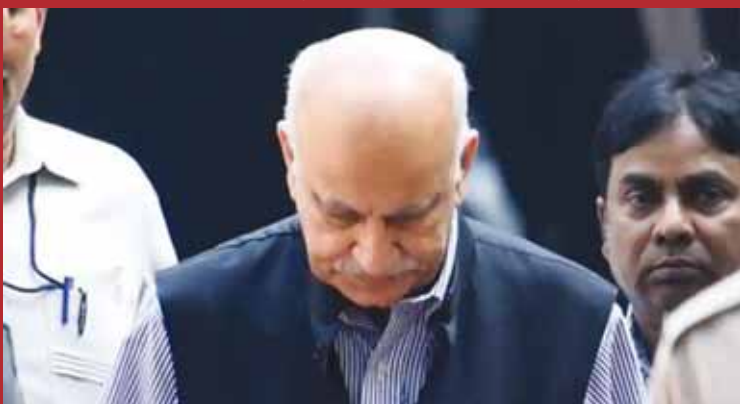
RSS hints at another 'mass agitation' for Ram temple

RSS hinted at a fresh "mass agitation" akin to 1992 for constructing a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh



STORY ON page 19

'Consensual relationship': MJ Akbar denies rape charges by US-based journalist



(News Agencies) Former minister MJ Akbar came out with a fresh statement on Friday, this time to counter to US-based editor of a leading media house who has accused him of raping her in India 23 years ago. He said it was a "consensual relationship". Akbar's wife also backed him on the rebuttal, insisting that two journalists who had accused her husband of sexual harassment, would often be at her house, "happily drinking and dining with us". "Neither carried the haunted look of victims of sexual assault..." (Contd on page 18)

Dassault gave Reliance Rs 284 cr to secure Rafale deal: Rahul Gandhi

(News Agencies) French aircraft manufacturer Dassault gave Anil Ambani's Reliance Defence ?284 crore as the "first installment of kickbacks" in order to secure the deal for Rafale fighter jets, Congress president Rahul Gandhi alleged on Friday.

Addressing a news conference at the Congress headquarters in Delhi, Gandhi said Prime Minister Narendra Modi "will not survive if the huge corruption" in the purchase of fighter jets was investigated even as he also blamed the Dassault CEO. Ambani's Reliance Infrastructure said the Congress's allegations were "blatant lies". "It is deeply unfortunate that the Reliance Group and its chairman, Mr Anil Ambani (Contd on page 19)

Congress' new social media strategy yielding results for Rahul Gandhi

Data from Facebook-owned social media tool called CrowdTangle shows how Congress president Rahul Gandhi's Facebook page has been inching closer to the popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's page, even though its number of page 'likes' is significantly lower.



(News Agencies) When Congress's Madhya Pradesh chief Kamal Nath sat with party president Rahul Gandhi and senior MP and chief of the Congress's campaign committee in Madhya Pradesh, Jyotiraditya Scindia, for dinner at Indore's famous Chappan Bazar, little did he realise that it was going live on Facebook. The dinner video — to showcase the casual and relaxed side of Rahul Gandhi — was a larger part of the Congress's new social media strategy to attract more eyeballs (Contd on page 19)

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Morticia (Sophie Turner) & Gomez Addams' (Joe Jonas) wish a Happy Halloween



Preity Zinta was 'Bringing up my wicked side ! ?? Wishing y'all a super fun spook-tacular #HalloweenNight filled with magical surprises!'

Hollywood and Bollywood stars celebrated the festival of Halloween



Heidi Klum and beau Tom Kaulitz get top prize this year for their Halloween costumes. They dressed up as our favourite ogres, Princess Fiona and Shrek.



Neil Patrick Harris and family (top) welcomed 'foolish mortals' to a 'happily haunted' Halloween on Instagram; while the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (above) went trick or treating Sherlock Holmes style with his family in Ottawa.

HALLOWEEN is one festival that doesn't come encumbered with race, religion or region. And our favourite stars - who could argue of being constantly under heavy make-up - willingly dress up for the occasion. This year saw some fun costumes, but leading the pack was America's Got Talent judge Heidi Klum and her 29-year-old musician beau Tom Kaulitz. The couple not just knows how to throw a good party but actually get into character. The 45-year-old German model and TV personality patiently waited for hours to be transformed into the much-loved Princess Fiona, slathering on green body paint, wearing prosthetics and finding the perfect matching emerald-green costume - she even posted videos and selfies on social media to show it. Needless to say Kaulitz had to become our all-time favourite ogre, Shrek. Not to be left behind, our Indian stars too joined in. From Sonam Kapoor to south superhero Chiranjeevi, all added their own colour and touch to the festivities.




Bollywood style diva Sonam Kapoor 'knew what she was doing' dressing up as Wednesday Addams. Meanwhile south Indian superstar Cheeranji celebrated Halloween with family and friends at home (left).



Migrant caravan nears the 'route of death' in Mexico where hundreds have been kidnapped by cartels and gangs in recent years

Almost 4,000 Central American immigrants trying to escape gang violence in their home countries entered Veracruz Sunday - the Mexican Gulf coast state where many have been kidnapped in recent years. The group was for directed northward and into what's known as the 'route of death', settling in the town of Cordoba for some much-needed rest. But first they had to trek past the state's sugar fields and fruit groves where hundreds of migrants have disappeared after gangs are thought to have snatched them in an effort to obtain ransom payments.



Memorable moments from 2018 TCS New York City Marathon

NEW YORK -- More than 51,000 runners from around the world participated in the 2018 TCS New York City Marathon, and there were many memorable moments during the 26.2 mile journey. Peter Ciaccia, TCS NYC

Marathon Race Director & President of Events for NYRR, started things off with his iconic pre-race speech. It was an emotional one for Ciaccia, who will retire after 18 years of spearheading the largest marathon in the

world. Then there was a historic performance from 20-year-old Daniel Romanchuk, who became the youngest and first American man to ever win the men's wheelchair race in New York. His interview with ESPN's Sage

Steele was truly inspiring. In the women's race, Kenya's Mary Keitany captured her fourth TCS New York City Marathon crown, with a time of 2:22:48. She embraced members of the crowd and Ciaccia after crossing the

finish line. Ethiopia's Lelisa Desisa held off his countryman Shura Kitata by 1.99 seconds in the men's race. The nail biting finish ended with Desisa finishing in 2 hours, 5 minutes, 59 seconds.

'She has no Indian blood!'

Trump reignites feud with Elizabeth Warren and rips woman who lied about being raped by Brett Kavanaugh as crowd chants 'Lock her up!' in Georgia

President Trump mocked Elizabeth Warren on Sunday night for releasing the results of a DNA test that didn't back up claims she'd made over the years about her Native American ancestry.

Trump had avoided mentioning Warren since he pledged to tone down his rhetoric but couldn't help himself in Georgia as he hit on his favorite campaign topic.

He noted that some Democrats want to get rid of Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency.

'Elizabeth Warren wants to get rid of — I can't call her Pocahontas anymore because she has no Indian blood,' he said as someone in the audience whooped as if imitating an Indian war cry. 'She has no Indian blood,' he repeated. And I said that a long time ago, before she brilliantly sent out the test results. That was not a good test, Elizabeth. That will be great leadership when dealing with North Korea, China and Russia — all of these countries...It was not good.'

He asked, 'Is she still running for president?' And an audience member replied, 'Who cares?'

Trump said, 'She is pushing a guy up in Ohio who will be a disaster for the state' as he shifted briefly to Richard Cordray's campaign for governor. 'He is a disaster. He's worse than she is.'

At the same rally in Macon, the crowd chanted 'lock her up' at the president as he ripped a woman for lying about her alleged rape by Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

Judy Munro-Leighton admitted on Friday that she took credit for a 'Jane Doe' letter filled with gruesome details of an alleged rape by Kavanaugh that she didn't write.

She said she had never met Kavanaugh and was angry about the allegations that he assaulted women when she claimed she authored the letter.

'The act never happened and it was a lie, it was a total lie!' Trump charged in Macon, Georgia, as the crowd told him she should be in jail. 'She made up the story.'

He said, 'It was a false accusation. It was a false statement. And she was forced to admit it.' Trump has been claiming that Kavanaugh was treated despicably and worse than anyone ever by Democrats who put him on trial in the U.S. Senate.

At nearly every rally he has held in the last month he has claimed that the spectacle would blow back on the opposing party.

With Munro-Leighton's admission, the president added a new claim to his campaign rally repertoire — that all of the women accusing the judge had lied about Kavanaugh's conduct,

including Christine Blasey Ford.

'And did you see what happened on Friday?' he said Sunday as he led into the topic. 'You knew that before. These three women, they knew that before. They knew that a long time ago.' None of the other women has retracted their statements, although Sen. Chuck Grassley, the Judiciary Committee chairman, has referred another woman, Julie Swetnick, to the Justice Department for criminal charges, in addition to Munro-Leighton.

Trump suggested that they should as he rallied supporters of Brian Kemp, the Republican nominee for governor of Georgia.

'So a woman, who accused then Judge Kavanaugh of horrible, horrible crimes, admitted that actually she never met Judge Kavanaugh, or Brett Kavanaugh or Kavanaugh period,' Trump proclaimed.

'Think if he didn't get the appointment based on this woman's false accusations. Think of it. Just think of it, how horrible that was. I think this was number four,' he said. 'And by the way, what about the other ones? How about the other ones?'

He repeated, 'This was

number four. But how about the other ones?'

The president said Georgians could vindicate Kavanaugh by voting for Republicans at the ballot box on Tuesday.

'He could have lost a judgeship on a story that was made up, and the way the Democrats treated him and us, you gotta get to the polls on Tuesday and you gotta vote,' he said. 'The contrast in this election could not be more clear. Republicans produce jobs, Democrats produce mobs.'

At a Montana rally on Saturday, Trump had unloaded on the fake 'Jane Doe' accuser who recanted her rape claim and implied that other accusers weren't telling the truth, as well. 'One of his false accusers just came out, a little while ago, and said it's all a lie... she made up the lie... It was fake,' Trump told the crowd. 'You know what fake means?...She lied about rape.... When are the others going to say what happened?' he added. His comments suggest that other accusers, such as Ford and Deborah Ramirez, weren't telling the truth about Kavanaugh, either.

Ford delivered emotional testimony before the Senate

Judiciary Committee.

Munro-Leighton's 'Jane Doe' accusations were not given nearly the same weight. She was not asked to testify and lawmakers didn't treat her claim as credible.

Kavanaugh denied her claim in a phone interview with committee staff soon after Sen. Kamala Harris of California turned over her letter.

The president in Montana, as he did in Georgia, tried to turn it into a political rallying cry. 'She lied about the story about rape. About rape, she lied. And we're supposed to sit back and take it,' Trump said. 'It's a damn disgrace,' he added.

'Imagine if he dropped out because of a filthy, dirty lie,' Trump said.

The president said in Georgia as the crowd chanted 'Trump' that he nevertheless 'overcame the Democrat smear campaign and confirmed' Kavanaugh to the high court.

Trump was in Georgia to persuade voters to support Kemp in his race for governor against Democrat Stacey Abrams.

He said Abrams wants to ax the Second Amendment and allow illegal immigrants to vote and hold political office as he assailed her on Sunday as too radical to lead Georgia.

Trump had previously claimed, without offering examples, that Abrams, the first African-American woman from either major party to be nominated for governor, is not 'qualified' to hold office and will not be elected, despite having the support of Oprah.



Air pollution: Reactive, band-aid solutions will not solve the problem

Crop stubble burning is not new. We must explore other practical solutions to end the polluting practice

The Supreme Court petition that asked to ban firecrackers also pleads to control pollution created from other sources, such as burning of crop stubble, garbage and vehicular emissions. Crop residue burning in farms around India's capital directly affects high population density urban centres like Delhi and the NCR. Latest satellite images show that these fires have reduced in recent days. But they're still contributing to almost 5% of the total pollution. Farmers who burn crop residue in northern India do so knowingly and because they don't have an alternate economical and viable option. As the first inhalers of that choking smoke, much before it gets into any city dwellers' lungs, they're also early sufferers. But they continue to burn because this is the fastest way they have to turnaround their capital, which is their acreage. This doesn't mean that they are justified in doing this at all. This, and anything that jeopardises human health to such a degree, is wrong, and must stop. It is our elected government's job to ensure that enforcement of

such a mandate is being followed especially at a time when we are going through a national health emergency caused by pollution.

But reactive, band-aid solutions and challans aren't going to help anyone. We need a comprehensive policy by a centralised, empowered and accountable authority tasked with quantifiable, timebound goals. And here is where every political party has let us — urban residents as well as farmers — down.

As always, this is about money. But it is also about intention.

Crop stubble burning isn't new. It is a recurring source which tips over an already high pollution baseload that north India suffers from due to geographical, meteorological and man-made factors.

What could the government have done, and can still do?

One: The Agriculture ministry can direct scientists and researchers from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, the National Soil Research Institute, etc to create implementable solutions. Soil researchers can



educate farmers on how burning damages the soil by depleting it of valuable nutrients, which, in turn, requires higher external application of fertilisers. Higher fertiliser use not just means a higher fertiliser subsidy outgo by the government (so again, taxpayers' money) but also higher input costs for farmers. Simultaneously, appropriate agriculture scientists can identify and encourage the use of those seed varieties with softer stalks that can be used as fodder. Farmers from Punjab who I met confirmed that the high silica in the paddy stalks of the varieties they grow makes them inedible as animal fodder. But more fundamentally, the government could easily get farmers to switch back to growing low-water use, nutrition-dense coarse grains such as pearl millet (bajra), finger millet (ragi),

sorghum (jowar), barley, rye and maize by offering higher support price subsidies. These higher iron-content grains are perfect for a country where large swathes of the population are anaemic. Now that the government's biofuels policy allows inclusion of ethanol made from maize and sorghum, there is even less reason to further deplete north India's water table by growing a high water-use paddy crop in a water-scarce area. These grains can be planted later, allowing farmers a longer turnaround window to clear their fields. As well, the ethanol produced from them can help farmers augment their income, besides creating new employment opportunities and saving on oil imports. Two: Make waste valuable. Farmers won't burn it. Our scientists could be tasked to find solutions that

reuse farm waste to monetise it. The government could directly pay farmers to deposit crop waste at collection centres or link it to their minimum support price payments. Simultaneously, they could subsidise entrepreneurs who create solutions like green refrigeration systems powered by farm waste or ecological crockery (which also reduces plastic use.) Three: The Ministry of Rural Development can deploy free MGNREGS labour to farmers during harvest for acreage needing a quick turnaround, a much more productive use of our taxpaying rupee.

Punjab farmers seem happy with the Happy Seeder, a machine that simultaneously performs the dual job of cutting crop stubble and sowing seeds. But before propagating — and subsidising — this as the only solution, it is important to check whether these diesel-run machines won't just end up swapping one source of pollution with another, not to mention will lead to increase in costs with further rise in oil

prices. In a labour-rich country like ours, deploying capital-intensive techniques like Happy Seeders is counter-intuitive.

But how do Uttar Pradesh farmers growing similar crops burn so much less? According to Chowdhury Pushpendra Singh, a Bulandshahar farmer, this is because farmers employ more traditional techniques that utilise most of the crop waste as fodder, animal bedding and compost. "Crop stubble from basmati seed varieties 1121 and 1509 doesn't have very tough/high silica stalks," he explains. Singh is aware of the Happy Seeder, but still feels that traditional techniques with some tweaks in rice varieties could easily lower overall costs.

Instead of working on solutions like these, the government hasn't even finalised its much touted National Clean Air plan. However flawed, it was a start. Now, it looks like another season — and election — must pass before beleaguered, vulnerable citizens can hope for respite

India can make it even easier to do business

Can India break into the top 50 of the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index? After all, this was one of Prime Minister's Narendra Modi's aims when he took over in 2014, when the country was ranked 142. Last year, India moved to 100. This year — the ranking was released on October 31 — it moved to 77. Like all ranking scales, a jump from 142 to 100 is likely to have been easier than one from 100 to 77, which means breaking the 50-barrier will be tough. Still, it can be done. China was ranked 78 in last year's ranking and moved to 46 this year.

Overall, India's score is at 67.23 against China's 73.64 and a regional average of 56.71.

To improve its position, India should look at the areas where it needs to change. The World Bank ranks countries on 10 parameters, and, on five, India's rank is low: Starting a business (137); Registering property (166); Paying taxes (121); Enforcing contracts (163); and Resolving insolvency (108). The corresponding scores are 80.96, 43.55, 65.36, 41.19, and 40.84. This would suggest that even radical reforms that help accelerate the process of starting a business are

unlikely to help India move up the rankings — although it is nobody's case that India should not work on making it easier to start businesses. On the tax front, similarly, it isn't clear how much India can improve: the big issue is not the number of payments (13 a year, which compares well with the OECD average of 11.2) but the time taken (277.5 hours, which compares well with the regional average of 274 but is far higher than the OECD one of 159) and the total tax as a percentage of profits (52.2% as compared to 43.5 in the region and 39.8 in OECD countries).

That leaves three areas in which India can actually change things significantly for the better — and, which would also help it move up the rankings. On the property front, as expected, India fares badly on all aspects: the number of procedures (9 as compared to 4.7 in OECD countries); time (85 days as compared to 20); cost (7.5% of value against 4.2%); and the quality of the land administration index, a combination of "reliability of infrastructure, transparency of information, geographic resolution, and equal

access to property rights" (9.5 on a scale of 30 as compared to 23).

It is also no surprise that India needs to improve its record in enforcing contracts. It takes 1,445 days on an average for the civil resolution of contracts in India, as compared to 582.4 in OECD countries (even the regional average, 1101.6 is better). However, India does fare well on the quality of the judicial process (10.5 on an 18 point scale; the OECD number is a comparable 11.5). Reducing pendency is all it will take.

On the third parameter, resolving insolvency, India

has made rapid strides with the passage of the Bankruptcy Code. Indeed, on a scale of 16, the World Bank ranking says India's regulatory framework for insolvencies scores 8.5, as compared to 11.9 in OECD countries).

But it takes 4.3 years on an average in India to resolve insolvencies, while it does only 2.6 years in the region and 1.7 years in OECD countries. To be sure, India's insolvency code is still in its infancy, and the first cases under it were closed only this year, so it is a safe assumption that the country's record on this front will improve.

US-India trade relations: India should keep cool, keep calm, and carry on

India should ignore the US president's rhetoric. It should continue to stay the course in its current approach to trade negotiations with the US.

There is no trade war today between India and the United States. On the other hand, there is not exactly peace. In early October, President Donald Trump called India "the tariff king, bringing to the fore bilateral trade frictions that have been simmering beneath the surface for a while. They've already called us to make a deal," he said. "We didn't even call them. They called us to make a deal, which is, like, shocking to people."

The point the US president was making in his comments — primarily for the consumption of the US domestic audience — is that he is "winning" in the tussle in trade relations with India. Winning in the public spotlight matters more than anything else to this president. Recognising this, India should ignore the president's rhetoric. It should continue to stay the course in its current approach to trade negotiations with the US.

To date, New Delhi has been quite patient with the Trump administration. It understands that the prevailing *weltanschauung* in Washington is more protectionist than it has been for decades. Unlike China, which has announced targeted tit-for-tat tariffs on US goods, New Delhi has largely worked behind the scenes with US officials, thus preventing any escalation.

India recognises that, in dealing with Trump, one is more likely to succeed by adopting the tactics of Mexico and Canada, which have already renegotiated the North American Free Trade Agreement, rather than that of China. This perspective is a solid one because of the economics involved. That's so because the opportunity and need for India is to maintain the growth trajectory of bilateral trade with the US, which has been consistently growing at an impressive rate since 1991. The country's bilateral trade in goods with the United States in that year stood at \$5.2 billion with exports of nearly \$3.2 billion and imports amounting to roughly \$2 billion.

Last year, the India-US bilateral trade volume was more than \$74 billion. Adjusting for inflation, \$5.2 billion in 1991 is \$9.2 billion in today's dollars. This means that the bilateral trade has grown eightfold in this time period. There are several reasons that the trade between the two nations has registered such substantial growth over the past quarter century. The liberalisation of the Indian economy and its subsequent expansion is foremost among them. An

improvement in bilateral relations in the post-Cold War era is another factor. A big reason, in addition, is the fact that neither nation has allowed their differences to come in the way of trade. There have been frictions all along, as is evident from the number of complaints each country has filed against the other through the years with the World Trade Organization over unfair trade practices and protectionism. Over the decades, the United States has complained about India's patent laws, which, according to Washington, cost American companies billions of dollars. In recent years, India has protested the tightening of H-1B visa rules, specifically targeting Indian companies, by successive US administrations. There are numerous examples of other points of disagreement. Despite these differences, the governmental leadership and business communities in both countries have been able to achieve a rapprochement and engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue that has been mutually beneficial.

With the current administration, this coming together and meeting of the minds is much more difficult. Recently, a top-ranking Indian official complained, off the record, that bilateral trade talks with the United States have essentially become a one-way street. According to that official, all the US representatives want to hear in bilateral meetings is how much more India will buy from the United States. The simple view on trade for the US now appears to be that "Buying is bad, selling is good." Some label this view or policy as "transactional".

But transactional it is not. Transactions involve buying and selling — not just selling. Rather than transactional, this view is nationalistic. And, as President Trump has recently proudly proclaimed, he is a nationalist. Nationalism in and of itself is neither bad nor good. What matters is how that nationalism is practised. Exercised prudently, and in the recognition that most other developed and developing countries are nationalistic also, it can provide a platform for establishing reciprocity and economic interdependence. This can create the basis for fair trade agreements rather than isolationism or protectionism. Such agreements are critical to the future growth of trade. As Columbia University economist, Jagdish Bhagwati, has observed, historical experience proves that "the case for protectionism is flawed" and the "link between trade openness and economic prosperity is strong and suggestive".

Any move on citizenship is sure to be challenged in US courts

Many legal and constitutional experts have said such a move would go against the Constitution and amount to the president overstepping his powers

United States President, Donald Trump, has pledged to end birthright citizenship, the latest salvo in his ever-expanding drive to crack down on illegal immigration. Mr Trump has clearly made the remarks with an eye on galvanising his core support base ahead of the midterm elections next week, as this is just the sort of thing that will appeal to the "Make America Great Again" crowd. Among those who have benefited from the right of citizenship for children born on US soil to non-citizens and unauthorised immigrants are thousands of children of Indian holders of US work and visit visas. Mr Trump has argued there is no need for a constitutional amendment to do away with this right, and that the matter can be settled through an executive order. Mr Trump has also argued, wrongly, that the US is the only country where babies born on its soil are given citizenship. The CIA's World Factbook states about three dozen countries around the world, including Canada, Brazil and Pakistan, grant "right of the soil" to anyone born within their territory. The debate over birthright citizenship is not new in the US, a country built by immigrants from around the globe. As far back as 1898, the US Supreme Court ruled in favour of such citizenship under the 14th amendment to the Constitution in the historic case of Wong Kim Ark, a man

born in San Francisco to Chinese parents. However, some have argued there is a need to have a review of this matter in view of the rise in the number of illegal immigrants in the US in recent decades. They have also argued the 14th amendment — which states "All persons born or naturalised in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States" — shouldn't apply to US-born children of illegal immigrants. According to a Pew survey, the number of children born to unauthorised immigrants in the US rose dramatically from 30,000 in 1980 to 370,000 in 2006, though it has been declining since then. Mr Trump's plans have triggered a pushback from Republican and Democratic lawmakers, with even Speaker Paul Ryan saying birthright citizenship can't be ended through an executive order. Many legal and constitutional experts, too, have said such a move would go against the Constitution and amount to the president overstepping his powers. Any move by Mr Trump is sure to be challenged in the courts, resulting in chaos similar to that witnessed when the president sought to ban citizens from some Muslim-majority countries through executive orders, though it can also result in the judges finally clarifying whether the 14th amendment should apply to immigrants.



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In the Age of MeToo, why criminal defamation must go

Criminal defamation – set out under Section 499 of the Indian Penal Code – is an anachronistic, colonial-era legal provision, that has been historically used by powerful individuals, corporations, and governments, to silence and suppress inconvenient speech

Last month, in *Navej Johar v Union of India*, when the Supreme Court decriminalised same-sex relations, it was not only a vindication of civil rights and the Constitution, but something more: the court acknowledged that its own judgment five years ago, in *Suresh Kumar Koushal v Naz Foundation*, upholding the validity of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, had been grievously mistaken. And the court made amends.

It is human to err, and judges are human, after all. However, it is substantially more difficult to acknowledge error, and to correct it. The Supreme Court's willingness to do so is a good sign that the institution can listen to its critics, and change its mind if it is persuaded that it has, indeed, erred.

In the wake of the #MeToo movement, the court now has a chance to correct another — recent — error. In the last few weeks, women who have come forward to testify about sexual harassment committed by powerful individuals, have had criminal defamation cases filed against them. Criminal defamation — set out under Section 499 of the Indian Penal Code — is an anachronistic, colonial-era legal provision, that has been historically used by powerful



individuals, corporations, and governments, to silence and suppress inconvenient speech.

Two years ago, the constitutionality of criminal defamation was challenged by a coalition of politicians, organisations and individuals. A two-judge bench of the Supreme Court, however, upheld the constitutional validity of Section 499, and refused to read in any safeguards to prevent abuse. The court held that criminal defamation struck an appropriate balance between the right to free speech and the right to reputation.

Even in 2016, the Indian Supreme Court was swimming against the global tide. Countries

around the world had been steadily decriminalising defamation, on the basis that the criminal law was a disproportionately severe infringement of free speech, especially for what was essentially a “private wrong”, and could be addressed by a regime of civil defamation. Even the United Kingdom, which gave us our penal code, had decriminalised defamation. And in the time that has passed since the judgment, this has only become more evident: in February 2017, the high court of Kenya, also a former British colony, struck down criminal defamation as unconstitutional, holding that the “traumatising gamut of arrest, detention, remand and trial” in a criminal

case had the effect of chilling speech, and promoting self-censorship among people who would not have easy recourse to a lawyer. This would result in “the citizenry remaining uninformed about matters of public significance and the unquestioned and unchecked continuation of unconscionable malpractices.” Then, in May 2018, the Constitutional Court of Lesotho followed suit, also holding that criminalisation was a disproportionately severe burden on speech, and that reputational interests could be protected by a less onerous regime of civil defamation. Both courts followed the jurisprudence of the African Human Rights Court that had emphatically ruled that criminal defamation was inconsistent with basic international human rights standards.

It is, therefore, clear that, across the world, more and more countries are acknowledging that modern, democratic nations do not jail people for things they might say about others. India is no different: our Constitution guarantees a right to freedom of speech and expression, which can only be restricted by a “reasonable” law. Our Supreme Court — most recently in its judgment on *Aadhaar* — has held that an essential facet of

reasonableness is that a law must not infringe rights to a degree greater than is strictly necessary to achieve its goal. In other words, if there exists an alternative mechanism that can also achieve the goal without compromising on individual liberty to such a degree, the impugned law must be struck down. Criminal defamation — which is targeted at punishing what is essentially a private wrong (a wrong that one person commits upon another, rather than upon society) — is a stark example of a law that disproportionately affects the freedom of speech.

Legislators have recognised this as well. Last year, Tathagat Satpathy introduced into Parliament the “Speech Bill”, which aimed to replace criminal defamation with a detailed, statutorily codified regime of civil defamation. The bill is pending consideration. But the recent spate of cases in the wake of #MeToo gives the court, which recently invalidated two colonial-era rights-invasive provisions — Section 377 and Section 497 (adultery) — to complete a hat-trick, and in the process, once again cement its reputation as an institution that sheds its own past, and evolves towards greater protection of rights.

Mj Akbar is accused of rape. Can we stop talking about his ‘legacy’?

Now that MJ Akbar, former external affairs minister (and bizarrely still a Member of Parliament), has been charged with rape by US-based journalist, Pallavi Gogoi, will the apologists in our fraternity finally zip up? I have spent the last few weeks dismayed by the responses of several senior colleagues. I have argued publicly with the women among them — Tavleen Singh, Manjeet Kriplani, Seema Mustafa — because I looked up to them as trailblazers of their generation. To see them mock the #MeToo movement, and worse, attack the women speaking up has been surreal. Their tweets reflected a medieval misogyny with comments that blamed the women instead of the perpetrators of harassment and

abuse. Will they now be embarrassed into retracting these remarks? Will they apologise? As for the men, too many senior male colleagues, who are contemporaries of Akbar, have been mealy-mouthed in their condemnation. It was only when the momentum of #MeToo became inescapable and woman after woman came forward that you saw more male editors ready to take a stand. In other words, they spoke only when it was risk-free to do so and after the women had done their work for them. At least a dozen women who have either levelled charges or other women who have said they are ready to testify to back the accounts of these women, have provided fence sitters with enough parachutes

for a safe landing just in case there was turbulence. The fact is that even one woman's account of credible allegations should have been enough. Women should not need the safety of numbers to find support and empathy. Yet you see a similar reluctance and diffidence in taking a stand with the other men named by women in the #MeToo revelations: Suhel Seth, Vinod Dua, Jatin Das, Kiran Nagarkar, Vikas Bahl and many more. The message this sends to women is: Find yourself multiple co-complainants if you want to be taken seriously. While this may be inevitable, it also patently unjust. But while blatant sexism can be confronted and argued with, the most disturbing dimension of the #MeToo debate

in India has been the instinct of so many commentators to cast these men in the role of damaged and “flawed” individuals who simultaneously represent both brilliance and baseness. Sorry, but this is a load of self-serving nonsense. I can't bear to read one more tweet or op-ed on Akbar's epigrammatic turn of phrase or blazing talent as an editor. We saw exactly the same conflicted social and peer group response when Tarun Tejpal was accused of rape. Akbar or Tejpal — and whoever comes next — cannot and must not be mythologised as brooding men of intensity with great achievements and a few minor chinks in their armour. This is not Fountainhead and they are not Howard Roark. This is real life where the starkness of the violations they are alleged to have

committed must be met without ifs, buts, alsos and maybes. The constant demand for a “fuller narrative”; the drawing room laments at the end of great careers — it is almost as if no matter what men do, there is an institutional indulgence when it comes to sexual violation. In an otherwise unsparing age of instant judgment and polarised opinions, can you explain why there are so many calls to separate the art from the artist? Why is there such a concerted effort at legacy building for the Akbars and Tejpal's of the news media? Look no further than America where the massive body of work by Charlie Rose or Kevin Spacey or Harvey Weinstein collapsed into instant oblivion after rape and abuse stories surfaced in the media.

Statue of Unity: One statue, two visitors, different views

How the unveiling of the world's tallest statue triggered conflicting emotions in two citizens at its opening.



(News Agencies) Hiren Patel stood out among the thousands of people awaiting the inauguration of the world's tallest statue in Kevadiya. He wore dark glasses, a bright yellow watch, and sported 'Om' tattoos on both arms. Seated in the VIP tent behind the statue complex, the young man was making a video call on his mobile phone and asking the person at the other end, in an American accent, if he could guess where Patel was. Patel travelled across an ocean to witness this moment in Gujarat's history.

A resident of California, the small-time businessman saved up to fly home for the occasion. Asked if he is a fan of Sardar Patel, he nodded.

"I am a fan of Narendra Modi," he added, somewhat surprised that anyone would wonder about his reason for

being here.

In 2014, Patel missed Modi's victory speech at Madison Square Garden in New York City because he couldn't afford the domestic air ticket. He took no chances this time.

Patel wasn't the only NRI to fly down for the event, but he is admittedly among the dogged defenders of "Brand Modi" in the US. "He actively takes on anyone who criticises Modi, India or Gujarat back there," said his friend, Jash Chaudhary, who travelled with him from their village in north Gujarat.

Working overtime in recent months to fight the flak, Patel said he hopes the event vows the world. "The statue has put Gujarat on the world map." He wants the global media to acknowledge India's greatness. "Not the New York

Times — it's local — but CNN.

I think they already ran a programme saying the Statue of Unity is set to become the world's most popular tourist destination." CNN hasn't yet run such a programme, but Hiran Patel isn't going to lose his faith in the statue's towering symbolism anytime soon. He kept his mobile phone camera pointed at the statue as it went through an elaborate inauguration, from the Prime Minister pouring soil and water at its feet to jets showering colours from the Indian flag on it from the skies. He gaped as Modi called the 182m steel-and-bronze structure built by 3,400 workers in 33 months at the cost of ~2,829 crore an engineering feat. He nodded along when the prime minister brought up "the expression of a new India's new confidence."

His last word before he left the venue: "Grand."

As Hiren Patel was driving out of the Narmada Valley, Ramesh Tadvi was asking his new friends from prison for a ride back to his village,

Indrapada. Tadvi, 40, drives a taxi for a living, but when he got out of the police headquarters in Rajpipla at 3pm on October 31 he says he didn't have "a single penny" on him to even bus it back home. Along with dozens of tribal leaders, activists and ordinary residents of villages around the site of the statue, Tadvi was detained by the Gujarat police ahead of its inauguration to maintain law and order. "I returned home after a day's work, had my bath and dinner and had barely sat down on a cot to relax when the police knocked at the door," he said. It was 10pm on October 30. "They came in and said, 'chalna hai.' They didn't explain why." As many as 75,000 tribal men and women from villages by the Narmada river planned to protest at the site on October 31. They have been claiming that the government acquired their land without adequate compensation or rehabilitation deals. The government has denied the allegations. "The cash compensation in the rehabilitation package has been increased to ~7.5 lakh per hectare from ~3.5 lakh, in

case the tribals do not want land in exchange," said R Ninama, Narmada district collector. Tadvi doesn't think ~7.5 lakh per hectare is a fair compensation for his 7-acre (1.66 hectares) land, which happens to lie in the way of a weir for boat rides and water sports being built 14 km downstream of the statue.

"This land is worth much more. We have heard industrialists are buying land from the government at crores of rupees. In any case, it's not money I want from them." What Tadvi wants from the government is a job. Not just a job for him, but also for his coming generations. "For my son, then my grandson ... according to their level of education," he explained. At the salary of ~10,000 a month, he finds it hard to support his family of four, and isn't sure how long he can "put food on their plates". Yet, he insisted he wouldn't have disrupted law and order in any way. "All I do is go to the district collectorate and the Narmada project office every other day to place my demand. The only thing I damage are my chappals,"

he said. He was going to observe October 31 as a day of quiet mourning. "No one cooked or ate in my village. I didn't either," he said. "They gave us food in the jail, but none of us touched it. We kept sitting and waiting for our release." After he travelled 20km back to his village, Ramesh Tadvi left his house again at dusk, this time to see the statue. He stood at Patel's feet, along with packs of visitors from the tribal villages, and marvelled at the craft. "Our protest is not against the Sardar," he pointed out. "It's against the Sarkar." SILIGURI: A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a statue of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the world's tallest, in Gujarat, Sikkim chief minister Pawan Chamling on Thursday unveiled the tallest statue of Chenrezig, a manifestation of the Buddha, in the world. Nestled in the snow-capped mountains, the 135-foot (40m) statue of Chenrezig is located at an elevation of 7,200 metres at Sangha Choeling, 1.7 km away from Pelling, a tourist destination in West Sikkim.

US citizenship move may be bad news for Indians

For a lot of them, their families grew after their arrival here, mostly on H-1B visas for highly skilled foreigners.

(News Agencies) Anuj Dhamija's wife is an H-1B visa-holder cleared for Green Card, he is on H-4 work authorisation for dependents and their children are Americans by birth. Their small world, already in the throes of uncertainty, has been shook up by President Donald Trump's plans to end birthright citizenship. "Do we belong here at all?" asked Dhamija, a project manager with a construction company in Massachusetts. "I am going through this miserable state of uncertainty and my children who are American citizens by birth — one and four years old — don't even know what's in the future for them." Dhamija's wife is among more than 300,000 primary Indian applicants waiting for employment-

based Green Cards (lawful permanent residency), which in some estimations grows to around 1.5 million taking into account dependents of the primary applicants and others.

For a lot of them, their families grew after their arrival here, mostly on H-1B visas for highly skilled foreigners. The parents continue to be Indian, and will remain so till they renounce it after becoming American. But their children born here are Americans, and now possibly in Trump's line of fire.

The uncertainty of the Green Card, which could take decades at the current rate — over 100 years for new applicants, by some estimates — has been worsened by the Trump administration's determination to rescind an



Obama-era rule allowing dependents of those in queue — and not all H-1B visa-holders — to work under H-4 EAD (employment authorisation document), which benefited mostly Indians.

"There is a deepening sense of panic and despair that this administration is coming after our families," said another Indian in a similar situation, pointing to the H-4 withdrawal plan.

He didn't want to be identified so he could speak freely about his feelings on the issue and that of the community.

Children of those who were born outside and before their families came to the US are faced with the problem of "aging out", becoming adults at 21, before their parents get their Green Cards. They will be forced to seek their own US visas, independently.

Now, an uncertain future awaits those born here. The US is among nearly 30 countries that grant citizenship to anyone born on their soil, and this a right guaranteed by the 14th amendment to the Constitution enacted in the aftermath of the American Civil War to extend citizenship rights to African Americans emancipated from slavery. Trump has said he plans to nullify that right with an executive order, telling Axios in an interview published on Tuesday: "We're the only country in the world where a person comes in and has a baby, and the baby is essentially a citizen of the US for 85 years, with all of those benefits."

He doubled down on

his plans on Wednesday. "So-called birthright citizenship, which costs our Country billions of dollars and is very unfair to our citizens, will be ended one way or the other. It is not covered by the 14th Amendment because of the words 'subject to the jurisdiction thereof'."

Some experts have argued that under the "jurisdiction" phrase in the amendment, children born to those illegally in the US can be denied citizenship. Others have contended all those on US soil — with the exception of diplomats — are subject to American laws, irrespective of citizenship.

If Trump presses ahead, the order will most likely be challenged in court.



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OP Chautala expels his grandsons Dushyant, Digvijay from INLD

Taking strong action on recent developments within the party, the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) on Friday expelled Hisar MP Dushyant Chautala and his younger brother Digvijay Chautala.

(News Agencies) Taking strong action on recent developments within the party, the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) on Friday expelled Hisar MP Dushyant Chautala and his younger brother Digvijay Chautala. Both are great-grandsons of former Deputy Prime Minister Devi Lal. Both have been expelled from the primary membership of the party with immediate effect, a party statement said here. The expulsion was announced by former

Haryana Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala, who is the National President of the INLD and grandfather of both youth leaders.

Dushyant Chautala has also been removed from the post of leader of the INLD Parliamentary Board.

The action follows recent activities of both youth leaders and their supporters who were trying to project Dushyant as a Chief Ministerial face in Assembly elections in Haryana to be held around

October next year.

“Both Dushyant Chautala and Digvijay Singh had been accused of indiscipline, hooliganism and spreading disaffection within the party against the party leadership during the birthday celebrations of Chaudhary Devi Lal in Gohana on October 7,” the INLD statement said.

“He (Om Prakash Chautala) conveyed to the party office that he did not need any outside evidence since he was a witness to the indiscipline and unruly

scenes that also continuously interrupted his speech on that day but still he had referred the matter to the Disciplinary Action Committee of the party.

“The committee has concluded that both are guilty as charged,” the party statement said.

The move is likely to affect the INLD prospects in the forthcoming general elections and Assembly polls

“In view of the fact that Dushyant Chautala and Digvijay Singh were mem-



bers of his immediate family, it was not an easy decision for him to make. But he added that all his life he had followed the principles and ideals of Jana Nayak Chaudhary Devi Lal, for whom the party was always bigger than the individual or any family member. “Thus he had to make a choice between the party and members of his family and he had chosen the party and decided to concur with the conclusions of the Disciplinary Committee. Accordingly, he had instructed the party office that his decision be immediately put into effect,” the statement said.

Madras HC cancels order allowing prosecution of P Chidambaram's family

The Income Department had given its sanction for the prosecution of former Union Chidambaram's wife Nalini, son Karti and daughter-in-law Srinidhi under the Black Money Act

(News Agencies) The Madras high Court on Friday quashed an order allowing prosecution of Congress leader P Chidambaram's family members in black money case, reports PTI. The Income Department had given its sanction for the prosecution of former Union Chidambaram's wife Nalini, son Karti and daughter-in-law Srinidhi under the Black Money Act

According to the tax department, Karti had not disclosed his bank account in Metro Bank,

the UK, and investments he had made in Nano Holdings LLC, USA.

The department had said Karti had failed to disclose investments made by Chess Global Advisory, a company co-owned by him, which is an offence under the Black Money Act.

It also said the trio had not disclosed Rs 5.37 crore worth of property they jointly own in Cambridge in the UK and Rs 3.28 crore worth of properties in the US.

The department initiated pros-

ecution against them under Section 50 of the Black Money (undisclosed foreign income and assets) and Imposition of Tax Act. When the pleas came up in June this year, Gopal Subramaniam, counsel for the petitioners, said that prima facie no offence can be made out against the petitioners under the Black Money Act.

The Act deals with undisclosed income raised from foreign assets. But in the present case, all the relevant information had been disclosed by the petition-



ers in their returns filed under the Income Tax Act, he said.

The petitioners filed their returns for 2016-17 in October, 2016. After the tax notices, they filed re-

vised returns in September, 2017 rectifying the procedural mistake, which is legally permissible under the Income Tax Act, he said

Even sex-workers have right to refuse: Supreme Court

The Bench said the trial court had rightly held that “even if the allegations of the accused that the woman is of immoral character are taken to be correct, the same does not give any right to the accused persons to commit rape on her against her consent”.

(News Agencies) Even sex-workers have a right to refuse their services and seek redressal when forced, the Supreme Court has ruled, overturning a 2009 Delhi High Court judgement and restoring the 10 years jail awarded to four persons by a lower court. The apex court judgement on Tuesday came on a 1997 gang-rape case in the national capital, asking the convicts to surrender within four weeks to serve the remaining sentence. “Even assuming that the woman was of easy virtue, she has a right of refuse to submit herself to sexual intercourse to anyone,” the court observed. A bench of Justices R.

Banumathi and Indira Banerjee held that the High Court erred in brushing aside the evidence of the victim by substituting its views and freeing the accused on the ground of they being falsely implicated, since they had lodged complaint accusing her of being a woman of bad character, who indulged in prostitution.

It also set aside the High Court ordering its registry to lodge complaints against three police personnel for prosecuting them for falsely implicating the four persons.

The Bench said the trial court had rightly held that “even if the allegations of the accused that the woman is of immoral character

are taken to be correct, the same does not give any right to the accused persons to commit rape on her against her consent”.

It observed that it is now a well-settled principle of law that conviction can be sustained on the sole testimony of the prosecutrix if it inspires confidence.

It held that even in cases where there is some material to show that the victim was habituated to sexual intercourse, no inference such as the victim is of a “loose moral character” can be permissibly drawn from that fact alone.

It noted that “a woman of easy virtue also could not be raped by a person for that reason.”





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Delhi HC dismisses plea to allow women of all ages, religions to enter all places of worship

(News Agencies) The Delhi high court Friday dismissed a petition seeking a direction to ensure that women of all ages and religions are allowed to enter and pray at temples, mosques and Zoroastrian fire temples.

A bench of Chief Justice Rajendra Menon and VK Rao refused to entertain the plea saying it lacked "territorial jurisdiction".

"Petitioner has not indicated which of the temples mentioned in the petition is under the jurisdiction of this court. None of the temples indicated here are within the territorial jurisdiction of this



court. We are not inclined to entertain it. The petition is dismissed," the bench said. The petition filed by advocate Sanjiv Kumar also said women should be ordained as "pujari", imam or priest of their respective temples, mosques or churches to lead prayers. It also sought that women

of menstruating or non-menstruating age from every religion be allowed to enter and pray at all times at all temples in India.

A similar order was sought in favour of the entry of men in women-only temples such as Attukal, Chakkulathukavu, Santoshi Maa "Vrat", Lord Brahma,

The petition also sought that women of menstruating or non-menstruating age from every religion be allowed to enter and pray at all times at all temples in India.

Bhagwati Maa Temple and Kamrup Kamakhya. It sought orders declaring as unconstitutional the prevalent practice of denying Muslim women the right to

observe fast and offer prayers during menstruation. The petition also urged the court to direct the Centre to put in place norms allowing menstruating Hindu

women to enter the kitchen as well as observe fasts, offer prayers and go to any place, and said denying this should be deemed "unconstitutional".

In Karnataka's Ballari, Congress and BJP fight a prestige battle via proxies

The by-election to the Ballari Lok Sabha seat, among the five assembly and parliamentary seats for which voting is being held today, has seen a pitched battle with both the Bharatiya Janata Party and the ruling Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) alliance going all out to capture the seat.

BJP leader B Sreeramulu has much at stake in Ballari, which is reserved for the Scheduled Tribe communities. He vacated the seat after he was elected to the assembly in May, and the party tried and failed to stake a claim

to form the government, despite having won the highest number of seats. The BJP has fielded his sister J Shantha, who is a former MP, and she is up against VS Ugrappa of the Congress, a member of the legislative council. While it is these two candidates whose names will appear on the electronic voting machines, they have been proxies for the battles fought by other leaders. On the one hand, Sreeramulu has battled the Congress's DK Shivakumar — who has been given charge of winning the seat — on the

other, mining baron G Janardhan Reddy has fought an ugly battle with his bete noire, former chief minister Siddaramaiah. While the BJP has banked on its local leaders to do the job, highlighting the fact that Ugrappa is an outsider to the district, the Congress-JD(S) alliance has pulled out all stops and one-time bitter rivals Siddaramaiah and his mentor, the former prime minister HD Deve Gowda, united to try and prove that a broad coalition could defeat the BJP ahead of the 2019 elections.

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Why not arresting Virbhadra Singh in money laundering case: Delhi High Court asks ED

In the first half of the day, the court asked ED's lawyers to take instructions from the agency on the issue of arresting the senior Congress leader.

(News Agencies) The Delhi High Court on Friday asked the Enforcement Directorate (ED) why it was not arresting former Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh in connection with a multi-crore money laundering case, when the agency was opposing bail granted to a businessman in the matter. Questioning the "selective approach" of the agency in arresting those involved in the case, Justice R K Gauba asked the ED whether it will withdraw its plea challenging bail granted to Vakamulla Chandrasekhar, the director/promoter of Tarini Group of Companies, or should the court pass an order.

In the first half of the day, the court asked ED's lawyers to take instructions from the agency on the issue of arresting the senior Congress leader.

Later, agency's counsel Amit Mahajan and Nitesh Rana told

the court that the officer investigating the matter was not senior enough to "take a call" on the issue of arresting Singh at the moment and sought more time to take a decision.

The lawyers also sought more time to take instruction from ED on whether to press for their plea challenging Chandrasekhar's bail or withdraw it.

The judge said if ED was not withdrawing the plea, then the court will dismiss it.

Thereafter, the lawyers told the court that the ED has decided to withdraw the petition, and it was dismissed as withdrawn.

Chandrasekhar was granted bail by a trial court in March 9, noting that no purpose would be served by keeping him in further custody.

The ED had earlier argued that it was a case of economic offence which has to be kept at a higher pedestal and the allega-

tion against the accused were of serious nature.

It had contended that Chandrasekhar had helped Virbhadra Singh in laundering crores of rupees and its investigation was still in progress. Chandrasekhar was arrested on February 15 under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and was in judicial custody before getting bail.

The ED had alleged that Chandrasekhar "had provided an amount of Rs 5.9 crore to Singh and his family members through his three personal bank accounts".

It had claimed that when the source of funds was enquired into, it came to light that the amount was received through a web of firms indulging in accommodation entry operations.

The trial court had on February 12 summoned Singh, his wife and three others as accused in the case, after taking cognisance of the ED charge sheet



against them and others, saying there was "prima facie" enough evidence against the accused persons.

The ED, in its charge sheet, named 83-year-old Singh, accusing him of projecting around Rs 7 crore "proceeds of crime" as agricultural income in connivance with his wife and others and invested them in purchasing LIC policies.

Besides Singh and his 62-year-old wife Pratibha Singh, the trial court had summoned Universal

Apple Associate owner Chunni Lal Chauhan and two other co-accused, Prem Raj and Lawan Kumar Roach. The final report also named as accused Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) agent Anand Chauhan, against whom a charge sheet was earlier filed by the agency. All six have been named in the charge sheet under relevant provisions of the PMLA. A disproportionate assets case, lodged by CBI, is also going on against Singh and others.

NIA court issues non-bailable warrants against Hafiz Saeed, Syed Salahuddin

The NIA has already filed charge sheet in the instant case on January 18 against 12 accused people including Saeed and Salahuddin.



(News Agencies) A special NIA court has issued non-bailable warrants against Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba founder Hafiz Saeed and Hizbul Mujahideen chief Syed Salahuddin for their involvement in terror funding activities, officials said Friday. "NIA approached the special NIA court for issuing non-bailable warrants against the above accused for their active involvement in terror funding for creating unrest in the Kashmir valley and other parts of India," NIA's spokesperson said here. The two mobilised Pakistan-trained terrorists and pushed them into India in connivance with secessionist and separatist leaders for waging war against India with the nefarious design of seceding

Jammu and Kashmir from India, the agency said.

The NIA has already filed charge sheet in the instant case on January 18 against 12 accused people including Saeed and Salahuddin.

The probe agency had filed the 12,794-page charge sheet against Saeed and Salahuddin for conspiring to wage war against the government (Section 121 of Indian Penal Code) by carrying out terrorist and secessionist activities in Jammu and Kashmir.

According to the NIA, the case was registered on May 30, 2017 and the first arrests made on July 24 last year.

The agency said that during the course of investigation, its teams

conducted searches at over 60 locations spread across Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana and Delhi and seized over 950 incriminating documents and over 600 electronic devices.

Over 300 witnesses were examined during the probe, it said.

The NIA said the scrutiny and

analysis of the documents and digital devices established that the accused Hurriyat leaders, the terrorists and the stone-pelters were carrying out terrorist attacks and orchestrating violence in Jammu and Kashmir as a part of their "well-planned" criminal conspiracy.

It said that conspiracy was hatched with active support, connivance and funding from terrorist organisations based in Pakistan and its agencies to achieve their objective of secession of the Jammu and Kashmir by waging war against the Indian government.

In Mulayam Yadav's home turf, brother Shivpal still popular

Home to 5,125 voters, the village has a medical university, a college, two stadia, an all-weather swimming pool, a government sports college and an air strip. The Agra-Lucknow Expressway is a proverbial stone's throw away

(News Agencies) At first glance, Saifai looks nothing like an average Uttar Pradesh village. Home to 5,125 voters, the village has a medical university, a college, two stadia, an all-weather swimming pool, a government sports college and an air strip. The Agra-Lucknow Expressway is a proverbial stone's throw away. For three decades, Saifai has been on India's political map as the nerve centre of the Samajwadi Party because it is the ancestral village of the party's first family, which has six lawmakers in Parliament and one in the assembly. But a bitter tussle for power in the Yadav family — especially between Jaswant Nagar MLA Shivpal Yadav and his nephew Akhilesh Yadav — has worried the villagers. Locals, a

majority of whom are Yadavs (the caste base of the SP) say they will stand by party patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav, popularly known as Netaji, in the Lok Sabha polls. Saifai is part of Mulayam's Lok Sabha constituency of Mainpuri.

But in the assembly elections, a section of the villagers say they will opt for Chhote Netaji (Shivpal) over Bhaiyyaji (Akhilesh) because the Jaswant Nagar MLA and founder of the newly formed Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia) (PSP) has been critical in the development of the village and remains popular. "In Jaswant Nagar, even if Bhaiyyaji contests against Chhote Netaji, the latter will

win," says Anshul Yadav, 28, a farmer. The villagers say they will vote for Netaji from the Mainpuri Lok Sabha seat irrespective of whether he represents the SP or the PSP. Saifai voters say Shivpal won the Jaswant Nagar seat in 2017 without the SP's support because of the people's enduring loyalty to the five-time MLA. "They have all worked for Saifai, be it Netaji, Chhote Netaji, or Bhaiyyaji. The family may be divided, but all the three are dear to us for what they have done for the village," says Ankit Yadav, 22, a student of Chaudhary Charan Singh Degree college in Saifai. Some of the villagers say they don't blame Shivpal for trying to tread a separate political path.

Activists livid after 'man-eater' tigress Avni shot dead by officials in Maharashtra

The apex court, in an order, refused to stay the order issued to kill the tigress but said an attempt must first be made to tranquillise the tiger.

(News Agencies) T-1, aka Avni, a six-year old tigress and mother of two nine-month old cubs was shot dead in controversial circumstances late on Friday in the Yavatmal district, some 150km from Nagpur, by Asghar Ali, the son of a controversial hunter Shafat Ali, provoking sharp responses from animal rights activists even as villagers celebrated the death of a big cat that they and the forest department believe was responsible for at least 13 human deaths over 18 months. Avni's death, from a single bullet fired by Ali

— it isn't clear whether he was authorised to shoot the animal — highlights the human animal conflict that is playing out, with tragic results for both humans and animals, in several parts of India. In this case, there weren't too many arguments about whether or not Avni was responsible for the human killings but there were a lot about whether humans had any business being where they were. Animal rights activists saw them as encroachers, and argued that she couldn't be called a man-eater because she

hadn't entered human habitations to kill people. The forest department, the local government, even the Supreme Court saw it otherwise. The apex court, in an order, refused to stay the order issued to kill her but said an attempt must first be made to tranquillise the tiger. According to the forest department, Ali shot Avni in "self-defence" after she allegedly attacked him at about 11.45 pm in Borati-Warud area after a failed attempt to tranquillise her. Ali is son of Shafath Ali, the sharpshooter, who was previ-

ously engaged in the operation to tranquillise the tigress. The father, animal rights activists allege, is a big-cat hunter and his participation became controversial. There were reports that the state government decided to terminate his services after the intervention of Union minister Maneka Gandhi. Irrespective of his standing, Ali Senior continued to direct the hunt for the tigress, involving scores of camera traps and live bait (usually goats). Reports say that on Friday, Avni was lured with bait and a mixture of urine (that of another ti-



gress') and a perfume (Obsession) by Calvin Klein because it contains a pheromone big cats find attractive). Wildlife activists refused to believe the details of how Avni was killed. Dr Jerryl Banait, who approached the Supreme Court against the September 4 shoot-at-sight order of the state forest department, alleged the tigress was shot dead without any effort to tranquillise her. "There was no wildlife veterinarian accompanying Ali, which is mandatory as per norms," he said. Kundan Hate, a wildlife activist and former functionary of WWF said that the forest department violated its own order, which stated that tranquillising efforts should be carried out first before elimination.

2 militants killed in gunfight with security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's Shopian



(News Agencies) Two militants were killed in a gunfight with the security forces on Saturday in Jammu and Kashmir's Shopian district, police said. Security forces started a cordon and search operation in a village of Shopian following information about a group of mili-

tants hiding in the village.

"As the cordon around the hiding militants was tightened, they fired at the surrounding security forces triggering an encounter in which two militants were killed," said a senior police official, adding the operation was going on.

RSS affiliate seeks cap on royalty, fee paid to MNCs

(News Agencies) The Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM), an affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to impose caps on royalty and technical fees paid to multinational companies in a bid to arrest the slide in the Indian rupee. In the letter, Ashwani Mahajan, SJM's national co-convenor, says that the cap on royalty and technical fees payment, which was discontinued by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in 2009, was a prudent policy as it helped in keeping a tab on outflow of foreign exchange. Mahajan claims that while foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows accounted for

\$60.96 billion in 2017-18, the payments relating to royalty and technical fees amounted to \$20.65 billion. "This shows how benefits of FDI are clearly being negated by the outflow on royalty and technical fees. Moreover, these outgoes would continue in future too, even when there are no FDI inflows," Mahajan added. Royalty outflows are payments made by domestic companies to their foreign parent firms or by Indian citizens to foreign entities for use of property, patent, copyright work, licence or franchise. SJM considers royalty and technical fees as a way in which foreign multinational corporations "extract huge sums

of money from the developing and underdeveloped economies", said Mahajan. "Prior to 2009, royalty payments were regulated by the government and were capped at 8% of exports and 5% of domestic sales in case of technology transfer collaborations and fixed at 2% of exports and 1% of domestic sales for use of trademark or brand name. This was in tune with international standards and practice," Mahajan contends. In October the value of the rupee fell against the US dollar and other major global currencies and government attributed this to high crude oil prices, widening current account deficit, and the dollar gaining strength.

As temple pressure mounts, UP to speed up Ram statue work

Deputy chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Keshav Prasad Maurya said, "Since the matter is in court, we won't be able to set a temple date."

(News Agencies) Uttar Pradesh deputy chief minister Keshav Prasad Maurya Saturday refused to commit on a date for the "construction" of a Ram temple in Ayodhya, saying the matter was being heard by court, but instead made a case for a Ram statue on a day when a section of politically inclined seers hinted on a move forward in December. In Jaipur, Union HRD minister and party's poll incharge for Rajasthan said at a press conference that the Ram temple was never a poll issue for the saffron party and asked the Congress to clarify its stand on the matter, days after leader Shashi Tharoor's remark that "no good Hindu" would want the temple built after demolishing somebody

else's place of worship. Asked if the BJP was making it an election issue, Javadekar said for the saffron party, it was "a matter of faith". Earlier in the day, Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha and Congress general secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad also held a press conference in Jaipur where he said for the Congress, "the issue was development". He also hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Rajasthan chief minister Vasundhara Raje on issues of farm distress, corruption, unemployment and safety of women. Javadekar "challenged" the Congress to debate on employment. "But their strategy is 'spit and run'. They make allegations and run. But we are open to discussion." Speaking to Hindustan Times over phone in Lucknow,

Maurya said, "Since the matter is in court, we won't be able to set a temple date. But yes, who can stop us from coming up with a grand statue of the Lord in Ayodhya? Who can stop us from developing the temple town?" His comments came on a day when a group of Hindu seers pushing for the Ram temple met in Delhi. Former BJP MP Ram Vilas Vedanti, of the Ram Janmbhoomi Nyas, said the temple construction would start from December 6, the day when the Babri mosque in Ayodhya was demolished 25 years ago. The Congress was quick to point this out and attack the BJP for "double-speak". "After suggesting all this while that they



are working on a temple law, now they suddenly announce that they would abide by the court," Congress's secretary Devendra Pratap Singh said. He referred to the build-up in Delhi and Vedanti's comments to say "the BJP was trying to fool people who would show it its rightful place in the 2019 polls". Earlier, Union minister Niranjana Jyoti had also made a

similar declaration in Unnao. "Wait till December," she said when HT asked her about her views on whether the BJP could bring a law to push its temple agenda ahead of the general elections. The Babri Masjid-Ram Janmbhoomi title dispute is being heard by the Supreme Court which has listed the matter for the first week of January 2019.

India's flagship crop insurance scheme a big leap, but needs fixes

The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana has achieved a better design by merging multiple insurance schemes into one, simplifying norms and cutting down premiums, the evaluation shows.

(News Agencies) The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), India's flagship crop-insurance scheme which is counted as the world's largest, is a big improvement over older schemes, but its improved features haven't made it any easier to implement or motivated all states equally. These are some of the key findings of two first-time reviews of the scheme that tracked its performance since its launch in 2016. If the scheme is to achieve its most critical goal — timely payouts to farmers — it can't fly without a raft of high-end technological fixes, from drones to an entirely new constellation of satellites for accurate crop assessments, experts say. PMFBY has achieved a better design by merging multiple insurance schemes into one, simplifying norms and cutting down premiums, the evaluation shows. Its performance has varied widely between states. A more dramatic finding is that its

success rates have varied even among districts within a state, pointing to local hurdles.

Insurance is critical to protecting farm incomes in a country where 54% of the sown area lacks irrigation and 12 million hectares, on average, suffer annual weather shocks. It is also a literal life-saver at a time when parts of the country are in the grip of an agrarian crisis which has resulted in widespread protests and which could be one of the most significant issues in the coming state and general elections. The Narendra Modi-led government will likely tout the benefits of PMFBY as well as its efforts to double farm incomes by offering a support price for crops that is at least 50% over the state-calculated cost of production.

The first study, "Governance Analysis of the PMFBY" by the Centre for Management in Agriculture of the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIM-A)

tracked the scheme till May 2018. The second by economists Ashok Gulati, Purna Terway and Siraj Hussain of the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) analysed it until 2016-17.

India will need more cloud-penetrating satellites for faster crop-loss estimates. Setting up such a constellation of satellites would likely cost Rs 2,000 crore, assuming an average cost Rs 400 crore per satellite, according to Gulati's calculations.

First off, the NDA government's crop insurance scheme scores for correcting a key flaw — capping of sum insured — in an earlier scheme, resulting in very low payouts but high premium, Gulati and his colleagues show in their work "Supporting Indian Farms the Smart Way". Sum insured is the maximum amount an insurance firm is liable to pay.

Removal of this cap has significantly increased sum insured in



certain districts. For instance, in UP's Gorakhpur, the actuarial (premium) rate for maize in 2015 (before PMFBY) was 57%, while sum insured was Rs 8,415 per hectare. When PMFBY was implemented, the actuarial rate dropped to 4.22% and sum insured went up to Rs 12,096 per hectare. Still, the IIM-A review found little improvement in time-bound payments.

Both ICRIER and IIM-A studies throw up state and district level disparities. Farmers in states that adhered to cut-off dates in rolling

out the scheme each season experienced timely payments. But, Bihar, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra, which delayed the process till July, ended up paying higher premium rates of 20%.

Bihar made a glaring error. It floated tenders when the state was already experiencing flooding in July 2016. "As a result, the companies quoted very high actuarial rate of 17%," the section on crop insurance in Gulati's "Supporting Indian Farms the Smart Way" revealed.

Assam will burn if citizenship bill is passed, warns ULFA's Anup Chetia after Tinsukia killings

Assam will burn if the Centre continues to push the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, Anup Chetia, the general secretary of the ULFA faction that is currently in talks with the government, said on the Tinsukia killings.



(News Agencies) Assam will burn if the Centre continues to push the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, Anup Chetia, the general secretary of ULFA faction which is currently in talks with the government, said on the Tinsukia killings. He said attempts by vested interests to blame the pro-talk faction of the insurgent outfit for the incident, would derail the ongoing peace process which are now in their "final stage". "Assam will burn if they continue to push the bill," Chetia said. "If the bill is passed in Parliament, the situation will worsen and the recruitment for ULFA(I), the ant-talk faction, will increase," Chetia said. The bill which is pending with

the Joint Parliamentary Committee would pave way for granting citizenship to persecuted minority communities, such as Hindus, Parsis, Sikhs, Christians and Buddhists, from neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

It is being opposed by indignant groups in Assam as they said it was against the 1985 Assam Accord, which empowered authorities to identify and deport illegal immigrants.

Also read: TMC delegation led by Derek O' Brien in Assam to meet Tinsukia victims' kin Chetia, who has been engaged in talks after he was extradited from Bangladesh and

released on bail, said killings of five people of Bengali community in Tinsukia on Thursday night, was unfortunate. "Poor people have been targeted," he said.

The police had blamed the United Liberation Front of Assam (Independent) faction for the attack even as the

banned outfit denied its role in the killings. Chetia put the blame on provocative statements by "vested interests and political leaders", including BJP MLA Shiladitya Deb, for vitiating the atmosphere of the state.

Pro-talk ULFA leaders like Mrinal Hazarika and Jiten

Dutta, who have been making provocative statements and were arrested on Friday, have also been accused of disturbing peace in the state. "They may have made provocative statements but they are not involved in the incident. We have laid down arms," Chetia said.

25 women home guards accuse seniors of harassment, seeking sexual favours in Gujarat

(News Agencies) As many as 25 women home guards in Surat city of Gujarat have accused two senior officials of harassment and seeking sexual favours, prompting an inquiry. The women approached city police commissioner Satish Sharma Friday with a written complaint. Sharma said a 'local complaints committee' set up under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act was looking into it. The complaint named two senior home guard officials, alleging that the duo subjected women to "mental, physical, sexual emotional and financial harassment", and even asked sexual favours from



some of them.

The four-page complaint has also been sent to Minister of State for Home Pradipsinh Jadeja and Chief Minister Vijay Rupani, official sources said. The two senior officers asked for money for transfer to desired places, the women alleged.

If the money was not paid, the women were transferred to far-off places and harassed, the complaint said. One of the se-

nior officers often touched women home guards inappropriately on the pretext of adjusting their uniform, the complaint alleged. Some of the women were forced to work as domestic help for seniors, it added.

"We have referred the matter to the district local complaints committee headed by a deputy commissioner of police," commissioner Sharma told reporters on Saturday. "Home guards have nothing to do with the police department, so we cannot take their complaints before the police's internal committee. The local complaints committee has started inquiry into it," he said.

How the British impoverished India

'How exactly did the British manage to diddle us and drain our wealth' ? was the question that Basudev Chatterjee (later editor of a volume in the Towards Freedom project) had posed to me 50 years ago when we were fellow-students abroad. After decades of research I find that using India's commodity export surplus as the measure and applying an interest rate of 5%, the total drain from 1765 to 1938, compounded up to 2016, comes to £9.2 trillion; since \$4.86 exchanged for £1 those days, this sum equals about \$45 trillion. The exact mechanism of drain, or transfers from India to Britain was quite simple. The key factor was Britain's control over our taxation revenues combined with control over India's financial gold and forex earnings from its booming commodity export surplus with the world. Simply put, Britain used locally raised rupee tax revenues to pay for its net import of goods, a highly abnormal use of budgetary funds not seen in any sovereign country. The East India Company from 1765 onwards allocated every year up to one-third of Indian budgetary revenues net of collection costs, to buy a large volume of goods for direct import

into Britain, far in excess of that country's own needs. Since tropical goods were highly prized in other cold temperate countries which could never produce them, in effect these free goods represented international purchasing power for Britain which kept a part for its own use and re-exported the balance to other countries in Europe and North America against import of food grains, iron and other goods in which it was deficient. The British historians Phyllis Deane and WA Cole presented an incorrect estimate of Britain's

18th-19th century trade volume, by leaving out re-exports completely. I found that by 1800 Britain's total trade was 62% higher than their estimate, on applying the correct definition of trade including re-exports, that is used by the United Nations and by all other international organisations. When the Crown took over from the Company, from 1861 a clever system was developed under which all of India's financial gold and forex

earnings from its fast-rising commodity export surplus with the world, was intercepted and appropriated by Britain. As before up to a third of India's rising budgetary revenues was not spent domestically but was set aside as 'expenditure abroad'. The Secretary



of State for India in Council, based in London, invited foreign importers to deposit with him the payment (in gold, sterling and their own currencies) for their net imports from India, and these gold and forex payments disappeared into the yawning maw of the SoS's account in the Bank of England. Against India's net foreign earnings he issued bills, termed Council bills (CBs), to an equivalent rupee value. The rate

(between gold-linked sterling and silver rupee) at which the bills were issued, was carefully adjusted to the last farthing, so that foreigners would never find it more profitable to ship financial gold as payment directly to Indians, compared to using the CB route. Foreign importers then sent the CBs by post or by telegraph to the export houses in India, that via the exchange banks were paid out of the budgeted provision of sums under 'expenditure abroad', and the exporters in turn paid the producers (peasants and artisans) from whom they sourced the goods.

The United Nations (1962) historical data for 1900 to 1960, show that for three decades up to 1928 (and very likely earlier too) India posted the second highest merchandise export surplus in the world, with USA in the first position. Not only were Indians deprived of every bit of the enormous international purchasing power they had earned over 175 years, even its rupee equivalent was not issued

to them since not even the colonial government was credited with any part of India's net gold and forex earnings against which it could issue rupees. The sleight-of-hand employed, namely 'paying' producers out of their own taxes, made India's export surplus unrequited and constituted a tax-financed drain to the metropolis, as had been correctly pointed out by those highly insightful classical writers, Dadabhai Naoroji and RCDutt. Surplus budgets to effect such heavy tax-financed transfers had a severe employment-reducing and income-deflating effect: mass consumption was squeezed in order to release export goods. Per capita annual foodgrains absorption in British India declined from 210 kg. during the period 1904-09, to 157 kg. during 1937-41, and to only 137 kg by 1946. If even a part of its enormous foreign earnings had been credited to it and not entirely siphoned off, India could have imported modern technology to build up an industrial structure as Japan was doing. Instead the masses suffered severe nutritional decline and independent India inherited a festering problem of unemployment and poverty.

RSS hints at another 'mass agitation' for Ram temple

Building further pressure on the government, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) on Friday hinted at a fresh "mass agitation" akin to 1992 for constructing a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh.

"We are confident that the Ram Mandir will be built soon... We have already waited too long for it and cannot wait indefinitely... If necessary, we shall launch a 'jan andolan' (mass agitation)," declared RSS general secretary (Sarakaryavyah) Suresh 'Bhaiyyaji' Joshi.

He urged the courts to take up sensitive cases like the Ram temple on priority and expressed confidence that all legal hurdles would be removed soon in this regard. Joshi reiterated the

RSS demand that the government should consider enacting a law or promulgating an ordinance to pave the way for



constructing the temple. His remarks came at the end of a three-day long RSS Akhil Bharatiya Karyakari Mandal conclave held near Uttan Beach of Bhayander town.

'Consensual relationship': MJ Akbar denies rape charges by US-based journalist

The latest allegation of rape against former Union minister M J Akbar was levelled against him by Pallavi Gogoi, the chief business editor of National Public Radio (NPR), a Washington-based American media organisation.

I don't know Pallavi's reasons for telling this lie but a lie it is," she said, explaining her decision to issue the statement, her first. Both statements were released simultaneously to news agency ANI.

In his counter, Akbar underlined that Pallavi Gogoi and he had entered into consensual relationship in 1994 that continued for several months. "This relationship gave rise to talk and would later cause strife in my home life as well," he said. Akbar stepped down as junior foreign minister last month after more than a dozen women journalists accused the former

journalist, a former editor of The Telegraph, Deccan Chronicle and The Asian Age newspapers, of inappropriate behaviour. He responded by suing journalist Priya Ramani, who sparked off the barrage of allegations, for criminal defamation in a Delhi court. The latest allegation of rape that has forced the Akbar couple to issue the statements was levelled by Pallavi Gogoi, the chief business editor of National Public Radio (NPR), a Washington-based American media organisation.

She detailed the "most painful memories" of her life in an article in The Washington Post,

accusing Akbar, the editor-in-chief of the Asian Age newspaper at that time, of using his position to prey on her.

Gogoi said she was 22 when she joined the Asian Age. She was star-struck working under Akbar. She was mesmerised by his use of language, his turns of phrase and took all the verbal abuse. At 23, Gogoi became the editor of the op-ed page which was a big responsibility at a young age, she said, detailing how Akbar physically and mentally harassed her for years while working at the Asian Age newspaper from New Delhi to Mumbai to Jaipur to London

Congress' new social media strategy yielding results for Rahul Gandhi

Data from Facebook-owned social media tool called CrowdTangle shows how Congress president Rahul Gandhi's Facebook page has been inching closer to the popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's page, even though its number of page 'likes' is significantly lower.

on the internet. It attracted 2.2 million views. Later, when Gandhi followed up his dinner with a visit to a ice-cream parlour, it got 765,000 views.

Data from Facebook-owned social media tool called CrowdTangle shows how Gandhi's Facebook page has been inching closer to the popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's page, even though its number of page 'likes' is significantly lower. In the last week of October, Gandhi's page got 697,771 interactions, just 11,000 short of Modi's 709,127 interactions. Exactly one year ago, Modi's page had over a million more interactions than Gandhi's. To be sure, the Prime Minister hasn't started campaigning aggressively for the coming assembly elections; his social media interactions and

engagement usually rise when he is in campaign mode. Even on Twitter, @rahulgandhi is attracting a lot of interactions. In November 2017, Gandhi's monthly median retweet count surpassed that of Modi for the first time. It has consistently been higher since then. In 2018, on average, the monthly median retweet count from Gandhi's account has been almost four times compared to Modi's account, HT's analysis of Twitter data shows. Retweets and 'likes' on Twitter and interactions on Facebook are not authoritative measures of popularity or engagement because these also sometimes include interactions orchestrated through fake profiles and automated bots.

BJP IT cell chief Amit Malviya chose not to comment.



These are promising signals for the Congress that is keen to recalibrate its social media plan in the backdrop of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's formidable presence on digital platforms. The Prime Minister is the second most popular political leader on the micro-blogging site Twitter after US president Donald Trump. On Facebook, he has a following of 43,293,259 people as on

Thursday while Gandhi has 2,056,215 followers.

The new strategy entails that Gandhi's presence will be stepped up across social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp even as Twitter remains the favourite medium for politicians to reach out to their audience. "Each platform will be used for different types of communication. Twitter is being used for short, clear messages while Instagram will showcase the personal side of him more than ever..." said one of Rahul Gandhi's political aides who asked not to be identified. According to Statista, Twitter has around 30.5 million users in India, Facebook 294 million, and Instagram, also owned by Facebook Inc, 71 million. In addition, on WhatsApp, some recipients will get stylised

messages, said a Congress leader who asked not to be identified. He points out that when Gandhi courted arrest outside the CBI headquarters last month, photos and videos of what was happening inside the bus were quickly spread across different platforms. "Earlier, all these online properties were run by the social media (team of the party). Now his office is in direct control of these platforms."

Gandhi himself is very involved in his social media strategy, the aide added. Afzal Amanullah, former union parliamentary affairs secretary, said: "The social media campaign is getting increasingly important in today's politics. But how a party performs in election would also depend on a lot of factors..."

Dassault gave Reliance Rs 284 cr to secure Rafale deal: Rahul Gandhi



, are continuously being dragged into a political battle in view of the impending state and general elections in the country," a spokesperson said. The company added that Dassault's investment in Reliance Airport Developers Limited, which is the Rs 284 crore referred to by Gandhi, had no links with the Rafale deal. "The Prime Minister is having sleepless nights. He has lost his sleep because of tension. He knows he will be caught," Gandhi said.

Gandhi said Dassault CEO Eric Trappier had cited non-availability of land as the reason for not giving the offset contract to the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). "He had stated that the contract was given to Anil Ambani because he had land. Now, it turns out that Ambani had purchased the land with the money he got from Dassault," the Congress chief

said. The comments are in keeping with the Congress's line of attack on the government for its decision to enter an \$8.7 billion government-to-government deal to buy 36 Rafale warplanes made by Dassault, which was announced in April 2015.

This deal, signed a year later, replaced the previous United Progressive Alliance regime's decision to buy 126 Rafale aircraft, 108 of which were to be made in India by the state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. The Congress claims the earlier deal was scrapped and a new one signed just to provide Ambani an opportunity for an offset deal. Both the government and Reliance have repeatedly denied this. Reliance, which is one of many companies to benefit from the deal, formed a joint venture with Dassault for the same. "HAL has more land that is available here. Why is Dassault

CEO lying? Who is he trying to protect? There is only one person the Dassault CEO is protecting and that is the person who runs this country. That is Narendra Modi," Gandhi said on Friday. A Dassault representative was not available for comment. Representatives of the government or the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party did not respond to requests for a

comment. Reliance also said that it had already acquired the land by the time it entered into a partnership with Dassault.

Gandhi also linked the controversy at the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to the alleged wrongdoing on the Rafale deal.

"Obviously, the CBI chief was looking at these papers. It is obvious that there is enough

material in the public domain to nail Shri Modi and the CBI chief was removed. So, clearly it is a cover up taking place."

His reference was to CBI director Alok Verma being sent on leave along with the agency's second senior-most officer, special director Rakesh Asthana, after the two accused each other of corruption.

Barack Obama, Donald Trump make final pitch to woo voters ahead of US midterm elections

No longer reluctant to speak out, former President Barack Obama delivered a closing argument for Democrats that seeks a firm check on President Donald Trump's policies in Tuesday's

midterm elections. Obama and Trump offered competing visions for the country in a split screen of campaigning on Sunday, seeking to galvanise voter turnout in the fight to control Congress and governors' mansions.

Obama rallied Democrats in Gary, Indiana, on behalf of Sen. Joe Donnelly, D-Ind., who faces a stiff challenge from Republican businessman Mike Braun. Later in the day, the former president campaigned in his hometown of Chicago for businessman JB Pritzker, Democrats' nominee for Illinois governor. Obama has taken on a more public

role this fall after refraining from offering a full-blown counterpoint to Trump's policies, which have sought to dismantle Obama's legacy. Without invoking his name, Obama has



accused Trump of lying and "fear-mongering" and warned Democrats not to be distracted. Trump has punched back, accusing Obama of leaving behind a trail of broken promises on

trade, the economic recovery and a promise during his presidency that patients could keep their doctors under his health care law. Trump headlined Sunday rallies in Macon, Georgia, and Chattanooga, Tennessee, supporting Republican Brian Kemp, who is running for Georgia governor, and Rep. Marsha Blackburn, who is seeking an open Senate seat in Tennessee.

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Online survey says over 50% respondents preferred Narendra Modi as PM for 2nd term

The survey, carried out by the news portal 'Dailyhunt', and Nielsen India, a data analytics company, was based on opinion of over 54 lakh respondents taken online from within the country and abroad, claimed a statement by them.

More than 63 per cent respondents in an online survey expressed their "trust" in Narendra Modi and over 50 per cent said a second term for him will provide them a better future.

The survey, carried out by the news portal 'Dailyhunt', and Nielsen India, a data analytics company, was based on opinion of over 54 lakh respondents taken online from within the country and abroad, claimed a statement by them.

"Sixty-three per cent of the respondents expressed more or similar levels of trust in Narendra Modi as compared to 2014 (when

he came into power), representing satisfaction in his leadership capabilities for the last four years," according to the survey.

The Congress, however, rubbished the findings and termed the survey as "wasteful" and "fake". "A desperate Modi government has lost the faith of people and is facing imminent decimation in five poll-bound states. It is now only using its ill-gotten financial resources to latch onto fake surveys to find legitimacy. Such wasteful surveys will never prop up a government that has already been rejected by the people," Congress chief spokesperson

and was expecting it in the next round of elections anyway -- it is unlikely that the dynamic will be the same as the last time he was in power."Rajapaksa could cement his return to power later this month when Sirisena reconvenes parliament, even as Wickremesinghe contests his removal as "blatantly illegal" and refuses to vacate the prime minister's official mansion. Rajapaksa has already taken on additional duties as finance minister, pledged to simplify the tax code and is working with advisers on the country's next budget.

Across Colombo, freshly plastered-up posters show a smiling Rajapaksa, who had triumphed against Wickremesinghe's administration in local elections earlier this year. Despite the controversial way in which he reclaimed power, the leader still enjoys strong domestic support for his role in ending the war, particularly among Sri Lanka's Sinhala majority.

Randeep Surjewala said. The survey also said that more than 50 per cent of the respondents believed that a second term for Modi "will provide them a better future".

When it comes to the five poll-bound states, the survey claimed the people in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh are "currently keeping the faith in Modi". "Telangana is the only state bucking this trend," it said without talking about the trend in Mizoram.

The survey claimed 60 per cent of the respondents seem to trust Modi the most in order to uproot the longstanding issue of

corruption."Interestingly, AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal got higher precedence over Congress President Rahul Gandhi in this category," it said, referring to the analysis of survey results of "trust and belief" factors.

"Sixty-two per cent of the respondents are confident that Narendra Modi is the best fit to lead the nation during a national crisis, followed by Rahul Gandhi, (17 per cent), Arvind Kejriwal, (8 per cent), Akhilesh Yadav, (3 per cent) and Mayawati, (2 per cent) respectively," the survey said. The statement by 'Dailyhunt' and Nielsen India clarified that the



survey is motivated not by politics and that it was carried out to reflect the voice the people of the country. Prasun Basu, President, Nielsen (South Asia) said, "We used scientific methodology to help design the study and analyse data received from Dailyhunt platforms to arrive at the findings." The survey was hosted on Dailyhunt's platforms and administered in 10 languages including English and Hindi. The respondents in 35+ years category showed greater support for Modi as compared to other age groups, added Bedi.

Sri Lanka's strongman Rajapaksa is back, and he's brought his family too

President Maithripala Sirisena fired his former ally Ranil Wickremesinghe as prime minister and appointed the mustachioed former president as his replacement.

In a compound secured by the Sri Lankan elite special task force that protects the island nation's top leaders, beneath framed photos of himself in army uniform, the brother of the country's newly installed prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa is mulling a presidential run.

"I'm not interested in actually becoming a minister," Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, who was appointed by his brother to be Sri Lanka's defense secretary in 2005 just before the climax of a brutal 26-year civil war, said in an interview. "But a lot of people want me to contest for the presidency."

In a country where it is common to appoint family members to run key ministries, the comments aren't much of a surprise. But they suggest the Rajapaksa clan is preparing to once again dominate politics in a nation it controlled from 2005 and 2015, when the family lost power in an election shock.

Now they are back, nearly

as unexpectedly as they fell. In a surprise move last Friday, President Maithripala Sirisena fired his former ally Ranil Wickremesinghe as prime minister and appointed the mustachioed former president as his replacement.

The move stunned everyone from officials at international ratings agencies -- who fear the chaos threatens debt repayments -- to activists who worry the return of Sri Lanka's strongman could erode improvements in civil liberties. There's also renewed concerns the island nation will once again tilt toward China, which holds much of the enormous debt racked up during Rajapaksa's previous rule, even if Colombo is not as enthusiastic as before.

"Rajapaksa learned hard lessons from his last experience dealing with China on Belt and Road investments," said Andrew Small, a senior fellow with the German Marshall Fund's Asia program. "Although Beijing will be happy to see his return --

and was expecting it in the next round of elections anyway -- it is unlikely that the dynamic will be the same as the last time he was in power."Rajapaksa could cement his return to power later this month when Sirisena reconvenes parliament, even as Wickremesinghe contests his removal as "blatantly illegal" and refuses to vacate the prime minister's official mansion. Rajapaksa has already taken on additional duties as finance minister, pledged to simplify the tax code and is working with advisers on the country's next budget.

Across Colombo, freshly plastered-up posters show a smiling Rajapaksa, who had triumphed against Wickremesinghe's administration in local elections earlier this year. Despite the controversial way in which he reclaimed power, the leader still enjoys strong domestic support for his role in ending the war, particularly among Sri Lanka's Sinhala majority.

Unlike Wickremesinghe, who wears western suits and seems more comfortable in Colombo's halls of power and foreign capitals, Rajapaksa is from the country's rural, southern Hambantota district. He dresses in traditional Sri Lankan robes, speaks in a folksy stream-of-consciousness manner and is very superstitious, wearing rings and bracelets he believes ward off misfortune.

As his government launched a final assault on the Tamil Tigers in 2009, his administration was condemned by human rights groups for extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances and detaining journalists and activists.

"The previous Rajapaksa government that included several family members refused to accept responsibility for serious allegations of human rights violations," says Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director at Human Rights Watch. There are



fears that "a Rajapaksa administration will continue human rights violations in the guise of nationalism and security."At his residence on the outskirts of the capital Colombo, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa told Bloomberg many international observers don't fully appreciate Sri Lanka's conflict had turned Colombo and other parts of the country into a war zone, with daily car bombs and suicide attacks. Their Tamil Tiger opponents, he said, had full control over large tracts of territory and had similar weaponry to the armed forces.

"Whether it is in Sri Lanka or another country, war is not a good thing," he said. "It's an ugly thing. But we

didn't create the war. Mahinda Rajapaksa didn't create the war. We ended the war."

Rajapaksa's brother denied the new government would once again lean on China to provide loans.

"We did not favor any particular country," he said. "We want to work with anybody who wants to work with Sri Lanka, whether it's west or east or whatever. And also we want to work with international organizations, but they have to be fair."

'Financial Crisis' Wickremesinghe, meanwhile, continues to fight.

He told Bloomberg he has the numbers to triumph over his rival in a vote when the suspended parliament reconvenes.

Pakistan's 'Father of Taliban' Maulana Samiul Haq Killed in Rawalpindi

Haq, 82, was the head of the Islamic religious seminary Darul Uloom Haqqania in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Akora Khattak town and also the chief of the hardline political party Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Sami (JUI-S).

Islamabad: Top Pakistani cleric Maulana Samiul Haq, who was also known as the 'godfather of Taliban', was stabbed to death at his residence in the garrison city of Rawalpindi on Friday, his family said.

Haq, 82, was the head of the Islamic religious seminary Darul Uloom Haqqania in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Akora Khattak town and also the chief of the hardline political party Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Sami (JUI-S).

Haq, a heart patient, was killed by unidentified attackers while he was resting in his room, his son Maulana Hamidul Haq was quoted as saying by Geo News.

His personal guard had gone out to the market and

when he came back he saw Haq lying "in a pool of blood" on the bed, Hamidul added.

JUI-S's Peshawar president also confirmed Haq's death following an assassination attempt in Rawalpindi.

Initially there were conflicting reports about how Haq was killed. Some Pakistani media had reported that he was killed in a gun attack.

Haq's son has clarified that the cleric was attacked with knife.

Mulana Abdul Majid Hazarwi, a close associate of Haq, also confirmed that he was attacked with knife.

So far, no outfit has claimed the responsibility of the killing.

A probe has been

launched to nab the assailants who apparently escaped on a motorbike, police said. Haq's funeral services will be held at 2:00 PM on Saturday in Akora Khattak.

The cleric was elected twice to Pakistan's parliament on Islami Jamhoori Itehad ticket.

He was also the chairman of the Difa-e-Pakistan Council — an umbrella coalition of more than 40 groups, including Hafeez Saeed-led Jamat-ud Dawa (JuD) and the banned Sipah-e-Sahaba.

Haq's madrassa in Akora Khattak is known for having several top Afghan Taliban leaders among its alumni, including Mullah Omar who had received an honorary doctorate from the

seminary.

Haqqani Network founder Jalaluddin Haqqani, Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AIQS) leader Asim Umar and slain Afghan Taliban chief Mullah Akhtar Mansoor were also among the alumni of the seminary which is dubbed as the "University of Jihad".

However, Haq never supported militant activities in Pakistan.

He was an ally of Prime Minister Imran Khan and supported the anti-polio vaccination drive by his government when hardcore militants opposed the campaign by terming it as a "western effort to sterilise Muslims".

Meanwhile, Khan, who is in China on an official visit, condemned the



killing of Haq and ordered the authorities to prepare a report of the incident and submit it to him.

Former premier Nawaz Sharif also condemned the killing of the leading cleric and urged public to remain clam.

Pakistani Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa also condemned the "assassination of the renowned religious scholar and political

leader". Pakistan's Minister of State for Interior, Sheryar Afridi, condemned Haq's killing and said, "The political and religious services of the Mualana will be remembered forever."

Maulana Fazlur Rehman, chief of Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam- Fazl (JUI-F), also condemned the attack. "I am with the family of the Maulana at this difficult hour," he said.

China set to give \$6 bn in aid to Pak as PM Imran Khan meets President Xi: Report



Beijing: China on Friday reportedly agreed to provide USD 6 billion in aid to Pakistan, which is going through a "low point", to minimise the cash-strapped country's dependence on an IMF bailout package as Prime Minister Imran Khan held talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Khan, who is here on his maiden visit, met Xi in the Great Hall of People where the two leaders also held one-on-one meeting besides delegation-level talks, Pakistani media reports said. Pakistan is expected to receive USD 6 billion economic package from China during the visit, Geo TV quoted sources as saying. A loan of USD 1.5 billion is also expected to be offered, along with an additional package

of USD three billion for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the report said. The loan and the investments were reportedly part of the USD 6 billion package. However, there was no immediate official comment from Beijing on the report. In his meeting with Xi, Khan, the cricketer-turned-politician, said: "my party (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) has only been in power for two months. Unfortunately, we have inherited a very difficult economic situation. "Countries go in cycles. They have their high points, they have their low points. Unfortunately, our country is going through a low point at the moment with two very big deficits, a fiscal deficit and a current account deficit. And so

we, as I've said, have come to learn". Xi assured Khan that China considers its relations with Pakistan a diplomatic priority. "China has always supported Pakistan's safeguarding of national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the new Pakistani government's smooth running of the government and advancement of national construction," he said. Xi told Khan that he highly valued the two country's relations, reaffirming they were "all-weather" friends. Earlier Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, told Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in a separate meeting that China would not let Pakistan down. "The Chinese side will continue to provide support and help to the best of its ability for Pakistan's economic and social development and national construction," China's Foreign Ministry cited Wang as saying. China's expected assistance is the second USD 6 billion package which Khan has managed to obtain in the last few weeks as Pakistan reeled under severe financial crisis.

US agrees to give India, 7 other nations oil waivers under Iran sanctions; analyst say move could be temporary

The US government has agreed to let eight countries, including close allies South Korea and Japan, as well as India, keep buying Iranian oil after it reimposes sanctions on Tehran from next week, Bloomberg reported on Friday, citing a US official.

Iran's biggest oil customers - all in Asia - have been seeking sanctions waivers to allow them to continue buying some of its oil.

Bloomberg reported that close US allies South Korea and Japan had received waivers along with India, which relies heavily on supplies from Iran. A list of all countries getting waivers was expected to be released officially on Monday, Bloomberg said. A Chinese official told Reuters that discussions with the US government were ongoing and that a result was expected over the next couple of days.

"We think Trump will agree to China importing some volumes, similar to the treatment that India and South Korea receive," Clayton Allen of Height Securities said in a note on Friday.

Representational image. ReutersRepresentational image.

Reuters South Korea's foreign ministry declined to comment, and Japanese officials were not immediately available for comment. Another country that has been seeking a sanctions waiver is Turkey, which takes significant volumes via pipeline from neighbouring Iran.

Turkey's Energy Ministry said on Friday it had heard rumors of waivers but added it had not received written notification of any exemption on buying Iran oil after the United States reimposes sanctions on Tehran on 5 November.

Although some waivers had been expected, crude oil prices fell, with Brent futures down by 10 cents at 0752 GMT to \$72.79 per barrel, as the number of waivers granted surprised many traders. Analysts said, however, that Iranian oil sanction waivers would likely only be temporary.

"The US may use waivers to slow-walk implementation, but these will not apply indefinitely," Allen said.

Goldman Sachs said it expects Iran's crude oil exports to fall to 1.15 million barrels per day (bpd) by the end of the year, down from around 2.5 million bpd in mid-2018.

Partnerships and alliances are the new mechanisms for savings lives

While donors and governments with the capacity to provide resources at a global scale can replenish these 'Global Health Funds', domestic donors can partner with their respective governments to set up similar mechanisms to multiply the impact that they can have working alone. These partnerships are essential if we want to create a world in which where you live does not determine whether you live.

The world's progress in improving health and development related outcomes for people everywhere is one of the greatest success stories of the past 20 years. Two decades ago, the infectious diseases that killed or harmed millions often went unchecked. Children born in poor countries were only vaccinated against a handful of the same diseases as children born in wealthier countries. There was no access to life-saving drugs such as antiretrovirals to treat HIV. But if we look closely at the trajectory of healthcare, we realise that since the 1990s, we have nearly halved the number of women who die in childbirth and halved the number of children who die before the age of five. There are many reasons for these gains. As countries have grown wealthier, they have increasingly invested in

their own healthcare systems, helping more of their citizens to live longer and better lives. Aid programmes from donor countries channelled either through their own agencies or UN organisations such as the WHO and UNICEF, have helped fill critical gaps. Large global charities such as CARE and Save the Children have raised funds from government and individual donors and with those funds have run large programmes in many poorer regions of the world.

An additional important reason the world has made such large gains in improving global health in the last two decades is the emergence of the 'Global Health Funds'. These new and powerful mechanisms have made it possible for donor governments and United Nations agencies to partner with large private donors and civil society organisations (CSOs) to create very large pools of funds and technical

capability to tackle some of the most pressing issues that poor countries face. In these funds, organisations like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have contributed significantly, by way of money, deep expertise, and as catalysts, alongside other private and sovereign donors, allowing each one to multiply the impact they could have had if they had acted alone. The 'Global Health Funds' currently comprise the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI); the Vaccine Alliance (Gavi); the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund); and the Global Financing Facility (GFF) and have had a remarkable impact:

In 1988, there were an estimated 350,000 cases of wild polio every year, killing or paralysing its victims. In 2017, there were just 22, with a large and complex country such as India having entirely eradicated the disease,

due to the joint efforts of domestic governments, CSOs, and GPEI.

In 2000, 30 million children in poor countries were not being immunised, leading to millions of unnecessary deaths. Since then, Gavi has supported the introduction of 380 routine vaccines into the health systems of vulnerable countries and helped to immunise 690 million children, preventing 10 million future deaths.

Since the creation of the Global Fund, deaths related to AIDS and TB have fallen by a third, and malaria by half.

GFF's 'In Support of Every Woman Every Child' is today tackling the more than five million maternal, newborn, and child deaths that still occur among the world's poorest people each year. These spectacular gains made in human health need to be sustained and accelerated. Polio is only endemic in three



countries, but until we get to zero, all countries will be at risk of polio re-emerging. Following the historic progress of reductions in malaria cases and deaths, we are on the verge of a resurgence that could see millions more at risk. And, despite more children being immunised worldwide than ever before with the highest level of routine coverage in history, increasing coverage rates with children in the world's poorest countries continues to be a challenge. To address these ongoing concerns, a massive replenishment effort for these funds is under way.

As large philanthropists emerge both at global and domestic levels, these new forms of partnerships and alliances offer a powerful way forward. While donors and governments with the capacity to provide resources at a global scale can replenish these 'Global Health Funds', domestic donors can partner with their respective governments to set up similar mechanisms to multiply the impact that they can have working alone. These partnerships are essential if we want to create a world in which where you live does not determine whether you live.

India certainly not 'tariff king', says World Bank official on US President Donald Trump's remarks

Earlier this month, Trump described India as a "tariff king" as he reiterated his allegations that New Delhi has a high tariff rate on various American goods.



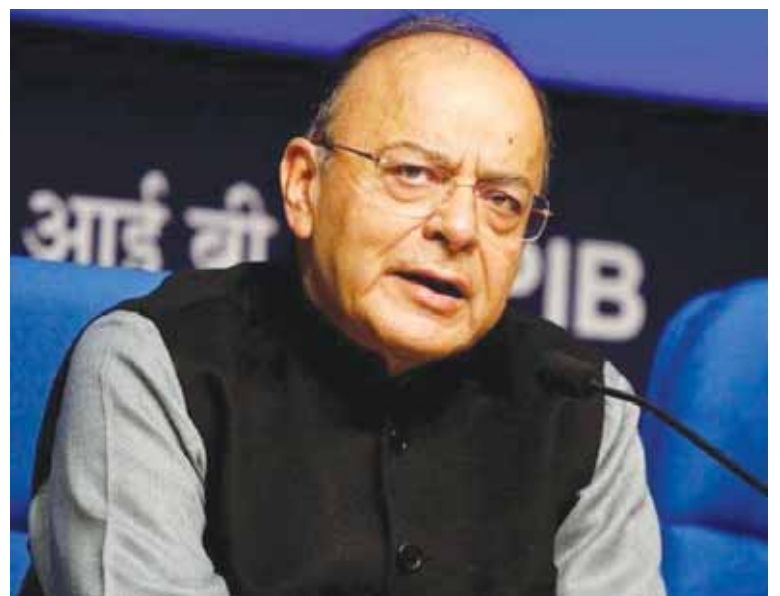
PTI in an interview when asked about Trump's statement. "India has some tariffs, but by no means it's not (tariff) king," said Devarajan, who earlier was chief economist for South Asia at the World Bank.

Even in South Asia India did not have the highest tariffs, he said referring to the experience he had in his previous capacity in the World Bank. "And they (tariffs in India) have come down quite a bit since then," he said. Liberalisation of the Indian economy is showing results, he said. "Tariffs were very high in 1991, when they liberalised and they found that actually the economy boomed. That has helped to build political support for further reforms," Devarajan said.

The World Bank does not agree with US President Donald Trump's claim that India is a "tariff king" and feels that the Indian taxation system and economy is much more liberalised than it was a few decades ago, a top official of the international financial institution said Wednesday. Earlier this month, Trump

described India as a "tariff king" as he reiterated his allegations that New Delhi has a high tariff rate on various American goods. "That (India being a tariff king) certainly is not what we find in our data," Shanta Devarajan, the World Bank's Senior Director for Development Economics and Acting Chief Economist, told

'Ease of doing business' HIGHLIGHTS: Top 50 within reach, says Arun Jaitley



India managed to improve its ranking in World Bank's latest ease of doing business report, securing 77th rank, jumping 23 places. The government has in the last several months taken specific measures to address impediments to doing business in the country identified by the multilateral

agency. These include simplifying the processes in cross-border trade, municipal permissions relating to land and buildings, and enforcement of contracts. The idea is to cut red tape, reduce the cost and time taken in transactions for businesses, and improving efficiency in governance.

Three young historians tell tales from the past and make bygones fun again

You detested history in school, yet you're ready to campaign against the censor board to allow the screening of Padmaavat (2018), irrespective of whether it respects history or not?

You disliked studying about Shivaji in your textbooks, but enjoyed Bajirao Mastani (2017); you didn't want to do papers on WW II, but contributed to making Churchill a (2017) superhit?

May be it's not our fault: writers of school books don't have the finesse of a film director, or the entertainment value.

The good news is that some writers now combine both: the authenticity of research and the skill of joyful storytelling. Ira Mukhoty, Manu S. Pillai and Parvati Sharma are three young best-selling authors (average age between the three = 35 years!) whose take on history is appealing to short-attention spanned millennials. As a special Diwali treat, HT Brunch asks them to pen one short story

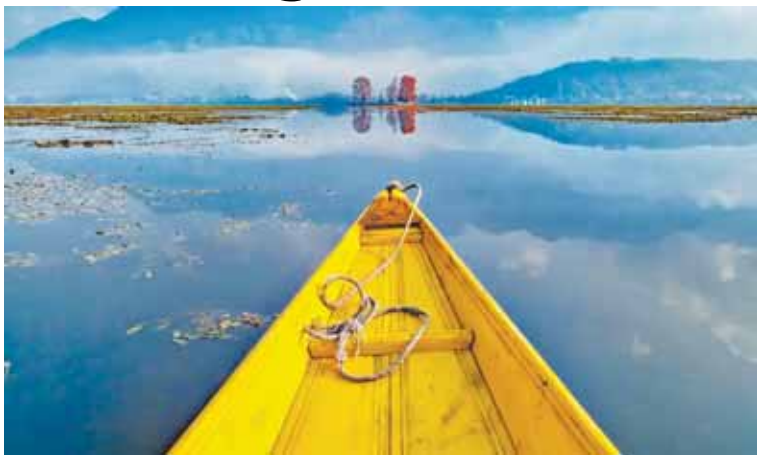
each from times gone by, that has the ability to provoke thought, imagination and drive, and invoke a love for history you never thought you'd possess! In the 24th year of Jalal-ud-din Akbar's reign, a 10-year-old boy was installed on the throne of the Adil Shahs of Bijapur. Ibrahim II was several decades the Mughal emperor's junior, but if the two had met, they'd have enjoyed each other's company. Though separated by distance as well as a generation gap, there was a great deal the Mughal badshah and the Deccan sultan had in common. Both were patrons of the arts, and each was a man of ability as well as charisma. And in what is directly relevant to our own times, Akbar and Ibrahim both embraced the plural impulses of the societies over which they reigned, birthing a magnificent age, and lighting a path that still shines centuries after they went to the grave.

While Akbar horrified the conservative with a tika on his forehead, Ibrahim II did the same with the rudraksha around his neck

The horror with which Akbar's religious views were perceived is well chronicled. But in the shadow of the emperor, Ibrahim languishes forgotten. Like Akbar, he too was a violent man when it came to matters of state. But when battle was done, and a calmer breeze prevailed, his curiosity matched that of the emperor far away. Where Akbar horrified the conservative with a tika on his forehead, Ibrahim did the same with the rudraksha around his neck. Where the emperor welcomed padres at court, in Bijapur too the gates were thrown open for the message of Christ. And while Akbar participated in "heathen" rituals with his Rajput wives, Ibrahim joined his Maratha consort and venerated, besides Ganapati, the goddess Saraswati. It

wasn't like powerful interests did not disapprove, and both men knew their unorthodox views could provoke trouble. Badauni held Akbar "in defiance and contempt of the true faith", just as a sufi rushed to "rescue" the Adil Shah from the philosophical embrace of a yogi. Both had to compromise with the conservative. Akbar died swathed in whispers that he was an apostate, and so too went Ibrahim, surrounded by smaller men with narrower minds. Indeed, the Adil Shah felt impelled to ward off attacks on his memory. "No," his grave read, "Ibrahim in truth was not a Jew, neither a Christian". He was "one pure of faith", and "never of the idolators." But even here he played a trick. On the face of it he was bowing to the orthodox. But this was a line from the Quran, and "Ibrahim" could be either the Adil Shah or the Prophet himself – even in death he would not fully concede.

Losing and finding yourself in Kashmir



"Srinagar. It is stopping at sidewalks and traffic lights when the convoys of rulers and their patrons in armored cars, secured by machine guns, rumble on broken roads. It is staring back or looking away, resigned. Srinagar is never winning and never being defeated"—BASHARAT PEER The day before I was to leave for Kashmir, a killing had taken place. Violence erupted and the next day, which was the day when I would arrive, was declared a bandh. I grew up in Kolkata. Bandhs were as normal as power cuts. My father ran a factory in Barrackpore where Naxalites would routinely gherao him and hold him to gunpoint. He never flinched. He and I were tear-gassed at Esplanade in the early 80s. When that is the preface of your life, your book takes an altogether different twist. But there was more. I arrived post lunch on a Friday. That is not a day and time to land in Srinagar. It is when clashes take place. The greatest clash within Kashmir is that between perception and reality. Between

the questions and the answers. Kashmir is 51 shades of grey. Some years ago, Shama Naqushbandi wrote, "It is for this reason that when I think of Kashmir, I do not think of polemics between good and evil. I do not think of India and Pakistan. It is of no consequence to me whether Kashmir falls under the aegis of one flag or another, or whether it gains independence. I do not see politics." I so agree with her. The eye must be trained to see what it must and miss what it should. Just then a friend calls. "Is there unrest in Srinagar?" I reply, "Not quite as much as there is in JNU. Or Twitter." As someone famously wrote, "Some days it storms. Some days it shines. That's how flowers grow." From the airport, the road to Vivanta Dal View, Srinagar, is dotted with mute soldiers carrying guns that they do not necessarily want to lift. And with mighty Chinars that do not want to bow. "Tum bhi ab Kashmir si ho chuki. Husn ke itne saarey pehredar jo

baithey huey"—VIHAAN I am just not a fan of non-vegetarian Kashmiri cuisine. I stay far away from the gushtabas, ristas, yakhnis and the tabak maas's of the world. But a recent introduction to Rajni Jhinsi (who I think is the finest Kashmiri cook in the country), made me fall hopelessly in love with muchch – a divine mutton kofta curry. Evidently, the head chef at Vivanta hadn't heard of it. I was told to wait until the next morning for the chef at my hotel to show up. I had the most divine meal courtesy chef Seva. The muchch was fantastic. He also made me some shalgam ki sabzi and served me ghaanth gobi leaves under the guise of haak. Breakfast there is equally sublime. Methi alu with puris.

As is expected of any touristy place, a cavalcade of clichés follows you in Kashmir. Here are some. Ahdoos. I gave up on the restaurant years ago. Someone pointed me in the direction of their bakery. The cheese puffs were fantastically forgettable. Then there are the 4.30am shikara rides to the vegetable markets where you are fleeced. So why bother? Much romance has been infused into the shikara ride to the bookstore in the middle of Dal Lake. Pass that as well. Then there is Chaai Jaai, a Victorian style teahouse. I mean really? Kahwa and chintz? Oh puhleez. Instead focus on the fabulous parts of Srinagar. The serenity that envelopes the Hazratbal Mosque. Visit the fabulous

Dachigam National Park, home to the hangul or Kashmiri stag. It also has musk deer, Himalayan black bears, otters and even long-tailed marmots. Visit Saklain's Coterie where you get soaps, scrubs and shampoos made with the freshest and finest Kashmiri produce. Pick up a bottle of kalonji oil. It is more virtuous than Portia was. Down a few blocks from Saklain is the temple of all things tasteful: Amin Bin Khalik. Marvel at the morels. Pack some. Pick up walnuts and pine nuts from there. Ask to smell the saffron. It reeks of richness. And do buy the garlic pickle. Visit Moonlight Bakery. Their walnut fudge is the eighth sin. And sample the tujjis from Imran's, a street-side stalwart.

Gourmet Secrets: The best of both worlds

As is expected of any touristy place, a cavalcade of clichés follows you in Kashmir. Here are some. Ahdoos. I gave up on the restaurant years ago. Someone pointed me in the direction of their bakery. The cheese puffs were fantastically forgettable. Then there are the 4.30am shikara rides to the vegetable markets where you are fleeced. So why bother? Much romance has been infused into the shikara ride to the bookstore in the middle of Dal Lake. Pass that as well. Then there is Chaai Jaai, a Victorian style teahouse. I mean really? Kahwa and chintz? Oh puhleez. Instead focus on the

fabulous parts of Srinagar. The serenity that envelopes the Hazratbal Mosque. Visit the fabulous What I didn't realise is that I hadn't eaten Tetsuya Wakuda's food since he was in a nondescript suburb of Sydney known as Rozelle almost 20 years ago. We visited it a few times between 1989 and 1999. Almost impossible to find..it was on the first floor with no signage. Once inside of course, his signature 10-course tasting menu of French meets Japanese, would floor us. To me, this is what "fine dining" is all about. It is not about fuss, frills and fancy presentation. Outside the great Michelin

restaurants of France, his fantastic blend of skill, artistry and taste wins me over. Tetsuya Wakuda's attention to detail is consistent and beyond sublime. If anyone succeeds in pulling off "fusion" cuisine, he does. Since 2000, the restaurant is in a much larger, swanky address in central Sydney where despite its 140 seating capacity on two floors, it is still difficult to get a reservation. This must be some record - almost 30 years of serving guests only a tasting menu where the signature dishes remain and the rest swivel with the seasons.

Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan: Why BJP's prospects in 2019 will hinge on these high-stakes battles

A BJP defeat will hand Congress president Rahul Gandhi a victory — at last — and set his party on the road to revival.

These days, I am frequently asked what will happen in the 2019 general election. My simple answer is, I don't know, but the forthcoming assembly polls may provide some clues. Indian voters have become far more inscrutable and discriminating than they once were, destroying many favourite theories of political pundits along the way.

Anti-incumbency is one such, but while the theory seems to hold in Rajasthan, the current BJP chief ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh are fighting for their fourth terms. The good news is that performance seems to matter. The question whether the electorate votes differently in state and general elections is still open to debate as there are examples that point in either direction. That said, there are still huge national implications shadowing the five states going to the polls this month. Elections in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, MP, Telangana and Mizoram will be closely watched for various reasons. The results on December 11 will come less than six months before the Lok Sabha election. This is why they are being called the semi-finals.



These five states represent 16 per cent of India's electorate and are also a metaphor for India's current political power equations — the BJP rules Rajasthan, MP and Chhattisgarh not only in the assemblies but also in the Lok Sabha and holds 62 of the 65 Lok Sabha seats in these three states; the Congress holds only Mizoram. The three largest states going to the polls are also a study in contrasts. Rajasthan is the current home of anti-incumbency — it has not returned a government to power in 20 years.

MP and Chhattisgarh have not voted for a party other than the BJP in 15 years. This is what makes the re-election campaigns of their chief ministers — Vasundhara Raje in Rajasthan, Raman Singh in Chhattisgarh and Shivraj Singh Chouhan in MP — so different. Both the Congress and the BJP will go on to fight the finals, the Lok Sabha, but these results will decide how they fight it. If the BJP loses in more than one state, it will be forced to revisit its election strategy.

A decline in the electoral goodwill

in these states may cost the BJP heavily, and cause it to rethink its recent political adventurism in the east and south of India. But more than that, a BJP defeat will hand Congress president Rahul Gandhi a victory — at last — and set his party on the road to revival. The potential fractiousness of a mahagathbandhan is not an issue in these elections and the stakes are high for both the Congress and the BJP who will be engaged in straight fights in three of the five states where the saffron party is fighting a defensive battle. This is a test for Amit Shah's electoral juggernaut. Can he recreate the astonishing series of victories he has delivered for the party in recent years? Earlier this year, Shah boasted of a Congress-free northeast by the year-end. Which adds significance to the contest in Mizoram — it's the only northeastern state where the BJP is not in power either on its own or in a coalition. This is also a significant test for Rahul and the 'soft Hindutva approach' he's taken of late as well as his party's polemic on issues such as Rafale, rising prices and the government's failings on the

economy. Our cover story, Do or Die, put together by our Jaipur, Raipur and Bhopal correspondents, tracks the trends on the ground.

The criticality of these elections is not lost on anyone in these states. In fact, a lot of the strategising in the BJP and Congress camps is being done keeping 2019 in mind.

In MP, for instance, the BJP is not raising issues like demonetisation and GST because it brings back painful memories. The party is, however, banking on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's crowd-pulling charisma to see it through in all these states. And that's going to be the real test. Does Brand Modi still have the kind of currency it once did? I believe charisma can only take you so far, specially the second time round. The results of these elections will reveal whether the plethora of schemes the NDA government had announced and claims to have implemented, both at the state and at the central level, have made a difference to the lives of people. As they say, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

The RBI can do better than this on the autonomy front

Instead of excluding the central government and players in the financial sector in a quixotic show of independence, it should work with them

Is the Reserve Bank of India deputy governor, Viral Acharya, right in lashing out at the government? And is the catastrophic scenario he claims will be caused by continued alleged government interference in the central bank's operations real?

It is a fact that under the leadership of governor, Urjit Patel, the RBI has continued a rather hawkish stance when it comes to interest rates. There is a thinking in several quarters in the government that it missed the boat on interest rate reductions, which could have given a fillip to the economy and prepared it better for the upcoming volatility. There is also some concern in the government that the books of banks have deteriorated under the RBI's watch, and that the blame for this is being passed on without adequate accountability. And there is some disquiet in the government that the RBI has not been able to communicate a credible strategy on the rupee to the market — the same market that Acharya believes will punish

the country.

This writer is of the view that the RBI, in its pursuit of autonomy and in an effort to showcase its independence from the government, is pursuing policies that will be detrimental to the country. There are four ways in which it can do better.

Work with, not in isolation from, stakeholders: The global economy is increasingly complex. In most advanced countries, all stakeholders work together. That would mean that the RBI, instead of excluding the central government and players in the financial sector in a quixotic show of independence, should work with them. The central bank and its officers should also stick to their mandates — discussion on non-economic issues such as tolerance are not their brief. A great central bank in a failed economy may work to the benefit of the governor in terms of his or her next posting, but does little for the economy.

Reforms work best when the economy is doing well: Whether it is our personal life, companies

or the economy, changes are best made when there is a buffer to reduce the effect of temporary negative impact. Piling on pressure when the economy is sucking wind because of inadequate liquidity is illogical to the extent of being bizarre. Nobody questions the need to improve asset quality — but stopping banks from lending is not the answer. Now is the time to "nurse" the economy: dealing with the bad assets but also allowing good lending to continue. Introspect and work with the powers already vested: The RBI needs to ponder over a few issues. How did its audits fail in the case of Punjab National Bank? How did it miss the crisis in IL&FS? There are bankers in the top rungs of RBI, but what role do they play in banking policies and oversight? Why is there general international investor discomfort with the lack of direction from the RBI? Instead of post-facto penalisation, the RBI can have pre-emptive discussions with banks, ideate and come up with new solutions



on bad debts, build up a long-term infrastructure funding market, and inform the markets about our FX strategy. There is enough to do, and it already has the powers to do so. An effective RBI will only help the economy.

Future-proof RBI: To deal with a complex new world, the RBI has to seriously consider breaking itself up to remove inherent conflicts of interest. For instance, a Treasury could look after FX, Interest rates and related areas; a government funding and budget unit could help with government financing; a policy making one could make the rules for the banking and financial

sector and an enforcement wing can ensure compliance. The four could always work together — with each other and other stakeholders but need to be fundamentally distinct entities.

One could perhaps say that individualistic sprints are being run by short term appointees in the RBI, when the need of the hour is an inclusive approach that ensures development and broader positive market perception of India. One must remember the Indian PM has to address public concerns immediately and does not have the luxury of long term theoretical economic options available to the unelected.

Indian airlines stare at steepest loss in a decade: Crisil

Indian airlines could report losses of \$1.65-1.90 billion in FY19, Capa India says in a report



airlines.

“With ATF prices expected to average 28% higher on-year compared with fiscal 2018, the impact will be significant,” said Crisil.

“The blow on this count is also expected to be severe given that the rupee has depreciated 13% against the dollar since March 2018,” it added.

Indian airlines haven't fared well due to cost pressures in the last few quarters. Intense competition has also prevented them from raising fares sufficiently to cover the increased costs.

“Almost two-thirds of an airline's cost, and therefore profitability, is susceptible to fluctuations in forex rates and ATF prices,” said Crisil Ratings' senior director Sachin Gupta. “To offset the increase in operating cost, the industry will have to raise average fares by 12%—that, too, assuming there is no change in the passenger load factor (PLF),”

he said but added that the “aggressive expansion plans of carriers and the race to maintain high PLFs will keep competitive intensity high and limit their ability to increase fares.”

Among the listed airlines, InterGlobe Aviation Ltd, which runs IndiGo, swung to its maiden quarterly loss since it went public, in the September quarter at ₹652.13 crore, compared with a year-earlier profit of ₹551.56 crore.

Jet Airways and SpiceJet are yet to report their September quarter results.

In the June quarter, SpiceJet plunged to a loss from a year-earlier net profit. Jet Airways also reported a loss in the June quarter due to higher fuel costs and foreign exchange losses. Jet Airways, which had a 14.2% of share of the domestic market in September, is in urgent need to raise cash to stay afloat.

The management of Jet Airways

has drafted a turnaround plan for the airline, which includes a cost reduction programme of more than ₹2,000 crore over two years, a plan to improve pricing, better inventory management, leveraging the Jet Privilege Pvt. Ltd loyalty programme, capital infusion and fleet simplification. Meanwhile, the government's recent move to cut the excise duty levied on jet fuel by 300 basis points to 11%, is not expected to provide much relief to airlines. One hundred basis points equal one percentage point.

Indian carriers are expected to report losses of \$1.65-1.90 billion in FY19, Capa India, an industry consultancy, said in a recent report. “Airlines will need to adjust to a new normal of higher costs and excess capacity. This may take time. Until then, industry losses are likely to increase,” CAPA India said in its latest aviation outlook.

Mumbai: Indian airlines may plunge into their steepest loss in a decade this financial year, slammed by rising operating costs caused mainly by high jet fuel prices and a weak rupee, Crisil Ratings said on Thursday. “At an estimated ₹9,300 crore, the industry's losses at EBIT (earnings before interest and tax) level would surpass the ₹7,348 crore blow it was dealt in fiscal 2014,” said the ratings firm in a

report. Airlines in the country posted “aggregate profit of ₹4,000 crore on an average at the EBIT level” from FY14 to FY18, when global crude oil prices stayed low, according to the report.

A weak rupee adds to the woes of airlines as most of their expenses are dollar-denominated while aviation turbine fuel (ATF) accounts for 35-40% of the total cost of

Mastercard lodges protest over promotion of Indian card network RuPay

Indian government using nationalism to promote the use of domestic payments network RuPay and New Delhi's protectionist policies were hurting foreign payment companies: Mastercard

New Delhi: Mastercard told the US government in June that the government was using nationalism to promote the use of domestic payments network RuPay, and New Delhi's protectionist policies were hurting foreign payment companies, a document seen by Reuters showed.

The government has in recent years backed India's homegrown payments network RuPay, whose rise has broken the dominance of US payment giants such as Mastercard and Visa. More than half of India's 1 billion debit and credit cards now go through the RuPay payment system, and that means companies such as Mastercard face an uphill task to expand rapidly in one of the world's biggest payments growth markets.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has publicly endorsed the indigenous card payment network, saying using RuPay was like serving the country as its transaction fee stays within

India and could help build roads, schools and hospitals.

In a written reference to Modi's stance, Mastercard told the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) on June 21 that the prime minister “associated the use of RuPay cards with nationalism, claiming it serves as ‘kind of national service’.”

The note, which was sent by a Mastercard Vice-President for Global Public Policy, Sahra English, said that, while Modi's digital payments push was “commendable”, the Indian government had adopted “a series of protectionist measures” to the detriment of global companies. US companies in India have been increasingly battling the government's policies they perceive to be protectionist. This year, US technology companies have protested against an Indian law that would require them to store more data locally, raising their costs.

The previously unreported note,

which was seen by Reuters, shows the extent to which Modi's support for RuPay frustrated the Purchase, New York-based company, which is the world's second-largest payments processor.

“Increasing rhetoric from the prime minister and government mandates on promotion and preference for RuPay ... continues to create market access issues for US payments technology companies,” Mastercard said in the note.

“The Indian government's preferential treatment of RuPay coupled with fallacies on pricing must be discontinued,” the company asked the US government to propose.

In response to Reuters queries, Mastercard said in a statement it “fully supports” the Indian government's initiatives and is “deeply invested” in the country. The company did not comment on its USTR note and its executive Sahra English did not respond to questions.

PNB rules itself out of mergers, eyes Rs 6,000 crore from 3 IBC cases

New Delhi: Punjab National Bank has ruled itself out of the next phase of banking consolidation. Before the Rs 14,356 crore scam, allegedly perpetrated by jewellers Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi, hit PNB, the Delhi-based bank was considered a front-runner to lead the consolidation drive as the country's second largest state-run bank.

“The bank is focusing on consolidating its internal operations and does not plan to go for inorganic consolidation at this point,” said Sunil Mehta, managing director and chief executive officer of PNB, adding the bank had let the government know its stance.

The bank has reported quarterly losses for three consecutive quarters and is struggling to put behind the effect of the scam.

The bank posted a record loss of Rs 13,417 crore in the fourth quarter of 2017-18 as it made provisions for the fraud as well as for the steadily rising NPAs after the RBI did away with all loan restructuring schemes. This loss was followed by a loss of Rs 940 crore in the first quarter

of 2018-19 and Rs 4,532 crore loss in the second quarter.

It is also strengthening its internal processes to prevent a recurrence of frauds. Further, asset quality pressures persist, forcing the bank to aggressively step up recoveries.

The bank, however, is targeting ending the full year in the black. It is banking on recoveries from three major cases that are in the final stages of resolution under the insolvency and bankruptcy code, including Essar Steel, Ruchi Soya and Bhushan Power and Steel. It is expecting to recover more than Rs 6,000 crore from these three companies by the year-end.

Another ray of hope is recovery from sale of assets of Nirav Modi that were attached by the Enforcement Directorate. But given that could be a prolonged legal battle, the bank may not secure any proceeds this year. After the five associate banks merged themselves with State Bank of India last year, the government in September this year announced the merger of Bank of Baroda,

Microsoft tests show 91% new PCs from India loaded with pirated software

Microsoft purchased the personal computers between May and July this year.



Over 90% of new personal computers purchased by Microsoft from India have a high-level of pirated software, according to an analysis by the software-giant. Nine Asian countries, including India, have a high-level of pirated software loaded on personal computers. Microsoft purchased the personal computers between May and July this year, and

then tested them, which showed that more 83% of them acquired from the nine countries were loaded with pirate software, according to the analysis of newly purchased systems. The tests showed that India had 91% of the new personal computers loaded with pirated software, followed by Indonesia 90%, Taiwan 73%, Singapore 55% and the

Philippines 43%. The worst were South Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand, all with 100% of the purchased personal computers loaded with pirated software. Out of the 166 personal computers bought from nine countries, 22 were purchased from Indian shops at random, 20 of which were loaded with pirated software when tested out by experts, said Mary Jo Schrade, Assistant General Counsel and Regional Director of Digital Crimes Unit in Asia at the Microsoft in Singapore. Calling on consumers to make a choice for genuine software when buying computers, Schrade said 17 units had malware out of the 20 acquired in India for the tests. Overall, the 166 personal computers acquired from Asian countries, 137 or 83% were loaded with pirated software. In her efforts to educate people, Schrade cautioned:

“Think! Free software is not really free.” Pirated software, initially cheaper, will lead to extra time and costs as it comes with embedded virus such as Trojan. Compromised personal computers performance is not only slowing the computer but stealing information and access to the system for there are malware allowing Bitcoin mining among other illegal activities, said the Microsoft executive. “We saw that in every step of this whole process you encounter malware,” said Biplap Sikdar, associate professor at department of electrical and computing engineering at the National University of Singapore. Sikdar, who analysed the computers, also cautioned about the time and cost of a compromised system. Sensitive information such as

personal, family pictures and banking, is stolen while the system is encrypted and locked, in some cases ransom is demanded as a way to unlock. Schrade warned, “Cybercriminals are constantly evolving their techniques to evade security measures and embedding their malware into pirated software is one of their tactics as it allows them to compromise large numbers of personal computers and access the amount of stolen credentials with ease.” “When vendors sell pirated software containing malware in their personal computers, they are not only fuelling the spread of malware in the region but are also putting their customers’ personal information and digital identity at the mercy of cybercriminals,” she pointed out.

Reliance Jio Diwali offer: 100% cashback on recharges, free JioFi with laptops and more

Reliance Jio’s new Diwali offer comes with cashbacks, free data and calls, and complimentary JioPrime membership.

Reliance Jio is back with another Diwali offer for its users. ‘Jio Diwali Dhamaka’ is currently live on the company’s website. Jio is offering 100% cashback on recharges, Rs 2,200 cashback on new 4G phones, and more. Jio has a total of eight offers under its ‘Diwali Dhamaka’. Jio users can avail cashback up to Rs 300 on recharging via mobile wallets like Paytm, PhonePe, Amazon Pay and MobiKwik. Jio has also announced a new annual plan of Rs 1,699 bundled with unlimited data and free calls. Users can avail 100% cashback on this Diwali plan and on plans priced above Rs 149. 100% cashback on recharge plans This cashback will be rewarded in the form of Reliance Digital coupons in the MyJio app. Recharges from Rs 799 will get more than one coupon. For example, users who recharge for Rs 1,699 will get two 500 coupons and one 200 coupon. These coupons can be used against a minimum purchase of Rs 5,000 at any Reliance Digital

store. These coupons cannot be used for products like hard disks from brands like Seagate, Western Digital, Sony and Lenovo. 4G smartphones Another cashback offer of Rs 2,200 cashback is applicable on new 4G smartphones. This cashback will be credited in the form of 44 cashback vouchers of Rs 50 each in MyJio app. Also, these recharges should be done on the same 4G smartphone. JioPhone Jio is also offering its JioPhone bundled with a gift card. On purchasing the JioPhone for Rs 1,095, users will get unlimited voice and data for six months. There’s also a complimentary data voucher worth Rs 101 bundled with the plan. On the JioPhone 2, buyers can avail Rs 200 cashback through Paytm. Laptops priced above Rs 35,000 are coming along with a free JioFi and data benefits worth Rs 3,000. Here, users will get JioPrime membership, 2GB data daily for 168 days and 10 vouchers of 6GB data.

Google’s new travel tools already know your vacation plans: How to disable it

In the world of luxury travel, two superpowers currently prevail above all: personalisation and intuition. The better a hotel, app, or travel company can respond to users’ needs and desires—and ideally, predict them before they bubble up to the surface—the more likely they are to gain a loyal following. But it’s not a hotel or travel agency that’s cracking the golden acorn. It’s Google. The tech titan is leveraging its immense artificial intelligence and machine-learning capabilities to boost its travel offerings, which currently cover everything from flight and hotel search to activity recommendations, destination guides, and mapping services. Travel tech expert Gillian Morris, founder of airfare search app Hitlist, says this is a space in which Google is uniquely positioned to succeed. “One reason why it’s so hard to innovate and give satisfying experiences in the travel industry is that companies rarely know anything about you; you don’t log in to Kayak or Expedia so that they can learn what you like,” she explains.

“Personalization is difficult when you don’t have a clear picture of the traveler. But Google has so much info through your email, flight confirmations—everything—they actually can deliver that magical trip experience.” The proof is in the pudding. Over the past few months, Google has quietly launched an array of travel-focused features and updates that highlight just how intuitive its AI technology has become. Put them all together and you’ll have enough reason to believe your next travel agent might just be a Google-powered bot. Here, the game-changing features to look for—or hide from, if you’re more concerned with privacy than being an early adopter: Potential Trips No matter what your search, Google is watching. (And if you use a voice assistant such as Google Home, it might also be listening.) But what feel like random, daydream-inspired searches—“best tacos in Mexico City,” maybe, or “how to do yoga on horseback”—offer excellent clues that tell

Google where you might be interested in going next. Now the engine is using those searches to file away “Potential Trips,” folders with information about hotels, restaurants, and activities you’ve previously researched in specific destinations. “If you’ve recently started looking at hotels or activities in Los Angeles but haven’t booked anything yet, we will organize this information in Your Trips, along with destination-specific searches, tracked flights (if you have any), and more tips,” explains Richard Holden, Google’s vice president of product management, who says the tool will help travelers pick up where they left off if their travel plans are delayed. “We want users to consider this as their travel bucket list, and now when they search, they can easily access and leverage any research they’ve done to date related to a destination,” he tells Bloomberg. How to use it Potential trips aren’t saved within an app such as Inbox or accessible from an easy-to-reach drop-down menu on Chrome.

The Dark Side of Life: Mumbai City gets a new release date

A little more wait for people! The film that was earlier set to release on October 19th, 2018 has been pushed and will now release on November 23rd, 2018.

The Dark Side of Life: Mumbai City is a story about seven individuals and their lives, who are pushed under depression while battling their emotional and financial problems. What will be the fate of these individuals, it would be interesting to know once the film will hit the screens.

Noted director-producer Mahesh Bhatt, who is marking his acting debut with this film also stars Avii, Nikhil Ratnaparkhi, Deepraj Rana, Alisha Seema Khan, Gul Hameed, Neha Khan, Jyoti Malshe, Irfan Hussein, Aarti Puri and Kay Kay Menon in the pivotal roles.

Written and directed by Tariq Khan, The Dark Side of Life: Mumbai City is produced by Rajesh Pardasani under the banner of Lakshya Productions.

Swara Bhaskar and Anjum Rajabali felicitate the winner of 'Launch Your Script,' 2018. Screenwriters Association (SWA), Motion Picture Association (MPA) and Asia Pacific Screen Awards (APSA) launched a joint script development outreach program, 'Launch Your Script,' 2018, in India earlier

this year to enable Indian screenwriters to showcase their work on a global platform.

To mark the success of 'Launch Your Script,' 2018, SWA hosted a felicitation ceremony for the LATC Global Film and TV program winner, Anubhav Chopra for his entry titled "Phurr" and the twelve finalists of the outreach program on October 24th 2018 at the SWA office in Andheri (W).

Swara Bhaskar, actor known for her roles in films such as Tanu Weds Manu, Ranjhanaa, and the recently released Veere Di Wedding and Saiwyn Quadras, writer of popular films such as Neerja, Mary Kom and Parmanu – the story of Pokhran were the Chief Guests. Also in attendance, were members from the MPA's India office, SWA, senior APSA Academy members and Suman Mukhopadhyay, recipient of the 2017 MPA APSA Academy Film Fund grant.

The objective of the outreach program was to open doors for SWA members and screenwriters across the country to compete in the 2018 MPA APSA Academy Film Fund. After receiving over 600 entries and going through multiple rounds of evaluation, SWA and the selection

committee comprising APSA Academy members: Rajit Kapur, Mayank Tewari, Leena Yadav, Rajan Khosa and Meenakshi Shedde shortlisted twelve finalists whose entries stand a chance to win a script development grant of USD 25,000 during the 12th Asia Pacific Screen Awards, to be held in Brisbane, Australia in November this year.

Chair of the Asia Pacific Screen Awards and its Academy Michael Hawkins said, "The M P A A P S A Academy Film Fund has seen phenomenal success in 2018 with finished projects premiering at Cannes, Venice and beyond. APSA applauds SWA and MPA India for their extensive outreach in support of the initiative, which in 2017 saw one of the applicants through this process, Suman Mukhopadhyay, become one of the four successful MPA Film Fund recipients. We look forward to seeing a strong number of applicants again in 2018."

Mike Ellis, President and Managing Director, Motion Picture Association, Asia Pacific said, "We are delighted to partner once again with the Screen Writers Association of India and the Asia Pacific Screen Awards in this enterprising program that offers screenwriters an avenue to secure significant support for a new feature film project. In 2017, Suman Mukhopadhyay's project Paradise in Flames, went on to receive one of the four USD\$25,000 script development grants. The project is now well advanced in the development

stage. The MPA APSA Academy Film Fund is now recognized as a world-class initiative for kick-starting exciting stories from every corner of the Asia Pacific."

Chief Guest of the event, Swara Bhaskar said, "A script is where the depth of a character lies. No matter how hard an actor



tries, there has to be something more in the writing for the character and the plot to stand out and be real. Now that I'm writing a script myself, I can also empathize with the struggle and hard work of the process of script writing."

Speaking about the collaboration, Anjum Rajabali, veteran screenwriter and Executive Committee Member, SWA said, "The Screenwriters Association is privileged to have been invited to associate with the Asia Pacific Screen Awards and the Motion Picture Association in this 'Launch Your Script' initiative since 2017. SWA congratulates its member, Anubhav Chopra for emerging as the winner of the prestigious LATC Global Film and TV program for 2018. It also offers its best wishes to the 'Launch your Script' finalists."

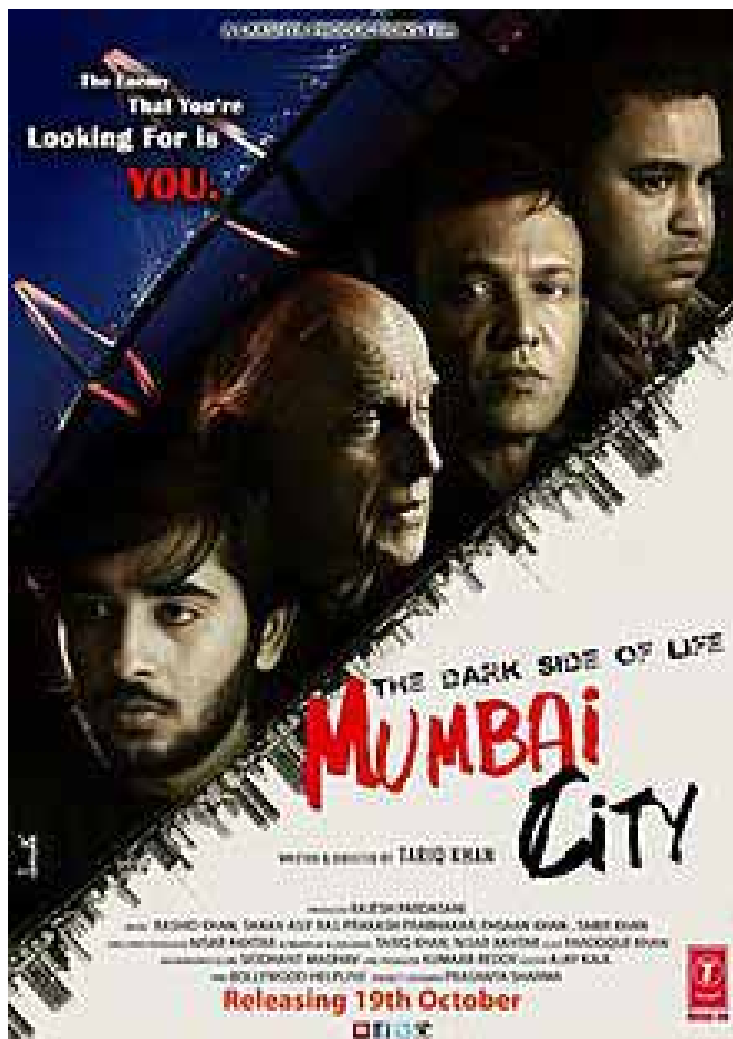
About the MPA APSA Academy Film Fund: The Motion Picture Association (MPA) and Asia Pacific Screen Awards (APSA) annually awards four script development grants of US \$25,000 each to APSA Academy members at the awards ceremony held in Brisbane, Australia. APSA is regarded as the highest

accolade in film in the region, and these grants provide significant support to enable stories from the Asia Pacific to reach the global stage. Winners of the film fund in the past have included Iranian writer-director Asghar Farhadi (for A Separation, which went on to win an Academy Award®) and Australian writer-director Rolf de Heer (for Mr. Ward's Incredible Journey). In 2017, SWA member Suman Mukhopadhyay's Paradise in Flames was one of the four recipients of the MPA APSA Academy Film Fund. This project was submitted with the endorsement of APSA Academy member Rajit Kapur as a creative consultant.

About SWA: The Screenwriters Association (SWA, formerly Film Writers' Association - Regd. Under the Trade Union Act 1926, Regd. No. 3726) is a Trade Union of screenwriters and lyricists who work for Films, TV and Digital Media in India. Authors, novelists, playwrights, journalists who aspire for to diversify or join full-time the mediums of films, TV or Digital entertainment, are also members of the SWA. AndhaDhun's success marks a new beginning for

production house Mr. Sanjay Routray and Mr. Kewal Garg, Producers at Matchbox Pictures believe that great content can never go wrong. Their first release, AndhaDhun, featuring Ayushmann Khurrana, Radhika Apte and Tabu, is a testament to their belief in making content-driven movies that also succeed at the box office.

AndhaDhun opened to rave reviews from critics and viewers alike and managed to collect a good number from ticket sales, too. The film has been hailed as one of the best thrillers to come out of Bollywood in recent times. Producer Sanjay Routray says, "At Matchbox Pictures, we have been creating a body of work that stands up to be counted. The success of our first film AndhaDhun has encouraged us to identify great scripts and filmmakers and provide them with everything they need to make wholesome viewing experiences for the audience". Director Sriram Raghavan adds, "It's always great to receive so much love from the critics and public alike, especially for the debut movie of a production house. I hope that Matchbox Pictures can continue to make exciting films. It's all thanks to a great team and uparwala's blessings."



The Nutcracker movie review

The Nutcracker is disappointingly dull, says Rashid Irani

A beautifully mounted production is let down by a pedestrian plot.

The Nutcracker... is a lavishly mounted but disappointingly dull affair. It's a live-action 3D version of a short story by the German fabulist ETA Hoffman, also the source of the eternally well-loved two-act ballet scored by Tchaikovsky,

Here, two veteran directors Lasse Hallstrom and visual-effects wizard Joe Johnston raise expectations, but are perhaps let down by the sluggish, pedestrian script by first-timer Ashleigh Powell.

The best parts of the movie are when Misty Copeland swirls to Tchaikovsky. After a somewhat long-winded opening sequence set in London on Christmas Eve, the viewer is transported along with the teenage protagonist (fresh-faced Mackenzie Foy) to

magical parallel worlds sprawling with tin soldiers, rodents and all manner of mechanical contraptions. Joining forces with the titular soldier (Jayden Fowora-Knight), the sprightly heroine strives to bring peace to four warring factions.

The costumes and production design are gorgeous. The pomp and pageantry of the fantastical alternate realms are eye-caressing. Also notable are two interludes in which the ballerina Misty Copeland swirls to Tchaikovsky's music.

Helen Mirren as the dictatorial Mother Ginger ought to have got a lot more screen time.

In the acting department, Keira Knightley exudes charisma as the deceitfully sweet



Shah Rukh Khan says he wanted to hug Deepika Padukone when he heard she was getting married

Shah Rukh Khan was at the trailer launch of his upcoming movie Zero when he was asked about the upcoming weddings of Deepika Padukone and Priyanka Chopra.

It is the seasons of weddings in Bollywood with Deepika Padukone and Priyanka Chopra set to tie the knot this year. Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan, who launched the trailer of Zero on his 53rd birthday on Friday, was asked about the same at the trailer launch.

Shah Rukh, in his trademark style joked, "It is good that everyone is getting married. What do I do? Begani Shaadi Mein Abdula Deewana. They are getting married so good and then they will have kids. I am already married, how can I get married

again." But he wished Deepika and Ranveer on their wedding later this month, saying he gets emotional when his co-stars settle down in their life.

When I came in the film industry I started acting with Sridevi ji, Madhuri (Dixit) ji. They got married. I have flowered as an actor and star because of the love these ladies have given me. The second generation got married and this is the third set who is getting married. I get really emotional when they get married. I called Deepika and I wanted to hug her, I told her be happy. My

love to Deepika and Ranveer. We will be celebrating as and when they call," he said

"As a matter of fact both Deepika and Anushka made their acting debut with me. So it is special for me," he added. Deepika made her Bollywood debut with Shah Rukh in Om Shanti Om while Anushka made her debut with him in Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi.

Deepika and Ranveer will tie the knot in Italy on November 14 and 15. Priyanka is rumored to marry her American singer fiance Nick Jonas on December 2.



Priyanka Chopra is getting 'bachelorette vibes' as wedding with Nick Jonas nears. See pic

Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas are all set to get married at Jodhpur's Mehrangarh Fort on December 2 and looks like the pre-wedding functions have set in already. Check out her latest Instagram story here.

Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas' wedding is planned for December 2 in Jodhpur but the run up to the big day has begun in earnest. If we saw her friends throwing a bridal shower for her in New York last week, it looks like there is another pre-wedding function coming up.

On Saturday, Priyanka posted two pictures on Instagram - a post and a story - and hinted that her bachelorette party was in full swing. She shared a flower-filled picture with 'Bachelorette Vibes' written on it as part of her story. With pale pink and golden

balloons and pink and white roses, the stage seems to be set for the bachelorette party to take off. In another picture, we can see the bride-to-be, posing with a radiant smile on her face

On October 28, Priyanka held her bridal shower, hosted by her filmmaker friend Mubina Rattsonsey and her manager Anjula Acharia at New York's upscale Tiffany & Co. Blue Box Cafe.

She wore a beautiful white satin and fur gown, a Marchesa dress, designed by her long-time friend and designer Georgina

Chapman. It may be recalled that Georgina recently divorced disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, after he was accused of sexual harassment and rape. Priyanka wore the dress as a show of support for the designer, whom she said shouldn't be blamed for her husband's alleged crimes.

Her bridal shower was attended by many of her close friends including Lupita Nyong'o and Kelly Ripa. Also seen were Neetu Singh and Sonali Bendre, both of whom have been stationed in New York, the former for the

treatment of her husband Rishi Kapoor while Sonali is undergoing treatment for cancer. Sharing pictures from the event, Priyanka had written on Instagram: "Love, laughter and a room full of amazing ladies...and some special gentlemen (what a special surprise)! Thank you so much @mubinarattsonsey and @anjula_acharia for throwing me such a memorable bridal shower that broke all the rules! My amazing friends and family who made me feel so special and loved, thank you. And to top it off

@tiffanyandco Perfect! Here's sharing it with you..."

She later shared a video in which she can be seen dancing with her mother Madhu Chopra and mother-in-law Denise Richards and other friends.

Priyanka will reportedly marry fiance Nick Jonas in Jodhpur's Mehrangarh fort on December 2. Recent reports suggest that the couple is prepping to perform at their sangeet ceremony on November 30. A report in Pinkvilla suggests that a few popular Bollywood singers will also perform at the event.

Why we love Shah Rukh Khan: He's one of us

The superstar is first one of the masses, from us, inspiring us, never afraid to love us back. This will always make him special

was in Egypt earlier this year and during our day trip to Alexandria, none of the taxi drivers were somehow willing to drop us to the Citadel of Qaitbay from the bus stop, when suddenly, one guy slowed down his cab. There was refusal written all over his face — but when he learnt that we were Indians, something seemed to shift inside him. He not only agreed to drive us to our destination, but also became exceptionally chatty from that moment on. And we soon were able to figure out the real reason behind this sudden change of heart — the connection was Mr Shah Rukh Khan. Especially the one story which he kept repeating during our 20-minute ride, of how one of his happiest memories of spending time with his family was when they had all gone to watch Billu starring Irrfan and SRK, laughed and cried

together, Billu remaining his favourite Hindi film till date.

In 2012, I was visiting New York with a cousin for work and on one of those freezing December nights, we found ourselves sitting on the famous red stairs on Times Square in the middle of the night, the place buzzing with young people even at that hour. The only Indian film playing at the AMC Empire 25 theatre nearby was Jab Tak Hai Jaan. We were starving and when my cousin went to buy us both sandwiches while I waited, an African-American teenager came up to me and said she had overheard our conversation and wanted to ask if we were from India.

When I said yes, she asked me if I knew Shah Rukh Khan.

Her friends standing behind her were giggling, but I could tell she had asked

the question in all earnestness. To her dismay though, I had to inform her that I, in fact, knew him well but unfortunately, he did not know me at all. She was heartbroken, I could tell, but even during that trying moment, she managed to request me to spread my arms ala SRK and pose for a photograph with her because this was the closest she had ever come to anybody who was actually from India.

And these stories are not exclusive to me.

I have met so many people from various fields of life who have similar stories of their own — that no other Indian star owns the crowd as well as Shah Rukh does is old news. But it's also true at the same time that no other star is owned by his audience as much as him.

Despite his meteoric rise to fame in the 90s and his

incomparable stardom, he never became a celestial figure whom the common person on the street couldn't touch or possess. His Brobdingnagian ambitions when he entered the movie business reflected the middle class's aspirations, his constant need to make everyone love him made him — unlike most of his contemporaries—forever ready to please them, whether by giving a speech at Yale or just climbing on a platform and waving and dancing for the thousands waiting to get a glimpse of him outside his bungalow in Bandstand.

His rebellion too was always relatable. And by that, I don't mean getting into a brawl with the Wankhede security, but his general tendency to swim against the tide. Some of his most appreciated roles were ones rejected by other superstars because



of their unconventional nature — whether Baazigar, Darr, Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge (for its time, it was unusual for a romantic hero to be a lying, drinking philanderer) to the more recent Swades and Chak De! India.

But my favourite Shah Rukh Khan role has been the one in which he stood up against the atrocities of the Shiv Sena which tried disrupting the release of 'My Name is Khan' because he publicly advocated the participation of Pakistani players in the IPL, or the one in which he gave it back to Hafiz

Saeed — when Saeed invited Khan to live in Pakistan — reminding everyone that he's secure in his country and outsiders should not give him unsolicited suggestions, or the time when he didn't shy away from using the now infamous "I-word" when he said "There's extreme intolerance in India" — vocalising what many of us felt at that time. My favourite Shah Rukh Khan role has been the one in which he was a reigning movie-star later, and a common citizen with a conscience first.

Bigg Boss is a trap. Contestants only enter, they never really leave

The all-amenities-filled house apparently has no exit door



Makers of Bigg Boss would have us believe that the programme's format has contestants stay in a house for a limited period of time with one participant being made to leave every week, based on who gets the least number of votes from viewers. This truth, however, is as far from reality as all those claims that the show is not scripted.

Nobody ever gets to leave Bigg Boss, especially if the person has been liked by

viewers and survived long enough in the house.

The show telecast on Thursday, November 1, is an example of how Bigg Boss is the chakravayuh that only allows you in — but gives you no way out. Four former contestants — Vikas Gupta, Shilpa Shinde, Sana Khan and Sapna Chowdhury — were seen in the house in season 12 of the show. Interestingly, not much has been seen and talked about the four since they 'left' the house. The only person

who really appears to still be 'in the business' is Vikas Gupta, primarily because he was always a 'behind-the-camera' person.

People who have aspired to give their careers a jet-speed flight after participating in the show have found their planes crash-landing with debris strewn all across the house.

These contestants keep resurfacing in the house, collecting the debris.

It is probably for this reason that makers of the show are finding it increasingly difficult to 'trap' people in the house. After Shilpa Shetty's career catapulted to great heights following her participation in the UK show Big Brother, from which Bigg Boss has been adapted, participants thought they could relive Shetty's success story.

But their dreams hardly materialised, with their

identities getting limited to being Bigg Boss contestants.

Shilpa Shinde, the winner of Bigg Boss season 11, is still stuck bickering over her grudges with Vikas Gupta, and despite all the talk about her fan following growing by virtue of participating in the show, no major project involving her has been announced.

A glorious career is not the only dream shattered. Controversial figures, who make it to the house aiming to improve their public image, haven't had much luck too.

Cricketer S Sreesanth, who in the past faced charges of match fixing, has only ended up spoiling his image further in front of people who gave him clean chits in the past. Sometimes, under pressure perhaps of being trapped in the house among strangers, and sometimes, just in a

bid to entertain, he has presented a side of his personality which has made him the most disliked character of the season so far.

The story with many other contestants has been same. Hina Khan, who was among the finalists in season 11, entered the house with a hope to show the glamorous side of her personality after appearing as the traditional Indian bahu in Kasautii Zindagii Kay. However, she was hugely criticised on various counts during her stay.

Some called her 'fake', while some said she apparently disrespected women. As a result, Khan has landed a negative role in Kasautii Zindagii Kay 2. Almost every day, a contestant from the old season — who is not seen anywhere else — is seen appearing as a guest in the house.

The truth is, the guests are permanent inmates now because Bigg Boss has no launch pads for sagging careers — there are no exit doors for contestants to leave.



Recce for Alia Bhatt starrer Sadak 2 begins, Pooja Bhatt shares pic with father Mahesh

Mahesh Bhatt, who will be returning to direction after 19 years with Sadak 2, was seen with his actor-producer elder daughter Pooja Bhatt, preparing for the Alia Bhatt starrer.

The recce for the upcoming film Sadak 2, to be directed by Mahesh Bhatt, has begun. Actor Pooja Bhatt on Friday shared a photograph of herself along with her father Mahesh in front of a helicopter and with mountains as the backdrop. "And our recce for 'Sadak 2' officially begins! Time to fly into the skies with Mahesh Bhatt. Here's to the start of a great journey and life changing experience for us all," Pooja captioned the

image. Sadak 2 is the sequel of Pooja's and actor Sanjay Dutt's 1991 hit film Sadak and will release on November 15, 2019. Sanjay has said that Sadak 2 will deal with the issue of depression. The sequel will star Mahesh's youngest daughter and actor Alia Bhatt and Aditya Roy Kapoor along with Pooja and Sanjay. On the occasion of his 70th birthday of her dad on September 20 this year, Alia shared a teaser of the upcoming film. The clip begins with a few scenes

from the 1991 superhit film and then goes on to announce the new film. Mahesh talked about casting Alia in Sadak 2, "It was Sanju (Sanjay Dutt), Mukesh and Pooja, who suggested that it (Sadak 2) should be narrated to Alia but we hadn't considered her while writing the script. Alia is a difficult cookie to crack because she only responds with her heart; she's very clear about whether she wants to embrace it wholeheartedly or say no. Honestly, she doesn't have to say yes



and prove anything vis-à-vis our relationship; I also wouldn't belittle our relationship by putting this burden on her. We gave a full narration to her and by the end of it; she was left shaking and crying. That was one hell of a triumph."

Janhvi, Arjun Kapoor celebrate Shanaya Kapoor's 19th birthday. Suhana Khan and Ananya Panday join in too

October and November seems to be the birthday months in planet Bollywood. If November saw twin birthdays (those of Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and Ishaan Khatter), then November 2 sees the birthdays of Shah Rukh Khan and a star kid of the Kapoor clan — Shanaya Kapoor, daughter of Sanjay and Maheep Kapoor. Joining in the celebrations at Sanjay's home were all her famous cousins including Janhvi Kapoor, Arjun Kapoor,

kid sister Khushi Kapoor and their dad, Boney Kapoor. Suhana, whose father Shah Rukh also celebrates his birthday on November 2, was seen in a car, on her way to Sanjay's residence. Also seen was her best buddy Ananya. However, Shanaya's other cousins — Sonam Kapoor Ahuja, Rhea Kapoor and Harshvardhan Kapoor and their parents Anil and Sunita — were not spotted in the current lot of pictures, flooding

the internet. Shanaya, Suhana and Ananya are best friends who are often spotted together. While Sanjay wished his daughter on Instagram, telling her to keep smiling always, big brother Arjun shared the photo of the cake on Instagram. Meanwhile, Shanaya's family members remain busy with their respective careers — dad Sanjay will be seen in cousin Sonam's The Zoya Factor;

Shah Rukh Khan's Zero inspires hilarious memes on porn ban, Apple fans, Khaleesi-Tyrion love story

The trailer for Shah Rukh Khan's Zero has inspired a tonne of memes on a range of topics since it released on Friday. Check out a few reactions.

From rocket launches to repeated outfits, there is a lot in Shah Rukh Khan's Zero trailer that could be hard to digest. And as we have often seen on the internet, such trailers lead to a barrage of memes. Since we got our hands on the trailer for Shah Rukh Khan, Anushka Sharma and Katrina Kaif's Zero on



Twitter isn't impressed by Aamir Khan's Thugs of Hindostan's similarities to Johnny Depp's Pirates of the Caribbean. As hard as they try to play down the similarities between Aamir Khan's Thugs of Hindostan and Johnny Depp's Pirates of the Caribbean, Twitter isn't having it.

A week ahead of the release of Thugs of Hindostan, the film's production designer strongly denied using Pirates of the Caribbean for reference, going so far as to say that he hadn't even seen Johnny Depp's multi-billion-dollar grossing movies. Speaking to Times Now, Sumit Basu said, "It never came to our mind. Our life was much simpler, we know the period, we know the ships. We are talking about Andalusia, we know those ships and people know there are



replicas of those ships floating in the water. So... I never take reference from films." In 2017, Aamir himself had distanced the film from Pirates. "There are some hundreds of action adventure films. There is

Pirates of Caribbean, there is Indiana Jones and many others. All these are action adventure films. So the genre of our film is action adventure but the story is different. Even my character in the film is

not similar to any other character," he said at a chat show. But the internet doesn't quite agree. Ever since the first trailer of the film dropped, comparisons have been made to the similarities between Aamir Khan's character and Johnny Depp's Captain Jack Sparrow. Not just that, fans have also pointed out that a lot of the film's action looks similar to the Pirates movies, with some characters even being thought of as Indian versions of Pirates characters.

Friday evening, Twitter comedians and meme-making geniuses have been working overtime to mint the dankest jokes. From drawing comparisons to the current ban on porn in India, to conveying the pain of medical students, these memes are covering a lot of ground. Check out the funniest few: Zero stars Shah Rukh as a dwarf, Bauua Singh. He is 38 years old and desperately wishes to find himself a bride. He locks his target on Anushka Sharma's Asifa Yousafzai, a wheelchair-bound scientist with cerebral palsy who wants to touch the moon. After a few requests and some wooing from Bauua, she falls in love with him but it appears as if he leaves her for another, the alcoholic movie star, played by Katrina Kaif. Shah Rukh said at the

trailer launch that the film is about a girl with cerebral palsy and about another who is emotionally incomplete. He also wished Deepika Padukone on her upcoming wedding with actor Ranveer Singh on November 14 and 15. "My love to @deepikapadukone.. god bless them happiness and goodness to them. I called Deepika the other day and said be as happy as I have been in my married life. Lots of love to them," he said. Shah Rukh also praised the VFX in the film which were used to make him look like a dwarf in the film. "Technology should be there in everything, if technology is available then it can enhance the visionary of the director," he said. The film is directed by Aanand L Rai of Tanu Weds Manu and Raanjhana. It will release on December 21.

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