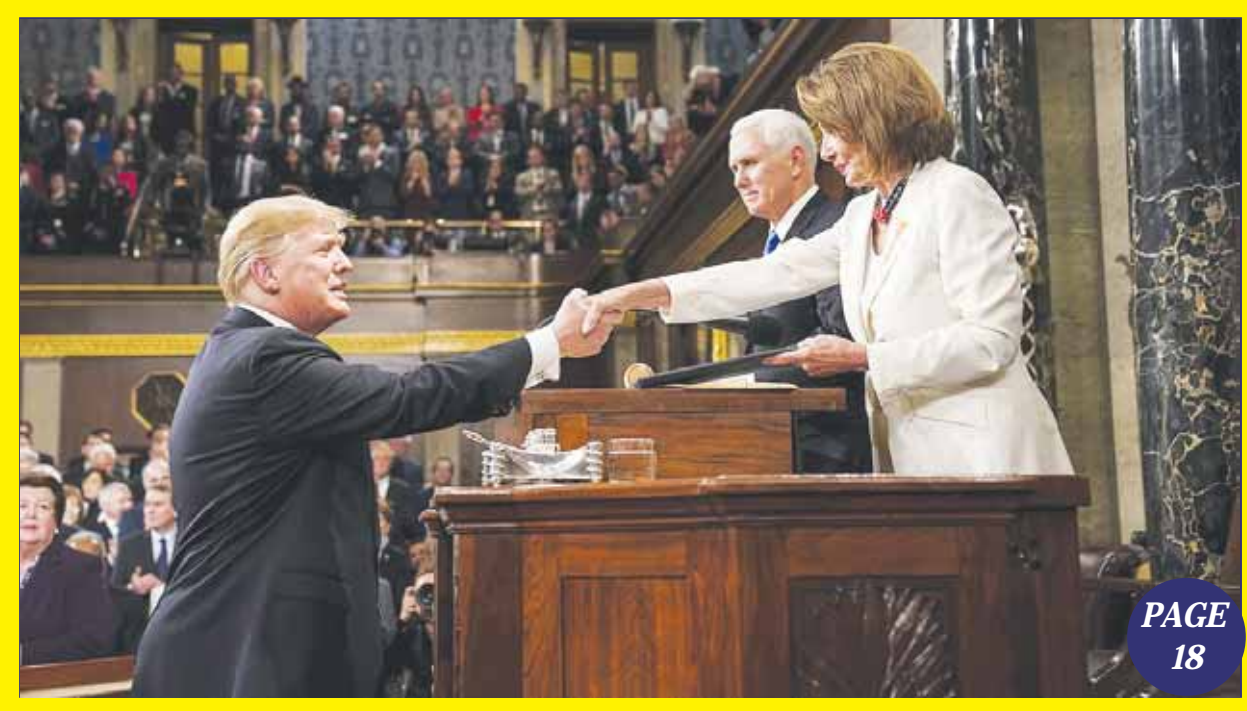




Donald Trump's State of the Union speech



Ex-army chief Gen JJ Singh joins 'genuine' SAD (Taksali)



(Insider Bureau) Nearly two months after resigning from the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), former Indian Army chief General JJ Singh (ret'd) joined the SAD (Taksali) outfit on Wednesday. JJ Singh had resigned from the SAD in December last year citing personal reasons but had also said there was a "disillusionment" with the party leadership. He had also served as the president of the SAD's ex-servicemen wing.

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UK approves Vijay Mallya extradition to India



(Insider Bureau)- UK Home Secretary Sajid Javid has approved the extradition of Indian business tycoon Vijay Mallya, who faces fraud charges back home. The move comes two months after a London court ruled that he should be sent back for trial. Mr Mallya, whose business empire once included Kingfisher beer, arrived in the UK in March 2016 after defaulting on debts of more than \$1bn (£785m).

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Liam Neeson: 'I'm not racist'



(Insider Bureau)- Liam Neeson appeared on "Good Morning America" on Tuesday in the wake of controversy over his saying he contemplated carrying out a racist revenge attack after someone close to him was raped. "I'm not racist," Neeson said. "This was nearly 40 years ago." The actor reiterated a story he shared in an interview with The Independent during a press tour for his new movie,

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'Virginity test of brides in india to be banned



(Insider Bureau) - Certain the marriage. The Maharashtra communities in the maharashtra government will soon make state follow a custom whereby forcing a woman to undergo a newly-wed woman has to virginity test a punishable prove that she was virgin prior to offence

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Insurance

(See Full Page Advt. on Page 32)

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35th Annual DancePe Chance' 2019 Organized



(By Paresh Gandhi) Indian Associations (FIA) of the New Jersey - The Federation of tri-state, one of the oldest and

the largest nonprofit Umbrella Organization of the Indian Diaspora celebrated India's 70th Republic Day in grandeur with its annual show "Dance Pe Chance" promoting the 2nd generation of the Indian Diaspora while

promoting the culture and heritage at the Union County Arts Center, in Rahway, New Jersey. DCG New York, H E Shatrughna Sinha & Emmy Award-winner PBS Travel Celebrity Darley Newman were Guests of Honor

515 Participants, 21 Performances set a new high for FIA as it sores past the milestone of having touched the lives of over 18000 children via this cultural performance competition spanning over 3 decades.

FTC Wins Key Ruling Allowing Agency to Continue Efforts to Hold Operator of Deceptive Computer Financing Scheme Accountable



(Insider Bureau)- At the request of the Federal Trade Commission, a federal bankruptcy court ruled that the operator of a computer-financing scheme cannot use a bankruptcy filing to shield himself from complying with a contempt order requiring him to pay \$13.4 million for violating a 2008 FTC order. A federal court in 2016 found BlueHippo Funding LLC, BlueHippo Capital LLC and former CEO Joseph Rensin in contempt for operating a deceptive computer financing

scheme in violation of a federal court order. As a result, the court entered a \$13.4 million judgment against Rensin for the harm consumers suffered related to the scheme. "In this case, the fraudster tried to avoid justice by declaring bankruptcy," said Andrew Smith, Director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection. "When the FTC gets a judgment against a proven wrongdoer, we will not stop until our work is complete, no matter

how many legalistic tricks and loopholes the scammer tries to employ." After Rensin refused to pay the \$13.4 million contempt judgment, the FTC in 2017 sought to have Rensin jailed until he paid the amount he owed. Instead, Rensin attempted to evade paying any of the judgment by filing for bankruptcy. A federal bankruptcy court for the Southern District of Florida, West Palm Beach Division sided with the FTC, saying the 2016 contempt judgment could not be discharged because it was the result of Rensin's fraudulent conduct. This latest ruling will allow the FTC to proceed with recovering money for cheated consumers.

SUFFOLK COUNTY CELEBRATED LUNAR NEW YEAR 2018

COMMUNITY CULTURAL PROGRAM HONORING "YEAR OF THE PIG"

STONY BROOK, NY (Insider Bureau)-The Suffolk County Asian American Advisory Board hosted one of the region's largest Lunar New Year celebrations on Wednesday, February 6, 2019 at the Holiday Inn Express, Stony Brook. "The Year of the Pig" was welcomed with holiday music and dancing. The Stony Brook community has one of the largest Asian-American populations on Long Island. Chinese New Year is the longest national holiday in China and New Year's day is the most important

date in the Chinese calendar. Chinese New Year is also known as the Lunar New Year and is intended for families and friends to join together in peace and prosperity. Each year, a different zodiac animal on the lunar-solar Chinese calendar is represented. Chinese New Year officially starts on Tuesday, February 5. The Chinese Zodiac rotates every 12 years, with each year dedicated to one of 12 animals: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig.



QUEENS BOROUGH PRESIDENT KATZ TO HOST ANNUAL BLACK HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATION on FEBRUARY 26

(Insider Bureau)- QUEENS, NY – Borough President Melinda Katz and the African American Heritage Committee will host their annual Black History Month Celebration at Queens Borough Hall (Helen Marshall Cultural Center) on Tuesday, February 26th, replete with cultural performances, academic scholarship awards, honors for civic-minded community members and more. "Black history is American history, and Black History Month is an important recognition of countless groundbreaking achievements and impacts made across every imaginable field and industry," said Borough

President KATZ. "Black History Month is also a time to reflect on the idea that we are all human beings deserving of dignity, respect, equal opportunities and fair treatment." The celebration, to be held inside the Helen Marshall Cultural Center at Queens Borough Hall, will feature a number of cultural performances, including a dance routine by members of the Edge School of the Arts in Laurelton. Performers from Get Empowered! will close the program with a pair of Afro-Brazilian dances, the capoeira and samba. Borough President Katz will also present more than a dozen high school seniors with college scholarships of \$1,000 each. More

than 150 Queens students applied for a scholarship through the African American Heritage Scholarship Competition, with the entrants being judged on their academic and civic achievement and the quality of their written submissions as to what Black History Month means to them. The winning students will be selected by the African American Heritage Committee in the coming weeks. The keynote address will be given by Primetime Emmy Award-nominated actor and Queens native Obba Babatundé, who is also one of eight individuals who will be presented with awards recognizing their accomplishments in their

respective fields. The winners include:
 ·Obba Babatundé - Lifetime Achievement Award
 ·Peter Edwards - Sports Award
 ·Cynthia Horner - Journalism Award
 ·Meredith Marshall - Business Award
 ·Mark McMillan, Esq. - Civic Award
 ·Donna Edge Rachell - Arts & Culture Award
 ·April Simpson - Borough President's Award
 ·Dennis Walcott - Education Award
 Sponsors of the annual Black History Month Celebration include ConEdison, JetBlue, the

Greater Jamaica Development Corp., Ridgewood Savings Bank, the Queens Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Resorts World New York, the H & N Insurance Agency, Community Mediation Services, the Jamaica YMCA, Ponce de Leon Bank, Get Empowered! and NYC Health + Hospitals/Queens. Borough President Katz commended her African American Heritage Committee for coordinating the planning of the celebration. The committee is comprised of community leaders who feel strongly about the importance of honoring the past, while also looking to the future.

US govt misled Indian students by setting up fake university: Indian American attorney

"We are not saying that our students are not at fault. They should have done their due diligence before signing up. If they are perpetrating crime knowingly, they should be punished but if they are trapped or encouraged to commit the crime then we need to help them," Anu Peshawaria said.

(By a Staff Reporter) - Flooded Tuesday alleged that Department of Homeland Security knowingly allowed the "fake university" to be set up and misled students sitting hundreds of miles away in another country. A day after the State Department blamed Indian students for the mass detention

and possible deportation from the US for enrolling themselves in a fake university set up by the Department of Homeland Security, California-based immigration attorney Anu Peshawaria said that the undercover operation has devastating consequences for hundred of Indian students. "We are not saying that our students are not at fault. They should have done their due diligence before signing up. If they are perpetrating crime knowingly, they should be punished but if they are trapped or encouraged to commit the crime then we need to help them," Peshawaria said. As per last week's figures provided by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, as many as 130 of

the 600 students from the fake University of Farmington were detained last week. Of these 129 were Indians. Many of them since then have been released or put under restricted movement. Several of them have left the country. Peshawaria said that some students are worried that they will have arrest on their record for ever and have lost years of education to no avail. "They could be possible blackmail for the rest of their lives. What is surprising is that the university was registered with the education board that authorizes the issuance of I-20s to students, which in turn is approved by the Department of Homeland Security," she said.

Hackensack resident appointed Kearny Bank 1st VP / Government Banking and Small Business Banking Leader



Chamber of Commerce, Anastasi has more than 20 years of experience in government, small business, and retail banking. "Operating from administrative

headquarters in Fairfield, NJ, Kearny Bank has 54 retail branch locations throughout New Jersey, as well as in Brooklyn and Staten Island, NY. Recently recognized by Forbes as one of New Jersey's five Best-In-State-Banks, Kearny Bank has supported the communities it serves since 1884. Its parent company, Kearny Financial Corp., recently completed a merger with Clifton Bancorp Inc. and its Clifton Savings Bank.

FAIRFIELD, NJ (Insider Bureau)- Jack D. Anastasi, of Hackensack, has been appointed Kearny Bank's 1st Vice President/ Government Banking and Small Business Banking Leader. Working in conjunction with the bank's Government Bank Team and its Business Relationship Officers, Anastasi is charged both with managing and expanding Kearny Bank's government and small business banking relationships, through exceptional customer service and enhanced product development. "The relationships we have with our government and business customers are essential to Kearny Bank," explains Anthony Bilotta, Executive Vice President/ Chief Banking Officer for Kearny Bank. "Jack comes to us with a wealth of experience in these sectors, and I'm confident he'll help provide our valued customers with precisely the type of outstanding banking service they've come to expect from our company." "A member of the Hudson County

Mayor De Blasio appoints reverend Dominique Atchison as executive Director of the Mayor's center for Faith and Community Partnership

NEW YORK (Insider Bureau)- Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the appointment of Rev. Dominique C. Atchison, MDiv as Executive Director of the Mayor's Center for Faith and Community Partnerships. In this role, Reverend Atchison will work closely with the Mayor's Clergy Advisory Council to maintain strong relationships between faith leaders and city government.

"I am humbled and grateful to Mayor de Blasio for granting me the opportunity to work with New York City's diverse faith communities. Growing up in the church, we always looked to the Pastor for information and direction concerning civic matters. Therefore, I understand the importance in cultivating strong partnerships between city government and faith leaders," said Reverend Dominique C. Atchison. "My overarching goal as Executive Director is to give the Center longevity and establish it as a model for faith based civic engagement." Reverend Atchison will work alongside Senior Program Manager Theresa Doherty and the Center's staff to engage and maintain the partnerships between faith leaders and city government. Reverend Atchison's priority will be further strengthening the Mayor's Clergy Advisory Council with the



goal of developing relationships between the Mayor's Office and a wider diversity of faith communities. The Mayor's Clergy Advisory Council (CAC) represents a diverse cross-section of well-respected faith leaders from all five boroughs of New York City. Members of the CAC serve as a conduit between city government and the wider faith community. Reverend Atchison is a native of the Bronx and graduate of Oberlin College and Union Theological Seminary. She was raised at the Abyssinian Baptist Church under the pastoral leadership of Rev. Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor and Rev. Dr. Calvin O. Butts III. It was at Abyssinian that Rev. Atchison answered the call to ministry as a Seminary Intern for Youth Ministries. She has ministered at, among other places, Judson Memorial Church under the mentorship of the Rev. Dr. Donna Schaper, and Brown Memorial Baptist Church under the mentorship of the Rev.

France confers highest civilian honour on 92-year-old priest from Bengal

Father Franois Laborde has been working with specially-abled and destitute children for 60 years.



(By a Staff Reporter) - Father Franois Laborde, a 92-year-old priest, was Wednesday conferred the Légion d'Honneur, the highest civilian award of France, in recognition of his work for specially-abled children. French Ambassador to India, Alexandre Ziegler, said the country was happy to confer the award on Father Laborde who had set up Howrah South Point, an organisation working for the development of

specially-abled children, the destitute and the most deprived sections of the society. "He is working for these specially-abled and destitute children for 60 years. The way he still works even at this age, he is an inspiration for us," Ziegler said. Father Laborde said he was dedicating the award to the children for whom he works. Father Laborde is of French-origin but he has been given Indian citizenship. He is the third person from the state to have been awarded the Legion of Honor after film maestro Satyajit Ray and actor Soumitra Chatterjee. While Ray was awarded in 1987, his favourite actor got the honour last year. The French Ambassador also visited an exhibition on the works of Father Laborde, organised on the occasion.

Upset Hindus urge C&H Sugar to list cow bone on packages, when used to refine sugar

(By Our Staff Reporter)- Hindus are urging C&H Sugar, which has a refinery in Crockett (California), to clearly mention bone char (identifying the source animal), if used to refine the sugar, on the packages sold in the market. Sugar, coming out of Crockett refinery, does not mention bone char (from recycled cattle bones) on its packages, although it is used for refining. "We use natural charcoal, also known as bone char, in our Crockett, CA and Chalmette, LA refineries to remove impurities from the liquid sugar", ASR Group Communications wrote to Hindu statesman Rajan Zed, responding to his query (C&H

Sugar belongs to ASR Group, & the C&H refinery is located in Crockett). When the sugar refining/filtration source was not listed and if it contained cow bones, it was a serious non-disclosure affecting the Hindu devotees and would severely hurt their feelings when they would come to know that they were inadvertently consuming beef-laced sugar; Zed, who is President of Universal Society of Hinduism, stressed in a statement in Nevada today. Rajan Zed urged ASR Group CEO and C&H managers to seriously look into this issue of transparency and issue a formal apology. Consumption of beef is highly conflicting to

Hindu beliefs. Cow, the seat of many deities, is sacred and has long been venerated in Hinduism; Zed points out. It was shocking for the Hindu community to learn that some of these popular C&H Sugar labels, which they had been eating for years, might contain traces of bone char said to be produced by charring cow bones while it was not explicitly mentioned on the boxes/packages to caution them, Rajan Zed indicated. Zed further said that it was hard to comprehend that why a company like ASR Group (claimed to be "world's largest refiner and marketer of cane sugar") was not transparent



enough to mention usage of cow bone char explicitly on the box/package when it was part of the process to refine/filter sugar at Crockett refinery; so that an ordinary consumer could make right and appropriate choices. ASR Group seemingly needed to re-look into its own "Guiding Principles", where it listed "integrity" as one of its four

"values", and under which it claimed:

"We are fair and honest with our associates, consumers, customers, suppliers and communities"; Rajan Zed noted. ASR Group, which is owned by Florida Crystals Corporation & Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida, whose history goes back to 1799 and which is headquartered in West Palm Beach (Florida), calls itself "world's most successful and innovative cane sugar company", with an annual production capacity of more than 6 million tons of sugar. C&H Sugar, "a leading brand of sugar in the United States' West Coast markets...has been a pantry favorite of consumers since 1906". C&H refinery in Crockett has an annual production capacity of 750,000 metric tons of sugar.

India Republic Day Celebrated at Town of Hempstead



(Hempstead, NY) (Insider Bureau)- On the occasion of 16th India Republic Day Celebrations at Town of Hempstead, members of Indian American Forum, India Association of Long Island and IDPUSA organized Celebrations

at Town Hall of Town of Hempstead. Hempstead Town Supervisor Laura Gillen and other elected officials of the Town were in presence. Indu Jaiswal, Chairperson of IAF, welcomed everyone and acknowledged the

presence of all community leaders and support of President IALI Lalit Aery and IDPUSA President Jasbir Singh. India Republic Day Awards were presented to few distinguished individuals. New York State

Senator Kevin Thomas presented Citations from the New York State to Honorees and Keynote speaker. Program started with pledge of Allegiance by Tara Choudhry. Indian and American national Anthems by Anjana

Moolaayil . Opening prayers were done by Pandit Amol Misra, priest from Vedic Heritage, Long Island. End of the ceremony prayers done by priest Venkamma Ghantasala from Sai Temple Baldwin.

South Asian Republican Coalition (SARC) State of The Union by President Trump



New Jersey (By Vijay Shah) SAI brings you exclusive pictures from during the recent gathering of leadership of South Asian Republican Coalition (SARC) for

Announcing Agenda of SARC and support to Republican Party outlines to the community & also State of the Union address by President Trump.



Ahead of LS polls, WhatsApp tells political parties not to spam users

WhatsApp has been at the centre of controversy in India since last year after false messages spread on its platform sparked a number of mob lynchings.

(Insider Bureau)-Instant messaging service WhatsApp has said political parties are not using the platform in the manner that was intended and warned them that it will ban accounts in the run up to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections if needed. India is WhatsApp's largest user market with over 230 million monthly active users. "We have seen a number of (political) parties attempt to use WhatsApp in ways that was not intended and our firm message to them is using it in that way will result in bans," said Carl Woog, head of communications at WhatsApp, during a media briefing in New Delhi on Wednesday. "Over the last several months we have engaged with political parties to explain our firm view that WhatsApp is not a broadcast platform; it is not a place to send messages at scale; and to explain to them that we will be banning accounts that engage in automated bot behaviour and we do this regardless of the purpose of this account. We are trying to maintain the private nature of our platform," added Woog. WhatsApp also released a white paper titled "Stopping abuse: How WhatsApp fights bulk messaging and automated behaviour" on Wednesday and said its top priority is to fight automated behaviour on the service. Globally, the company has removed over 2 million accounts a month for the past three, on account of bulk or automated behaviour. It has a global user base of 1.5 billion. The company said it had briefed the Election Commission of India and state election commissions about its preparations for the election. The Facebook-owned platform has come under fire, in India and elsewhere, for propagating the spread of Fake News. In India, for instance, several instances of lynching last year have been attributed to fake messages about kidnapers or cow smugglers doing the rounds of WhatsApp. The matter was significant enough for the Indian government to seek a response from WhatsApp, and for the messaging platform to take out full page ads, and put in place measures such as labelling forwarded content and restricting the number of forwards to five. "We have also engaged with numerous political parties to ensure they are aware of our terms of

service and that attempting to send bulk messages on WhatsApp is not allowed. We will ban accounts engaging in abuse without warning-in most cases it happens automatically," added a company spokesperson in an emailed response. "We have built sophisticated machine learning systems to detect abusive behaviour and ban suspicious accounts at registration, during messaging, and in response to user reports... These efforts are particularly important during elections where certain groups may attempt to send messages at scale," stated the white paper. The company said it has been preparing for the upcoming Lok Sabha election since the Karnataka elections held in May 2018.

"We have been preparing for the India election since the Karnataka vote last year-when we saw a number of parties attempt to abuse WhatsApp," added the spokesperson.

"At that time we saw how parties tried to reach people over WhatsApp and in some cases that involved attempting to use WhatsApp in a way that it was not intended to be used," explained Woog. "As a private communications platform we believe its important to maintain the private nature of our service and to that end one of the top priorities is to fight automated behaviour on WhatsApp to deal with all messaging because that can be a source of click bait, it could also be a source of problematic content for our users," he added. Matt Jones, a software engineer on WhatsApp's integrity team for the past three-and-a-half years said the company's efforts to put a limit to forwarded messages was in alignment with its efforts to tackle this abuse.

"We limited forwarding behaviour altogether, one of the first platforms to intentionally put a limit on how fast messages can spread and we extended that to users all over the world two weeks back. This will also limit the scale of viral content being shared from outside India. we are not here to give people a microphone, we are here for private messaging," said Jones. "We have people who try exploit our service to send you click bait links and maybe even make you vote a certain way," he added. The company plans to further build its India team to engage with the government and civil society organisations.

According to Rahul Mattan, a partner-lawyer in technology and media practice at the law firm Trilegal and author of Privacy 3.0, the measures cited will be helpful to tackle abuse on the service.



Tamil filmmaker kills wife, chops her and drops pieces in garbage bins: Cops

(Agencies)- A Tamil filmmaker, working as an assistant director in Chennai's Kollywood film industry, was arrested on Wednesday on the charge of murdering his wife last month and dumping her body parts in garbage bin in the city. With the arrest of Gopalakrishnan (51) from his Jafferkhanpet residence, the Pallikaranai police have solved the mystery behind the recovery of a woman's limbs - a hand and two legs?- at the Corporation dump yard at suburban Perungudi on January 19, a couple of days after the Pongal festival. Corporation's sanitation workers brought the garbage in a truck from Kodambakkam area of the city to Perungudi, who alerted the police about this. The hand had a tattoo and police were initially clueless. But a missing woman complaint in Thoothukudi threw

some light and the deceased was identified as Sandhya (39) from the southern port town of Thoothukudi.

It led to the arrest of Gopalakrishnan and during questioning, he admitted to having committed the crime, police said.

Police said Gopalakrishnan had produced a budget film financed by Sandhya in 2010. But it had flopped and a financial crunch forced him to work as an assistant director with his friends and acquaintances.

Meanwhile, frequent quarrels erupted between them as both suspected each other's fidelity and they had filed for divorce. Though Sandhya had left for her maternal home in Thoothukudi, they were on talking terms as they have two kids, a son and daughter.

"Gopalakrishnan suspected that Sandhya, much younger to him, was having an affair. Since they were on talking



terms, he invited her to Chennai during Pongal holidays. They had fought with each other since her arrival and on January 18 night, a day after Pongal festivities, he hit her in a fit of rage and she died on the spot. To conceal the crime, he had decapitated the body and sliced the limbs and threw them at different places. A hand and two legs, thrown in Kodambakkam were recovered from Perungudi," police said.

However, police suspect that Gopalakrishnan alone could

not have cut the body into pieces in his crowded neighbourhood. Further investigation is on to ascertain whether some of Gopalakrishnan's friends helped him.

The news comes a day after a doctor in Madhya Pradesh was reported to have killed his driver, cut his body into over two dozen pieces and put them in a drum filled with acid to dissolve them, in a technique similar to one seen in TV?show Breaking Bad.

State of the Union speech showcases talent of Trump on the stump

Alas for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., President Trump got to deliver his State of the Union address after all. And once again, America saw that Trump on the stump is very, very good. The speech Tuesday night was an important way for the president to reboot his standing with the American people. After a contentious several months and an unpopular partial government shutdown that hammered his approval ratings, Trump had a chance to remind the entire country why he was elected in 2016.

That he did, with a CBS poll showing that 76 percent of viewers liked what they heard. In a speech that was interrupted 102 times by applause, President Trump rocked the House, delivering remarks that were at times moving, funny, inspiring, feisty and visionary. He appealed to lawmakers in both parties to rise above partisan politics and define victory as "not winning for one party but winning for our country." The president appealed at one time or another to everyone in the chamber, reaching across the aisle on numerous occasions to promote popular causes like criminal justice reform, the elimination of childhood cancer or the eradication of AIDS. As he often does, President Trump celebrated the extraordinary accomplishments of our country. He asked Democrats to partner with him in "choosing greatness" and to "keep freedom alive in our souls."

He exhorted Congress to "think of this very chamber, where lawmakers before you voted to end slavery, to build the railroads and the highways, to defeat fascism, to secure civil rights, to face down an evil empire." The president asked members of the House and Senate: "What will we do with this moment? How will we be remembered?" He framed his speech as a celebration of two great occasions: the 75th anniversary of D-Day that liberated Europe from the Nazis and the 50th anniversary of America's moon landing. Heroes from both those historic undertakings were in the gallery, personifying the daring and selflessness that has characterized the United States throughout our history. How petty Democrats appeared by comparison. A large number of female lawmakers wore white to celebrate the suffragettes of the past; through most of the speech they sat on their hands. However, Trump broke through their grumpiness by celebrating the record number of women working in the U.S. today and the all-time high number of women in Congress. Even they couldn't resist celebrating themselves, which they did with high fives and laughter. Trump's guests in the gallery included veterans from the D-Day landing

and a survivor of Nazi concentration camps who was enjoying his 81st birthday. Legislators sang "Happy Birthday" to him, surely a first in a State of the Union. The president hosted a cop who, despite being wounded seven times, subdued the man accused of killing 11 Jews at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh in October. He invited former astronaut Buzz Aldrin, who walked on the moon in 1969 - one of the proudest moments in our country's history - and a young girl who is a brain cancer survivor. Democrats' guests included the woman who had accosted then-Sen. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., in an elevator during the Senate confirmation hearing for now-Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh. Other Democratic guests included some people in the country illegally who had at one time worked on a Trump property. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., who is seeking her party's presidential nomination, brought as her guest a transgender man who serves in the Navy. Trump asked Democrats to reject the politics of "revenge, resistance and retribution."

That appeal left Democrats like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., firmly planted in their seats. No surprise there; with the Democratic Party split on everything from "Medicare-for-all" to abortion extremism, that's all that Democrats have to offer. In fairness, even while calling for a "new era of cooperation" Trump threw some partisan zingers into the mix. He singled out bills recently introduced in Virginia and passed in New York that allow for late-term abortions, and said he would ask Congress to pass legislation banning such procedures. In addition, the president hammered home his determination to secure our "dangerous" border, and the need for a wall.

To make the point, he introduced some family members of an elderly couple killed by an illegal immigrant. Democrats were not pleased. The Democrats also pouted as the president listed the economic gains made during his administration. They did not cheer when he said 5.3 million new jobs have been added - including 600,000 manufacturing jobs. Nor did the Democrats cheer when the president cited the all-time low in African-American, Asian-American and Hispanic unemployment and the uptick in the incomes of blue-collar workers. Do Democrats not approve of putting people to work? Trump warned that the only thing that could disrupt the steadily growing economy would be "ridiculous partisan investigations," politics or endless wars. Needless to say, Democrats did not leap to their feet on that one.

Jeff Bezos' Super Bowl Fumble

The spot wasn't quite an advertisement, making no overt attempt to sell a specific good or service - unlike the recent New York Times commercials, which did include a subscription solicitation. Nor was it a work of propaganda, fiddling with our deep emotions to change our minds. Stripped to its essence, the spot was a simple recitation of the civic catechisms everyone was taught in seventh grade about the value of a free press and the First Amendment. If Bezos' ad was designed merely to get people talking about him and the Post, and to portray the paper as a courageous national player to the hundreds of millions who don't read it but do watch the Super Bowl, then you could call it a success. Donald Trump Jr. denounced it promptly in a tweet, dismissing the mainstream press as "leftist BS." A Post union representative ripped the ad from the workers' point of view, calling it an "infuriating expense" for a company that has cheapened employee benefits. The New York Post speculated that the ad might have been produced at the last minute after Bezos yanked a \$20 million commercial for his rocket company, Blue Origin, when it was disclosed that his mistress helped film it. But was the Post ad worth it? Let's imagine Bezos had spent the \$10.5 million on reporters instead. He could add 10 to the Post's staff at \$100,000 a year for 10 years and still have money left over to buy several tankers filled with coffee and a semitractor loaded with donuts. Surely such a purchase of talent and snacks would have shined a brighter light on the darkness Bezos fears than a one-off

Super Bowl commercial. The counterargument - don't concern yourself with Bezos spending \$10.5 million on a commercial any more than you do him buying a \$65 million private jet - doesn't cut it. I don't begrudge Bezos' wild spending on items of personal consumption. I just don't like seeing him burn cash on a PR stunt with no demonstrable payoff for journalism. It's the mark of a bad publisher to waste money that could be put to good and lasting use on hot copy! The Bezos ad was the video equivalent of the Newseum, that "slow-motion disaster" of a museum built in 2008 for \$450 million, which just announced that it plans to close. Like the Bezos commercial, the Newseum probably seemed like a good idea to its planners. But instead of building a sensible structure for collecting artifacts and conceiving exhibits, the Newseum's trustees wanted the bloat of spectacle and broke ground for a glass-and-steel palace adjacent to the National Mall - some of the most expensive real estate in town. The building's extravagance had the weird effect of reducing the exhibits and knickknacks about journalism to small and worthless afterthoughts. If Bezos genuinely wants journalism to survive - and given his deep investment in the Washington Post that's obviously the case - he should stop spending his pin money on commercials for himself, and earmark those funds for the production of quality journalism. Good journalism is the greatest advertisement for journalism there ever was.



ISSN No. 1554 06X

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A Publication of Media Partners Capital, Inc.

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The logic behind putting Ayodhya on the back-burner

The BJP realised that bypassing the court carried the political risk of alienating the moderate voter

(Insider Bureau)- The BJP realised that bypassing the court carried the political risk of alienating the moderate voter

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad's (VHP's) declaration that it will not organise any agitation for the construction of the Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya for the next four months stems from a recognition of the limits imposed by India's political, constitutional and legal framework. It is also a product of an internal deal within the various affiliates of the broader Sangh parivar - where the immediate goal of electing a friendly government has taken

priority over the longer term goal of the temple. Over the past few years, there was a concerted move by hardline elements within the Sangh, VHP and the broader community of Hindu saints invested in the cause to build public pressure for the temple. The logic for them went something like this: There was a conducive ideological climate. Even secular parties found it difficult to oppose the temple cause. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was in power at both the Centre and in the state. The Supreme Court (SC), through this

pressure, could be persuaded to hear the case promptly. Elements within the BJP concurred, and believed that if the pressure did lead to a regeneration of the Hindutva momentum and a favourable court decision, it would be a blessing for the party for the 2019 general elections. But the plot was not as linear. It became increasingly clear that the SC would hear the case at its own pace, following its own procedures, and not get affected by political timelines and public campaigns. The BJP - especially Prime Minister Narendra Modi - realised that bypassing the court and



bringing in a legislation or ordinance would not be durable, would invite a legal challenge, and carried the political risk of alienating the moderate vote. The Sangh leadership also saw that building a crescendo for the temple could actually be counterproductive for its own government if it could not deliver. But now that the base had been mobilised,

something had to be done. The government filed a petition, seeking the SC's permission to return the "excess" land to the original owners, the VHP backed Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas. The VHP had a face saver - for they could show this as proof of the government's intent. The Sangh leadership was happy at reconciling the

differences within its political and militant, religious affiliates. And the current decision to hold off the agitation reflects this truce. But make no mistake. Ayodhya will continue to be a campaign theme, and its peaceful and just resolution remains a key test of India's secular, political and constitutional order.

To clean India, invest in water conservation

(Insider Bureau)- Nagaland is pristine and gorgeous. But one needs a strong heart and a much stronger back to enjoy the Himalayan state. The roads are dirt tracks and tourist facilities are non-existent. The infrastructure-deficit Himalayan state, however, is not a laggard on one count: toilet infrastructure, especially in its rural areas. Recently, rural Nagaland was declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) by the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM). In fact, unlike in many other sectors, SBM's record - not just in Nagaland - but across the Northeastern region (NE) has kept pace with the country's expanding sanitation coverage. According to the ministry of drinking water and sanitation, five out of seven states are ODF, with Assam and Tripura being the exceptions.

The NE's good ODF record, experts say, is due to several reasons. First, high literacy levels; second, strong community-based institutional structures (church groups, students'

organisations, youth groups, and village-level water and sanitation committees, which ensure that all members of a community adhere to decisions such as banning open defecation); third, a progressive mindset with a strong focus on an integrated approach covering aspects of water, sanitation and hygiene; and fourth, an absence of any caste-related ritual pollution and purity concerns, which often make people resist the idea of building toilets inside their homes (a problem in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar). The negative impact such pollution-purity issues could have on the pace and success of SBM has been well documented by economists Diane Coffey and Dean Spears in *Where India Goes, Abandoned Toilets, Stunted Development and the Costs of Caste*. However, the commendable gains made by these Himalayan states (the Centre bears 90% of the cost of building a toilet in these states), despite their

undulating topography, may take a hit in the future due to an emerging water crisis, being sparked by deforestation (which will impact rainfall, soil health and consequently water availability), overpopulation (which will put stress on existing natural resources), and climate change (which will also affect water availability, among other things).

The first signs are already here. "Population has been increasing over the years. Natural water bodies, streams and springs - the region's core source of water - are getting polluted. Villages already face acute water problem... drilling boreholes is not an option," explained Assam-based Samuel Therieh, a sanitation expert for World Vision India. "Many Himalayan villages are located on hilltops and in many cases away from the water sources. It's not always possible to build pipelines due to the topography. If nearby water sources dry up, then people will find it difficult to get water for sanitation purposes." Last year, the



NITI Aayog said in a report that 30% of springs in the Indian Himalaya have dried up

The ministry of water resources estimates that each rural household in India needs 40 litres of water every day, out of which 15 to 20 litres are required for sanitation. But as of 2017, almost 19,000 villages in India were yet to have access to piped water supply. Even the ones that do get piped water, getting 40 litres a day remains a distant dream. On an average, a well supplied rural household receives 8-10 litres of water per day. As water is mostly utilised for cooking, drinking and

washing, using it for sanitation becomes the last priority. The government has said that it is committed to covering 90% of Indian rural households with piped water supply by 2022. "A lot of the funds for sanitation came at the expense of water. So while the need for water increased because of toilet usage, the investment in water to augment domestic water supplies decreased. With challenging geography, the situation gets more complex," says Indira Khurana, water and sanitation expert, and author of *Reflections on Managing Water, Earth's Greatest Natural Resource*.

The absence of water resources was also raised by a parliamentary panel in 2018. The panel, headed by Lok Sabha member, Dr P Venugopal, said that going through the factual and ground realities prevalent in the country, it is perplexed as to how ODF can be achieved without the availability of adequate water provisions. The panel recommended that the ministry of drinking water and sanitation prioritise the provision of water availability along with the construction of toilets under SBM and apprise it of actual figures of toilets with water facilities that have been constructed.

With Sixth Budget, Government Has Made A Mockery Of Constitution

The interim Finance Minister, Piyush Goyal, rose to present the interim budget for 2019-20 in the Lok Sabha on February 1, but in a 22-page budget speech spread over 105 minutes, he sought to present a full budget. For the benefit of my readers, I may point out the difference between a full budget and an interim budget, which also contains a vote-on-account proposal. A full budget is preceded by an economic survey. The budget consists of the expenditure budget and the demands for grants of various ministries, also new revenue proposals in the finance bill. An interim budget does not include new items of expenditure but a regular budget does. It is also not accompanied by a finance bill. So, as far as this budget is concerned, while the economic survey was not presented to Parliament, it had

all the other elements of a regular budget. This is in complete violation of the constitution and the constitutional practices and conventions of seven decades. It is another matter that this government, especially this prime minister, have treated long-established conventions of our constitution and polity with such disdain that it has ceased to matter. Nobody even mentions it now.

This is not merely a populist budget; it is a "cash-for-votes" budget. The finance minister has announced that every small and marginal farmer will receive an income support of Rs. 6,000 per year. Strangely enough, this item of expenditure has been introduced with retrospective effect from December 1, 2018. How strange. Thus by the end of March, each farmer would receive Rs. 2,000 in his account from the government. The Lok Sabha

elections will be held in April and May this year. The intention of the government therefore, clearly, is to give the farmer Rs. 2,000 in cash just before the elections, in order to secure his vote. It is illegal for a candidate to do so. He can go to jail if he is caught doing so (this applies after the candidate files his nomination and the model code has kicked in). How ethical is it for the government to do so with government funds? Rs. 500 per month is at best a pittance. I had suggested earlier that a sum of Rs. 12,000 to 18,000 per year be paid as income support to the farmer, taking into the account the size of his landholding. My other suggestion was that this step should be accompanied by comprehensive agricultural sector reforms like the removal of all trade restrictions including export restrictions on farm produce, extension services for

the farmer at his doorstep, storage and processing facilities, financing through Kisan Credit Cards etc. The government's approach is restricted to only giving the farmer a dole. The farmer has his own dignity; he does not want charity, what he wants is his right. The insurance scheme for the workers of the unorganized sector, which will fetch them a pension of Rs. 3,000 per month after the age of 60, is also ill-conceived. It will require a worker to shell out Rs. 100 per month or Rs. 1,200 per year as his contribution. My experience would suggest that most people in this category are daily wage earners and therefore not in a position to pay this large amount on a monthly basis. For them, their present is more important than their future. The tax benefit of a rebate on income tax for a taxable income of upto Rs. 5 lakh will not benefit all the

taxpayers because it is a rebate and not an exemption.

The Finance Minister has claimed that the fiscal deficit for the current year would go up by only 10 basis points from 3.3% to 3.4%. Next year's fiscal deficit is also projected to be 3.4%. This is seriously questionable. Revenue receipts have been jacked up; corporation tax is expected to go up from Rs. 6.21 lakh crore to Rs. 7.60 lakh crore next year. Similarly, income tax is expected to rise from Rs. 5.29 lakh crore to Rs. 6.20 lakh crore despite the concession announced in the budget. The collection from GST was expected to be Rs. 7.44 lakh crore in this year's budget. In the revised estimates there is a shortfall of 1 lakh crore, yet the budget estimate for the next year is Rs. 7.61 lakh crore. These figures are highly inflated.

Modi Has Scored A Spectacular Own Goal In Bengal

So Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah flexed their muscle and, unbothered by constitutional niceties, deployed the much-worn out CBI to question the Kolkata Commissioner of Police, Rajeev Kumar. Even before the loud comparisons to a banana republic could start, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee went on a dharna along with her police commissioner, and India saw the surreal spectacle of CBI officers detained by the police.

In one fell swoop, the Modi and Shah duo achieved opposition unity and put Mamata Banerjee at the heart of the opposition. It

has to be said that Chanakya, who is Shah's often-stated role model, would have frowned at these strong arm tactics. Democracy in institutions was given the short shrift. The centre going to the Supreme Court can hardly serve as a demonstration of democratic traditions. The Modi government has now fully demonetised democracy. The opposition charge of the CBI being an ally of PM Modi is fully justified. The ostensible reason for the CBI team to go looking for the commissioner was his lack of cooperation in the Saradha chit fund scam. The chief accused,

Mukul Roy, a former Trinamool Congress leader and Mamata Banerjee's second-in-command, is currently in the BJP, hoping to stave off investigative agencies. He was not even spearheading the BJP charge in Kolkata, which was given to Shah's closest lieutenant, Kailash Vijayavargiya. The bickering opposition united and stood up together to be counted. It was advantage Banerjee as the Congress, AAP, Samajwadi Party, BSP, NCP and even the National Conference rushed to pledge their support. If the game plan of the centre was to achieve opposition unity it is now

presented in spades. So what provoked the Modi and Shah misadventure? A pliable CBI Director, M Nageswara Rao (appointed interim chief in the post-midnight coup in October), on his last working day, and the desperation to ensure that Bengal makes up the seats that the BJP will lose in north India in the general elections to be held in three months. Says a cabinet minister ruefully "our tragedy is that the two men who now run the government don't get democratic values. They were aiming for Congress-mukt Bharat and Mamata-mukt Bengal... sadly all that we have done with

our overreach is uniting the opposition." To date, all investigative agencies have been misused by those at the centre, but the Modi government, with its utter disdain for niceties, is ensuring that the CBI and Enforcement Directorate act as glue for the opposition. Take the case of the raids on Akhilesh Yadav the day after he announced his alliance with Mayawati in the bellwether state of Uttar Pradesh with 80 Lok Sabha seats. Or the fact that just before the Karnataka assembly election, the CBI dropped all charges against the Reddy brothers of the Bellary mining scam fame.

Zee Crisis Shows IL&FS Impact Beyond Finance

The opportunity to own the largest broadcaster in a consumer market of 1.3 billion people doesn't arrive all that often; even more rarely does it come after a single-day 26 percent rout in the stock.

The special situation has arisen because of Indian infrastructure financier-operator IL&FS Group's sudden \$12.8 billion bankruptcy. Analysts who believed the tremors would reach other shadow-banking entities like Dewan Housing Finance Ltd. were half right. Yes, Dewan's loan

disbursements fell 95 percent from a year earlier in the December quarter amid pressure on the mortgage lender to deleverage. But the shock waves have now spilled beyond finance to reach the glamorous world of television content. Subhash Chandra, the founder who controls 41 percent of Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd., is putting half his shares on the block after making wrong-way leveraged bets in unrelated industries such as infrastructure, a mistake the tycoon acknowledged in an open letter

on Friday evening. Although the stake-sale plan has been known for a while, the official explanation so far was that Zee wanted a partner to become a "global media-tech player." It's clear now that the real reason is the debt load of Chandra's Essel Group. Bloomberg Quint estimates the burden at 170 billion rupees (\$2.4 billion) across 87 operating companies as of March 31, 2017. The collapse of IL&FS found a mention in Chandra's mea culpa. The implosion of the highly rated lender raised financing costs for everyone who had borrowed

short-term funds to invest in long-term assets such as roads, power stations, waste-management plants, or in the case of drugmaker Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd.'s billionaire founder Dilip Shanghvi, apartment complexes and windmills. The collateral for these forays in most instances was shares of their successful, publicly traded operating companies. But as both Shanghvi and Chandra recently found out, collateral can wear thin very quickly. All it takes is a whistleblower complaint of financial irregularities or a news

article insinuating links with a company allegedly dealing in unaccounted-for cash to make the stock price plunge. Strenuous denials or defamation lawsuits can't quite set things right with creditors left edgy by IL&FS's defaults, though a weekend meeting with lenders does seem to have bought Chandra time to conclude the sale of his crown jewel. Zee, where I worked briefly in the 1990s, is a content powerhouse with a 20 percent share of India's traditional television viewing market.

Robert Vadra leaves ED office after 6 hours, to be questioned again

Robert Vadra's wife Priyanka dropped him outside the ED's office, in a move seen as sending a political message to Congress' opponents.

(By a Staff Reporter) - Robert Vadra, the brother-in-law of Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, was Wednesday questioned by Enforcement Directorate (ED) for over six hours in its money laundering probe into alleged possession of illegal foreign assets, days after he was directed by a city court to appear before the central probe agency. Vadra's questioning will continue tomorrow at 10:30 am.

Vadra's wife Priyanka Gandhi accompanied him in a white Toyota Land Cruiser and dropped him outside the ED's office in Jamnagar House, in a move seen as sending a political message to Congress' opponents ahead of Lok Sabha polls. Shortly after, Priyanka took charge as AICC general secretary in-charge of Uttar Pradesh East, a fortnight after her formal induction into the Congress party on January 23. "He is my husband, he is my family...I support my family," Priyanka said in a show of support to Vadra, who returned from London earlier in the day.

Priyanka was asked by newsmen at the All India

Congress Committee (AICC) headquarters whether she was sending any message by dropping her husband at the ED office for questioning. Asked if it was a political vendetta, she said everyone knows why this is being done.

On the day of Priyanka's appointment, Vadra had sent an emotional message to her. "Congratulations P... always by your side in every phase of your life. Give it your best," Vadra said in a Facebook post.

It is for the first time that Vadra, son-in-law of Sonia Gandhi, is appearing before any probe agency in connection with alleged criminal charges of dubious financial dealings.

After jostling with a posse of assembled media persons, Vadra entered the ED office at around 3:47 pm, minutes after a team of his lawyers reached the premises. He then signed the attendance register before being taken in for questioning.

Vadra has denied allegations of possessing illegal foreign assets and termed them a political witch hunt against him. Vadra has

alleged he was being "hounded and harassed" to subserve political ends.

Ahead of the questioning by a team of 3 ED officials, official sources said Vadra will be put through a dozen questions on transactions, purchase and possession of certain immovable assets in London and his statement will be recorded under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). ? Vadra was directed by a Delhi court on February 2 to cooperate with the investigation being carried out by the ED after he knocked at its door seeking anticipatory bail in the money laundering case.

The court directed him to appear before the ED on Wednesday on his return from London.

The BJP seized on the questioning of Vadra to attack the Congress and allege he got kickbacks from a petroleum and defence deals took place during the UPA regime.

BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra alleged at a news conference that Vadra bought 8 to 9 properties in London from the money he got as kickbacks from



a petroleum and a defence deal which took place in 2008-09 when the UPA was in power. Patra did not provide any evidence to back up his claim. Congress spokesperson Abhishek Manu Singhvi claimed that the charges against Vadra are "fickle, superficial, non-existent, non-substantive". The BJP had full four and a half years to investigate but could not find anything, he claimed at a news conference.

The attempt is to mislead, confuse and to create an ambience before election, but people see through this, he said. "The ED, Income-Tax Department, the CBI, and 10 other agencies could not do a thing against him, for so many

years. It shows that this is nothing but an 'electoral jujitsu'". The ED case against Vadra relates to allegations of money laundering in the purchase of a London-based property located at 12, Bryanston Square worth 1.9 million GBP (British pounds), which is allegedly owned by him. The agency had told the court that it has received information about various new properties in London which allegedly belongs to Vadra.

A local Congress leader Jagdish Sharma, questioned by the ED in this case few weeks ago, was present outside the agency's office after Vadra went in. Talking to newsmen, Sharma alleged that Vadra was being "framed" in the case.

Hardik Patel to contest Lok Sabha polls, Lucknow announcement stirs up Gujarat

(By a Staff Reporter) - Patidar leader Hardik Patel's announcement to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, months after he attained the eligible age of 25 years, evoked a mixed response in political circles of Gujarat. The firebrand leader, who has been spearheading the agitation for OBC status to his Patidar community since 2015, declared his much awaited debut in Lucknow. The announcement, made away from his home state, has generated quite a bit of curiosity among his supporters as well as opponents. While Hardik chose not to make public as yet whether he would go solo or join any political party and the constituency he plans to contest from, sources close to the young leader said he could opt for Amreli in Saurashtra. According to sources, the Congress may support him by

not fielding a candidate against him. Up in arms against the BJP government over reservation benefits in government job and college admissions, Hardik's Patidar Anamat Andolan Samiti (PAAS) outfit had supported the Congress in 2015 local body and the 2017 assembly elections.

"He (Hardik) has announced his plans of contesting elections in Lucknow. We understand that he will soon decide on which party's support he wants," said PAAS spokesperson Nikhil Savani.

After addressing a rally in Rajasthan on Tuesday, Hardik for the first time officially acknowledged his plans of entering electoral politics in an interview to a local daily.

Hardik's former aides, however, see red in the way he made the announcement.

"Why did he make the announcement outside Gujarat?"

asked Dinesh Bambhania, a former supporter.

He went on to add that Hardik was most likely going to contest from Amreli which is a stronghold of the Congress. "So the move is not going to benefit the Congress."

He also said that Hardik has betrayed the community that so far supported him, as Patidars' demand of OBC status and justice to 13 youths who died during the 2015 agitation has not been met yet. Congress welcomed the decision. "We welcome the decision of Hardik to contest elections. He will

make a good contestant against the Modi government and also as he represents the youth, who are struggling to get jobs," said Congress spokesperson Manish Doshi. The Congress in 2017 won all five assembly seats under the Amreli Lok Sabha constituency. Amreli and adjoining Junagadh districts have



been a Congress stronghold. The number of Patidars there is significant, which largely restricted the BJP to 99 seats in the 182-member assembly. BJP however said that Hardik's candidacy would benefit the BJP. "His candidacy will only benefit the BJP as Hardik now stands exposed. When the Congress

has not fulfilled any of the 17 demands made by him earlier, he cannot go back to his community and ask for votes. This announcement is a gimmick, which won't work when the Gujarat voter has made up its mind to make Modi the PM again," BJP spokesman Bharat Pandya said.

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How CBI's Plea in SC Lays Ground for President's Rule in Bengal

(Agencies) - West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is taking her fight against the Modi government to Delhi next week, where she will be joined by several Opposition leaders who claim they are standing up for the Constitution, human rights and the rule of law.

But even as she prepares to lead the charge to dethrone Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the next general election, the Bharatiya Janata Party appears to have plans of its own to wrest power from Didi and her Trinamool Congress in West Bengal. To do this, they're not going to rely on their oft-used *modus operandi* - no Operation Kamals, no rath yatras, no polarisation campaigns.

Instead, it looks like they're going to do this one by the book, and try to impose President's Rule in the state. Moreover, this isn't going to be like the Uttarakhand fiasco, where they shot from the hip and had their decision overturned by the high court. No, this time they're looking to get judicial approval or at least acquiescence for their

reasoning before they pull the trigger.

Why should we believe this to be the case? After all, messages are being sent to the media (see for example this piece in *The Hindu*) saying that President's Rule is not on the cards, despite calls for it by BJP leaders like Rakesh Sinha and Babul Supriyo. The devil is in the details, though, and the details of the CBI affidavit filed in the Supreme Court earlier this week appear to be the first tentative step towards President's Rule in West Bengal.

What the CBI Affidavit Says
The Central Bureau of Investigation has filed two pleas in the Supreme Court. The first is an application for a direction by the court to the West Bengal authorities (including the Kolkata Police and Commissioner Rajeev Kumar) to cooperate with the CBI and not impede their investigation of the chit fund scams. The second is a contempt petition which alleges that the West Bengal authorities have failed to

comply with the Supreme Court's judgment dated 9 May 2014, which ordered them to cooperate with the CBI, to whom the judges had transferred these investigations. When they mentioned these pleas before the court on Monday, Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi took exception to how the CBI was claiming they were afraid Kumar was planning to destroy electronic evidence, without any proof or evidence to back up this claim. The bench instructed the CBI to submit proof of Kumar's intent to destroy evidence before the hearing on Tuesday.

In this, not only did they claim that Kumar was intending to destroy evidence, they also alleged that he had already tampered with electronic evidence like call logs, withheld some evidence, and coordinated with the accused persons in the case. True to form, they failed to provide any evidence in the affidavit to back up these claims, but assured the judges they would provide them with relevant proof in a "sealed cover" (of course).



After 20 poorly-worded and repetitive paragraphs which at least relate specifically to the application and petition, the affidavit then takes a detour in para 21 to decry the detention of the CBI officers who tried to enter Rajeev Kumar's house on Sunday, and the alleged holding of the CBI Joint Director and his family hostage by the Kolkata Police on the same day. It is understandable that the CBI would want to draw attention

to the way in which they were thwarted by the West Bengal authorities, since they want such obstruction to stop. However, the affidavit goes far beyond pointing out these concerns, and instead offers an interpretation of the events that raises the stakes. It begins with these lines: It's the specific usage of the wording "breakdown of the constitutional machinery" that makes the intentions of the CBI (read: the central government) clear.

Rahul Gandhi spells out his 2019 agenda

(Agencies) - In one can agree or disagree with Congress president Rahul Gandhi's views, but his willingness to take questions and be challenged is a positive democratic trait. In one of his most wide ranging interviews in recent times, Congress President Rahul Gandhi spoke to this newspaper and gave a glimpse into his broader world view, the issues that he believes will define the 2019 election, his dynamic with the rest of the opposition with which Congress shares both a cooperative and competitive dynamic, the question of leadership of a future government, and, most importantly, his own vision to take India forward. One can agree or disagree with Gandhi's views, but his willingness to take questions and be challenged is a positive democratic trait. There are three big messages that emerge from the conversation. Mr Gandhi has a sharp sense of the political economy challenges that confront India. He is accurate in his assessment that creating jobs and addressing the agrarian distress, particularly boosting farm incomes, are essential. With a relentless focus on these twin issues, Mr Gandhi has succeeded, over the past year, in pushing the Bharatiya Janata

Party (BJP) on the defensive. But the Congress president's prescription for these problems needs deeper thought. On jobs, he focuses on manufacturing, skills, and small and medium scale industries - all good ideas, but this is not very different from the set of ideas that Prime Minister Narendra Modi pushed when he started out. Remember Start Up India, Make in India, Skill India, Mudra. On agriculture, while the party's politics has revolved around farm loan waivers, his recognition that a broader approach is needed is again similar to what Mr Modi has said. What the Congress needs to offer is thus a more detailed policy prescription, which identifies why some of these solutions have been difficult to achieve. That will make the alternative agenda more convincing. The second theme is more political. Given that the BJP will posit the election as one between strong and decisive leadership versus chaos, Mr Gandhi has turned it around and made the very absence of a common opposition leader and the multiplicity of parties into a virtue. This has allowed him to frame the battle as one between diverse, democratic formations versus an authoritarian leader.

Money laundering causes distortion in the economic statistics

The money laundering industry thrives on the art of trickery. Money launderers make it difficult to detect the origin of illegitimate money. The risks of money laundering go beyond the financial sector and impact the economy in its entirety.



illegitimate money from foreign jurisdictions. Such countries face a high risk of losing their reputation internationally. Financially, these countries may be evaluated and tagged as high risk nations and, therefore, loans to those

It is difficult to assess the exact monetary impact of money laundering activities on a country's economy. However understanding the direct and indirect impact on law-abiding citizens, various sectors and country, is the first step towards shaping stronger anti money laundering policies. Law violators spend or invest the illegitimate money not to gain profit but to conceal the source. They are fully capable of investing in a loss-making business. On the contrary, any businessman with legitimate money invests to earn profit. When the products of two types of business models compete in the market,

certainly the business with the illegitimate money would survive and flourish but the law-abiding citizen will likely fail. This concept is explained by Gresham's Law: "bad money drives out the good money". Once that money has been legitimised or cleansed, it would not be able to compete in business due to thriving black money in the country. This results in capital flight from the country as the money launderers then move that white money to countries or jurisdictions with stronger anti money laundering laws - because white money can compete with white money only. Countries having lax anti money laundering laws attract

countries will come at a higher rate of interest. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) does a mutual evaluation of most countries at regular intervals (India's mutual evaluation is due in 2020). Countries found with lax anti money laundering law can be put on the list of "Non-cooperative Countries and Territories" (NCCT), leading to international shaming and financial problems for them. Recently, FATF found Pakistan lax in implementing anti money laundering and anti terror financing laws and put it on the grey list of NCCT. Pakistan is facing the music from international financial institutions and has been asked by FATF to improve itself.

'Barbaric': Human organs harvested from Chinese prisoners prompts outrage, call for retraction of 400 scientific papers

(By Our Staff Reporter)- A group of researchers is calling for the retraction of more than 400 scientific papers after a first-of-its-kind study that claims countless human organs were unethically harvested from prisoners in China. The study, which was published in the journal BMJ Open and led by Australian researchers, highlights a facet of scientific ethics that does not receive a lot of attention. Namely, that many English-language academic journals do not

follow international ethics rules over donor consent for organ transplants. "There's no real pressure from research leaders on China to be more transparent," Wendy Rogers, a professor of clinical ethics at Macquarie University and the study's author, told the Guardian. "Everyone seems to say, 'It's not our job.' The world's silence on this barbaric issue must stop." According to the British publication, this is the

first time that any study has examined the progress of the transplant community in preventing unethical research. The study looked at research papers published from January 2000 until April 2017. Researchers identified 445 studies involving 85,477 transplants. A staggering 92.5 percent failed to report whether or not organs were sourced from executed prisoners, while 99 percent failed to report that organ sources gave consent for transplantation.



The Australian researchers also found that two organizations that have barred research involving

executed prisoners, the Journal of American Transplantation and The Transplantation Society, have also made questionable decisions about publishing papers. "A large body of unethical research now exists, raising issues of complicity and moral hazard to the extent that the transplant community uses and benefits from the results of this research," the researchers write in the study's conclusion.

How Women in Congress Are Using Fashion to Send a Message

(By Our Staff Reporter)- Democratic women in Congress created a sea of white in the House chamber during President Donald Trump's 2019 State of the Union address, a coordinated wardrobe choice that marked the latest iteration of how female lawmakers are using clothing to highlight their visibility and telegraph intent. Women from both the House and the Senate dressed in white, the color worn by the suffragettes, at the invitation of the House Democratic Women's Working Group, to convey, as the group's chairwoman,

Rep. Lois Frankel told CNN ahead of the joint address, "a respectful message of solidarity with women across the country, and a declaration that we will not go back on our hard-earned rights." The group organized a similar all-white fashion statement for Trump's address to Congress in 2017 to send a message that they support women's issues; in 2018, they invited members of Congress to wear black in solidarity with the #MeToo movement. The striking visual of Congresswomen in white at the 2019

State of the Union also highlighted the historic demographics of the current Congress, which boasts a record number of female lawmakers elected yet, roughly a fourth, according to the Pew Research Center. Trump even referenced the milestone in the 2019 State of the Union, which earned loud chants of "USA, USA!" Though it's worth noting that milestone is particularly true for the Democratic Party, which boasts 89 women representatives after the midterm elections versus the Republicans' 13.

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Department of City Planning Launches Digital Zoning Resolution

Online platform means keyword search and interactive links for cross-referencing Resolution text, which was previously available in static PDF and hardcopy only

NEW YORK (Insider Bureau)- Department of City Planning (DCP) Director Marisa Lago today announced the release of the City's new online Zoning Resolution. The free digital platform makes New York City's official Zoning Resolution – the City's text for land use and development – instantly accessible to New Yorkers. "Because it shapes the city in which we live, the Zoning Resolution affects every New Yorker. By putting an interactive Zoning Resolution online for the first time, New Yorkers – be they neighborhood residents, elected officials or community leaders – as well as planners, students, lawyers and industry professionals, can easily search the Zoning Resolution. This online Zoning Resolution is yet another example of DCP's continuing commitment to make our data even more accessible and transparent," said DCP Director Marisa Lago. The flexible digital platform serves as a green replacement for the physical copy of the Zoning Resolution. It offers keyword searches and easy navigation of what was, until now, available only in hardcopy. The document will no longer be printed, saving money, increasing government

transparency and helping to fight climate change.

The New York City Zoning Resolution is a legal instrument that regulates and establishes limits on the use of land and building size, shape, height, and setback. The current Resolution was adopted on Dec. 15, 1961, and has continuously evolved since then as new land use regulations are mapped or altered. The City's first Zoning Resolution was adopted in 1916. Until now, the 1,570-page paper Resolution could be purchased for \$750, or could be viewed on DCP's website, but only via static PDFs for each chapter.

"Making the text of the City's zoning resolution available in a hyperlinked, web-friendly format is great to see," said Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer. "I'm glad the Department of City Planning continues to improve its online planning toolkit. I'm certain that both professionals and the community at large will find this version highly useful."

"Creating a user-friendly online platform to navigate New York City's complex zoning regulations makes zoning more accessible to a greater range of New Yorkers," stated Land Use Chair Council Member Rafael Salamanca. "I applaud the

Department of City Planning's efforts on creating a transparent system that allows people to easily find the important information relevant to their communities."

"Making the Zoning Regulation available online at no cost to every New Yorker is a welcome step into the 21st Century and a fantastic initiative for the 8.6 million residents whose lives are directly affected by every land use and development decision the city makes," Council Member Francisco Moya, Chair of the Land Use Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises, said. "I'm excited to see that the online platform will be readily searchable, which will no doubt empower residents, community boards and activists when it comes to reshaping our city. I'm also happy to see the commitment to going greener as this will eliminate the need to physically publish the massive document. I applaud this initiative and hope it will lead to greater public engagement."

"Zoning is complicated but the Department of City Planning is making it easy to understand for every New Yorker," said Council Member Ben Kallos, Chair of the Land Use Subcommittee on Planning, Dispositions, and Concessions. "ZoLa's zoning

and land use maps are a tool that I use frequently and making the zoning text friendlier than the current PDF is a natural next step. Thank you to Mayor de Blasio and City Planning Chair Lago for making zoning more accessible to every New Yorker." With this relaunch of the Resolution, DCP is making it easier than ever to navigate the city's zoning laws. Exciting features of the new Zoning Resolution platform include:

A streamlined, mobile-friendly interface with a modern look and feel

Keyword search, which also shows chapters and context in the results

For example, by searching for "waterfront" or "Mandatory Inclusionary Housing," you can find accompanying info about districts established, definitions and much more.

The ability to print or download from the digital edition

Improved navigation and clickable section numbers

Text resize option, allowing font and images to be easily read on all devices

One-click sharing and email options for easy reference

Interactive links to cross-referenced sections

The option to subscribe for updates as new land use actions

are approved

A legislative history of each individual section of the Zoning Resolution will be part of a future update to this online platform.

The Department of City Planning (DCP) plans for the strategic growth and development of the City through ground-up planning with communities, the development of land use policies and zoning regulations applicable citywide, and its contribution to the preparation of the City's 10-year Capital Strategy. DCP promotes housing production and affordability, fosters economic development and coordinated investments in infrastructure and services, and supports resilient, sustainable communities across the five boroughs for a more equitable New York City. In addition, DCP supports the City Planning Commission in its annual review of approximately 450 land use applications for a variety of discretionary approvals. The Department also assists both government agencies and the public by advising on strategic and capital planning and providing policy analysis, technical assistance and data relating to housing, transportation, community facilities, demography, zoning, urban design, waterfront areas and public open space.

Trump Continues to Lie About Immigrants in SOTU Speech

In response to Donald Trump falsely claiming he supports legal immigration and that building a wall would protect the country, AAPI media director John Santos released the following statement:

"Lacking any real accomplishments to tout, President Trump predictably fell back on his usual vicious attacks on immigrants. Dedicating long portions of his speech to demonizing immigrants, he spouted his usual lies about drugs coming across the southern border and crimes committed by immigrants in order to justify funding for his unwanted, unnecessary and ineffective

wall. He said he supports legal immigration, yet he is pushing for the deportation of thousands of Southeast Asian war refugees and has sought to slash the number of legal immigrants allowed to come into the country. This administration has done nothing but make life miserable for immigrants. Democrats believe diversity is a strength and will continue to work to stop any further attempts by President Trump to make life harder for immigrants."

BACKGROUND:

President Trump says that drugs are being smuggled into the country because of the lack of a wall, but the majority of drugs smuggled into the US go through ports of entry.

President Trump continues to justify his attacks on immigrants based on the portrayal of immigrants as violent criminals. Yet the truth is that immigrants-undocumented or documented-commit less crime than those born in the US and illegal immigration does not increase the rate of violent crime.

President Trump says he wants to encourage legal immigration and values documented immigrants, but this is also the same administration that is pushing for thousands of Southeast Asian refugees to be deported, has made it harder for immigrants to come to the US legally, slashed refugee admissions, and wanted to make it harder for immigrants



fleeing violence in their country to apply for asylum.

Finally, President Trump continues to talk about a crisis at the border, but the real crisis at the southern border is the humanitarian crisis that his administration created. Recently, reports

indicate that thousands more children may have been separated from their parents at the southern border, and the Department of Homeland Security is indicating that it may now be impossible to reunite some of these children with their parents.



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Mueller prosecutor leaves team in latest sign investigation is winding down

(Insider Bureau)- A criminal appellate prosecutor who was part of an ongoing subpoena fight related to the special counsel's investigation into Russian election interference concluded his detail with the team in December, the special counsel's office has announced.

The announced departure of Scott Meisler comes amid growing indications the special counsel is winding down the investigation.

Of the 17 prosecutors who joined Mueller's team within the Justice Department since May 2017, Meisler is the fourth known to have to

exited the office.

He is still working for the Justice Department and on cases related to Robert Mueller's investigation, according to Peter Carr, a spokesman for the unit run by Mueller. Other divisions of the Justice Department have taken on more responsibility in matters launched by Mueller.

"Scott Meisler concluded his detail with the Special Counsel's Office in December 2018 and returned to the Criminal Division but continues to represent the office on specific pending matters

that were assigned to him during his detail," Carr said on Tuesday.

Acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker said last week the Mueller investigation was "close to being completed." Sen. Chuck Grassley, a Republican Judiciary committee member, said earlier Tuesday he expected Mueller's final report to come out within a month, then corrected his statement later in the day, saying it was based on rumors.

Meisler has continued to work out of the special counsel's offices

sporadically over the past month. He is one of at least two prosecutors from the office who has fought for information from a company wholly owned by a foreign country in recent months. There's no indication yet they've gotten the information they sought, but prosecutors Tuesday night indicated they're willing to reveal more about the ongoing fight in the court system.

Meisler's most visible work on the Mueller team -- aside from the mystery subpoena case -- came when he handled some legal arguments related to



Paul Manafort's criminal case, which is nearing its end as Manafort heads to his sentencing next month.

Meisler is also a key part of the long-running and still-unresolved challenge to a subpoena in the Mueller probe. He and prosecutor Zainab Ahmad

fought the case for Mueller against a foreign-government owned company that wanted to dodge turning over information to a grand jury, according to various court records. Ahmad still works with the Special Counsel's Office.

Virginia Democrats confront second blackface scandal

Virginia's Democratic hierarchy is in total disarray.

(Agencies)- Days after Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam admitted to donning blackface as part of a costume decades ago, Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring admitted Wednesday that he, too, as a young man darkened his face for a college costume party. "In 1980, when I was a 19-year-old undergraduate in college, some friends suggested we attend a party dressed like rappers we listened to at the time, like Kurtis Blow, and perform a song. It sounds ridiculous even now writing it. But because of our ignorance and glib attitudes - and because we did not have an appreciation for the experiences and perspectives of others - we dressed up and put on wigs and brown makeup," Herring wrote in a statement. "This was a onetime occurrence and I accept full responsibility for my conduct." Herring, who had called on Northam to resign after his blackface scandal erupted Friday, indicated in his statement that he's not sure if he'll stay in office. The admissions of the two Democratic leaders bookend another emerging political

crisis involving the Virginia's only statewide elected black politician, Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax, who has been accused by college professor Vanessa Tyson of sexually assaulting her at the Democratic National Convention in 2004. Fairfax, who first called the charges a "smear," publicly moderated his tone Wednesday and said in a new statement that his accuser should be given the "space and support" to tell her story. Fairfax's statement was quickly followed by the shocking revelations from Herring, however. And shortly after that, Tyson issued a lengthy statement detailing Fairfax's alleged assault. Earlier Wednesday, Herring told the legislative black caucus about his controversy in a hastily called closed-door meeting after rumors began circulating about the photo of him in blackface decades ago.

Lawmakers emerging from the meeting on Wednesday were shell-shocked. Black lawmakers have called for Northam's resignation, but two lawmakers interviewed by

POLITICO after the meeting on Wednesday did not criticize Herring or call for him to step down. "We're just taking a measured approach and we're taking it step by step," said Democratic Del. Joe Lindsey. "We're just trying to deal with the matter at hand." Lamont Bagby, chairman of the Virginia legislative black caucus, also declined to comment on the meeting or tell reporters whether he had lost confidence in Herring's leadership. Similarly, in the nation's Capitol, Virginia Sen. Mark Warner, didn't know what to say when news broke of Herring's admission.

"I'm shocked and incredibly disappointed. This has been an awful week for Virginia," he told reporters as he tried to get away from them in an elevator, stammering along the way. "I'm just getting the original report. I'd like to get ... I ... I haven't even read statements yet," Warner said, declining to say if Herring should quit. Democrats are conflicted about Herring, in part, because he was supposed to be their Plan C if Northam resigned and if Fairfax somehow didn't



replace him. Now talk of that option appears dead as well. The succession of blows to the top three elected officials in the state paralyzed the Capitol in Richmond and left Democrats stunned by the multiple revelations concerning racial sensitivity and sexual violence - two issues that the party had once viewed as a strength relative to the GOP. Beyond partisan politics, the scandals involving Northam and Herring were a raw reminder that the past is never dead in the old capital of the Confederacy. Northam's 1984 East Virginia Medical College yearbook page, unearthed by conservative website Big League politics, bore a picture of two young men in black face and a Ku Klux Klan outfit. The yearbook had other pictures of young white men in blackface and the yearbook was finally shuttered in 2014 after it

contained pictures of students dressed up as Rebel soldiers. Northam, who initially admitted to being one of the young men in the photograph, reversed himself Saturday but admitted he had darkened his face to look like Michael Jackson at a 1984 talent show.

Four years before that, Herring donned his own costume imitating yet another black entertainer. But now, what used to be no big deal for white boys in college is political cyanide. And Herring sounded unsure about whether it would kill his term.

"In the days ahead, honest conversations and discussions will make it clear whether I can or should continue to serve as attorney general," Herring said in his statement, "but no matter where we got from here, I will say that from the bottom of my heart, I am deeply, deeply sorry for the pain that I cause with this revelation."

US pull-out from Afghanistan: It's advantage Taliban

Given its geographical location on the strategic crossroads to the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and West Asia, a peaceful and stable Afghanistan is a vital national interest for India.

(Agencies)- President Donald Trump declared victory against the ISIS in December 2018 and decided to withdraw all US forces from Syria. He also announced that the US would withdraw half the troops from Afghanistan in about two months. Both decisions contravene carefully formulated strategies to defeat the Islamic State, al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban. In Afghanistan, in particular, Trump has unwittingly handed over the initiative to the Taliban.

After vacillating for over six months, the US President announced his administration's policy for the resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan in August 2017 as part of his strategy for South Asia. Contrary to his campaign promise to pull out, he pledged continuing US support for diplomatic, military and financial commitment to peace and stability and political

reconciliation.

In a major departure from the policies of the Obama administration, Trump invited India to help the US to work towards conflict resolution in Afghanistan. As was widely anticipated, Trump put Pakistan on notice for encouraging terrorist organisations to destabilise neighbouring countries and warned the country that "it has much to lose by continuing to harbour criminals and terrorists". But despite immense American pressure, Pakistan's ISI has continued to support several factions of the Afghan Taliban and provide them safe havens. The present situation in Afghanistan can be described as a strategic stalemate. The Afghan National Army (ANA), supported by the US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), is

not losing but the resurgent Taliban now controls about one-third of the country. While the ANA controls most of the large towns, the writ of the Taliban runs in huge areas of the countryside. One estimate suggests the direct war-related casualties number 111,000 dead and 116,000 wounded in the last two decades.

The Taliban continues to haunt government forces. Sporadic strikes by terrorists belonging to ISIS Khorasan - the local branch of the ultra-extremist Islamic State - to stoke sectarian conflict by attacking the Shias continue unabated. Governance is weak, crime is rampant and corruption and tax evasion are widespread. The presidential election that was scheduled for April 2019 has been postponed to July 2019.

Till a week back, efforts to find a



negotiated end to the conflict had not made much headway. Though there is general agreement that reconciliation negotiations should be "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned", the Taliban consistently refused to meet representatives of the Afghan government.

A parallel Russian initiative, called the Moscow format, succeeded in bringing together the Taliban and Afghan representatives but the Afghans were from the High Peace Council, a "national but non-government institution".

The reconciliation talks between the US special envoy Zalmay

Khalilzad and representatives of the Taliban did not see any forward movement because the Taliban negotiators were stalling for time. The withdrawal of troops ordered by President Trump further emboldened the Taliban and weakened the Afghan government. One of the Taliban leaders gloated that it has "defeated the world's lone super power". The group demanded the withdrawal of all foreign forces without itself making any concessions and the Trump administration, eager to pull out, has apparently conceded.

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5 key takeaways from Donald Trump's State of the Union speech

President Donald Trump delivered his State of the Union address Tuesday night, a speech that was, in equal measure, surprisingly bipartisan and deeply divisive -- reflective of the deep contradictions that sit at the heart of his presidency. Within just a few paragraphs, Trump swerved from calls for unity and shared victory to blasting Democrats on their opposition to his proposed border wall. In one breath, he touted the low unemployment rate. In the next, he insisted that if Democrats wanted peace and prosperity, then they could not carry on "partisan investigations."

It was vintage Trump -- in all its incongruity, unpredictability, exaggeration and occasional moments of surprising grace.

I watched the speech (all 82 minutes of it) and took notes. My initial takeaways are below.

1. Trump started on a bipartisan note, but ...

In advance of the speech, administration officials pushed the idea that Trump would extend an olive branch to Democrats and urge the two warring parties to come together for the good of the country.

And he started on just that note. "There is a new opportunity in American politics, if only we have the courage to seize it," the President said in the speech's earlier moments. "Victory is not winning for our party. Victory is winning for our country."

Which is a great sentiment! The problem, of course, is that Trump is a deeply flawed messenger on the whole "unity" thing. A pitch like this one -- "We must reject the politics of revenge, resistance and retribution -- and embrace the boundless potential of cooperation, compromise and the common good" -- could work if spoken by someone who, well, is not Trump.

He literally turned the "politics of revenge, resistance and retribution" into an art form during the 2016 campaign. To

turn suddenly and ask the assembled Congress to put aside nasty rhetoric and name-calling feels a little pot-calling-the-kettle-black-ish.

And even as he called for unity, Trump repeatedly cast Democrats as obstructionists bent on open borders and unwilling to condemn voices within their party making extreme remarks on abortion.

2. Peace ? "partisan investigations"

The line likely to be quoted most -- especially by Trump's critics -- from the speech was this one: "If there is going to be peace and legislation, there cannot be war and investigation. It just doesn't work that way."

The logic here, while strained, goes like this: If you want economic prosperity, you can't investigate the President. One doesn't work with the other.

It's quite a line, given that Trump's administration is in the midst of an investigation led by special counsel Robert Mueller, his company is in the midst of an investigation by the Southern District of New York and House Democrats are preparing a series of investigations into, among other things, Trump's Cabinet, his taxes and the firing of FBI director James Comey.

It's also a line that evokes a less-than-ideal comparison for Trump. "I believe the time has come to bring that investigation and the other investigations of this matter to an end," said then-President Richard Nixon in his 1974 State of the Union speech. "One year of Watergate is enough."

So, yeah.

3. Women rule

It was hard to miss the large number of Democratic women sitting together on the House floor wearing white in honor of the suffragette movement. (A record number of women were elected to Congress in the 2018 election.)

And that group of women provided the most surprising -- even for Trump -- moment of the night. In touting his economic successes, Trump delivered these lines:

"All Americans can be proud that we have more women in the workforce than ever before -- and exactly one century after the Congress passed the constitutional amendment giving women the right to vote, we also have more women serving in the Congress than ever before."

He was repeatedly interrupted by cheers as the women -- almost exclusively Democrats -- slapped five and hugged to celebrate their momentous accomplishment. "You weren't supposed to do that," Trump joked.

The celebration of the record number of women in Congress morphed into a "USA! USA!" cheer that -- gasp -- the entire chamber soon took up. Trump clearly loved every second of it -- despite the fact that many of the women elected in 2018 were not only driven to run but spurred to victory by their opposition to him and his policies. "That's great, really great," he said. "And congratulations, that's great."

It was a nice moment -- for all parties. And a rare one, in both this speech and our broader politics.

4. The case for a national emergency on the border was made

Trump pointedly did not say that he would declare a national emergency on the southern border if Congress could not come to some sort of compromise before February 15.

But he laid the groundwork for why his hand would be forced if and when the time comes. "The lawless state of our southern border is a threat to the safety, security and financial well-being of all Americans," Trump said at one point. At another, he described the "very dangerous southern border." At still another he painted a picture of cities in Mexico loading undocumented immigrants in trucks and buses to bring them closer to unsecured parts of the US border.

To the extent there was any sort of unifying theme to this speech -- and you really have to dig hard for one -- it was Trump making the case that the country is under a grave threat from illegal immigration, and that if Congress won't act,

he will.

"In the past, most of the people in this room voted for a wall -- but the proper wall never got built," Trump said. "I'll get it built."

5. The reaction shot story

Part of the SOTU is the reactions from the opposition party. And with Trump in the White House and the 2020 Democratic race already in full swing, it was prime season for reaction shots of Democrats deeply disgruntled about Trump's pronouncements.

There was the eye roll from New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D). The mouth-twisting dismay from California Sen. Kamala Harris (D). Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer's seeming expletive at a Trump claim. And then there was Speaker Nancy Pelosi's golf clap for Trump -- a slapping of hands together that has already become a meme. For Democrats, these reactions will set off waves of elation. For Republicans, they will be seen as reflections of a party unwilling to ever give the President the benefit of the doubt. For the rest of us, it's a reminder that a) one speech doesn't change people's views and b) the SOTU is one big TV show.

Ex-army chief Gen JJ Singh joins 'genuine' SAD (Taksali)



The first Sikh chief of the army and former Governor of Arunachal Pradesh had joined the Akali Dal on the eve of the Punjab assembly election in 2017. He had unsuccessfully contested against Congress veteran Captain Amarinder Singh, now the Punjab chief minister, from

his bastion Patiala. JJ Singh said on Wednesday it was a "mistake" to join SAD after he became the member of the new outfit, which he described as the genuine Taksali party of Punjab. "The SAD and Congress are working hand in glove. They tried their best to ruin my status," he said. "The SAD is

a commercial party which has been running hotels and many more business in the state," he said.

When he joined the SAD in 2017, JJ Singh had said he chose the Parkash Singh Badal-led party over the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party because of the work they had done to promote heritage and restore the hurt pride of the Sikhs.

He joined the Taksali brigade in presence of SAD (Taksali) president Ranjit Singh Brahmura and senior vice-president Rattan Singh Ajnala. Brahmura said with the inclusion of JJ Singh, his party has become stronger in Punjab.

JJ Singh became the 22nd army chief in 2005 and retired from the force in 2007.

UK approves Vijay Mallya extradition to India

He now has 14 days to appeal against the decision. He denies "fleeing" from India and says he made an "unconditional" offer to pay back the sum in full in July last year.

High-profile figure

Mr Mallya built his fortune from Kingfisher beer before branching out into Indian cricket and Formula 1 racing. He set up the now defunct

Kingfisher Airlines in 2005. He faces a raft of charges relating to financial irregularities at Kingfisher Airlines. His monetary affairs are being investigated by India's Central Bureau of Investigation and the Enforcement Directorate, which handles financial crimes.

In 2012, Mr Mallya sold a majority stake in his United Spirits group to UK drinks

giant Diageo. The deal was supposed to help Mr Mallya reduce United Spirits' debts and free up funds for Kingfisher Airlines.

But the airline, which was grounded in 2012, lost its flying permit the following year. It made annual losses for five years in a row and finally collapsed after lenders refused to give it fresh loans.

Mr Mallya's total debts,



including unpaid wages and operating costs, are estimated to exceed \$1bn.

He is a high-profile figure who

has in the past been called "India's Richard Branson" and the "King of Good Times" for his lavish lifestyle.

'Virginity test of brides sexual assault'



"Virginity test will be considered a form of sexual assault...after consultations with the Law and Judiciary department, a circular will be issued declaring it a punishable offence," the minister told reporters later. The demeaning custom is allegedly followed in the Kanjarbhat community among others. Some youth from the community have launched an online campaign against it.

Minister Patil, meanwhile, also said his department will hold bi-monthly review of cases of sexual assault, and ensure low pendency of such cases in the courts.

, it said Wednesday. Certain communities in the state follow a custom whereby a newly-wed woman has to prove that she was virgin prior to the marriage.

Ranjeet Patil, the Minister of

State for Home, met a delegation of some social organisations on the issue Wednesday. Shiv Sena spokesperson Neelam Gorhe was also a part of the delegation.

Liam Neeson: 'I'm not racist'



"Cold Pursuit," which he said Tuesday is a dark comedy about revenge. Liam Neeson expresses regret for once contemplating racist revenge. In the newspaper interview Neeson began recounting his personal story after being asked about his film character turning to anger. He did not reveal who was attacked but said he found out when he returned home from a trip.

"She handled the situation of the rape in the most extraordinary way," Neeson told the newspaper, which published an audio excerpt. "But my immediate reaction was ... did she know who it was? No. What colour were they? She said it was a black person." "I went up and down areas with a cosh [crowbar], hoping I'd be approached by somebody. I'm ashamed to say that, and I did it for maybe a week -- hoping some [Neeson gestured air quotes with his fingers, according to the Independent] 'black bastard' would come out of a pub and have a go at me about something, you know? So that I could kill him."

On Tuesday he told "GMA's" Robin Roberts that "It really shocked me, this primal urge I had." "It shocked me and it

hurt me," Neeson said. "I did seek help. I went to a priest who heard my confession." "The "Taken" star said power walking two hours a day and talking it out with two friends also helped him. Neeson explained that he grew up surrounded by violence during The Troubles in Northern Ireland -- a sectarian conflict which included terrorist attacks and bombings. Roberts pushed back, pointing out that Neeson "asked about color. You didn't ask if the person was tall or short, big or small. You immediately went to race." The actor conceded that, but said he did ask those other questions of his friend who he said has since died. He said he would have had the same reaction had his friend said her rapist was white. "If she had said an Irish, or a Scot, or a Brit or a Lithuanian I know I would have felt the same effect," Neeson said. "I was trying to show honor, stand up for my dear friend in this terrible, medieval fashion."

Roberts pointed out the pain some have felt over Neeson's remarks and he said he hopes his comments help people to talk more openly about racism and bigotry. "Violence breeds violence," he said. "Bigotry breeds bigotry."

South Asia's most deadly earthquakes - as disaster strikes again

A 7.5 magnitude earthquake has rocked northern Afghanistan. At least 200 people have been confirmed dead so far and tremors were felt in Kabul, Islamabad and Kathmandu, making it one of the most powerful earthquakes to hit south Asia in recent years. South Asia is a hotspot for natural disasters, with Mondays quake marking the fifth to hit the area in the last 15 years. Below is a list of the most deadly.



hitting the Bhuj-Ahmadabad-Rajkot area of India killed 20,005 people, injuring a further 166,836, and destroying 339,000 buildings in the area.

25 April 2015

A magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck central Nepal earlier this year, killing over 8,000 people. The region then suffered 120 aftershocks (smaller earthquakes that occur after a larger one), including one which measured 7.3 on the 12 May.

29 September 1993
Estimated to have caused over \$300,000,000 worth of damage, the Killari earthquake that hit central India in 1993 reached a 6.2 magnitude and had a death toll of over 11,000 people.

million, making it the most deadly earthquake to ever hit south Asia.

31 May 1935

Still regarded as one of Pakistan's most deadly earthquakes, the Quetta earthquake killed an estimated 30,000 - 60,000 people and seriously damaged the towns of Mastung and Kalat.

26 January 2001

Registering at a 7.7 magnitude, the earthquake

8 October 2005
Pakistan's North West Frontier Province was hit by a shallow 7.6 magnitude earthquake which killed more than 75,000 people and displaced a further 2.8

Over 500 Indian fishermen believed to be in Pakistan's custody: Government



(Agencies)-Over 500 Indian fishermen and more than 1,050 Indian fishing boats are believed to be in Pakistan's custody, the government said Wednesday. The government said it has sought their early release

and repatriation from the neighbouring country. Minister of State for External Affairs V K Singh, in a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha, said the government's persistent efforts have succeeded in securing the

release and repatriation of 1,749 Indian prisoners, including 1,725 fishermen, along with 57 boats from Pakistan's custody since 2014. This includes 179 Indian prisoners and fishermen who were repatriated from

Pakistan in 2018, he said. According to the available information, 503 Indian fishermen are believed to be in Pakistan's custody, the minister said. Pakistan, through a list shared on January 1, 2019, has acknowledged the

Pakistan, through a list shared on January 1, 2019, has acknowledged the custody of 483 fishermen who are Indian or believed-to-be-Indian in their jails, Singh said.

custody of 483 fishermen who are Indian or believed-to-be-Indian in their jails, Singh said. The 483 fishermen includes those who are in Pakistan for over 20 months. The government has asked Pakistan to provide consular access and early release and repatriation of the remaining Indian prisoners and fishermen along with their boats in Pakistan's custody, he said. More than 1,050 Indian fishing boats are believed to be in Pakistan's custody, Singh said. However, he said Pakistan has not acknowledged their custody so far. Responding to a question on whether the government has recently received any representations regarding

alleged attacks by Sri Lankan Navy on Indian fishermen and capture of their properties, Singh said the government has received letters from the state governments of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry and also from fishermen associations on it. During the past three years, there have been occasions when the arrested Indian fishermen have complained of assault by Sri Lanka Navy, the minister said. The fishermen issues have been raised at the highest level, including by Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his Lankan counterpart Ranil Wickremesinghe during the latter's visit to India in October 2018. To another question, Singh also informed the Lower House that 4,705 Indian nationals are in prisons in Gulf countries, which also includes Indian origin labourers imprisoned due to accidents.

Replying to another question, Singh said the total number of Indians who have completed their jail terms but are still lodged in prisons of foreign countries is 434, out of which 396 Indians are in Pakistan. To a question on complaints by NRI brides, he said the ministry has been receiving petitions from Indian women deserted or harassed by their NRI spouses. Between January, 2014, and December, 2018, the ministry has addressed 5,379 complaints of distressed Indian women deserted by their NRI spouses, he said. On another question, Singh said the number of emigration clearances granted to ECR passport holding Indian workers in the last three years was 5,20,938 in 2016, 3,91,024 in 2017, 3,40,157 in 2018. PTI/ASK RCJ

India's security interests are at risk from US capitulation to Taliban

India will have to do whatever is necessary to shield its vital interests in Afghanistan, or else developments there would adversely impinge on Indian security, including in the Kashmir Valley.

(Agencies)- This year is Afghanistan's 40th year in a row as an active war zone. Betrayal, violence and surrender have defined Afghanistan's history for long, especially as the playground for outside powers. The US-Taliban "agreement in principle" fits with that narrative. By promising a terrorist militia a total American military pullout within 18 months and a pathway to power in Kabul, the US, in essence, is negotiating the terms of its surrender. It is worth remembering how the US got into a military quagmire. The US invasion in October 2001 ousted the Taliban from power in Kabul for harbouring the Al Qaeda planners of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. However, the key Al Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden, Khalid Sheikh

Mohammed, Abu Zubaida and Ramzi Binalshibh, were later found holed up inside Pakistan. Yet, paradoxically, the US, while raining bombs in Afghanistan, rewarded Pakistan, as President Donald Trump said last year, with more than \$33 billion in aid since 2002. The quagmire resulted from the US reluctance to take the war to the other side of the Durand Line by targeting the Taliban's command-and-control bases in Pakistan. In modern world history, no counterterrorism campaign has ever succeeded when the militants have enjoyed cross-border state sponsorship and safe havens. This also explains why terrorists remain active in the Kashmir Valley. Rather than take out the Taliban's cross-border sanctuaries, the US actively sought "reconciliation" for years,

allowing the militia to gain strength and terrorise Afghans. The protracted search for a Faustian bargain with the Taliban also explains why that ruthless militia was never added to the US list of Foreign Terrorist Organisations. This approach counterproductively led to an ascendant Taliban expanding its territorial control and killing government forces in growing numbers. Now, desperate to exit, Trump has sought to accomplish what his predecessor, Barack Obama, set out to do but failed - to cut a deal with the Taliban. It was with the aim of facilitating direct talks with the Taliban that Obama allowed the militia to establish a de facto diplomatic mission in Doha, Qatar, in 2013. Then, to meet a Taliban precondition, five hardened Taliban militants (two of them accused of

carrying out massacres of Tajiks and Hazaras) were freed from Guantánamo Bay. The five were described by the late US senator, John McCain, as the "hardest of hard core". Instead of the promised Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, the Trump administration clinched the tentative deal with the Taliban without prior consultations with Kabul and then sought to sell it to a sceptical Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. In doing so, it has unwittingly aided the Taliban effort to delegitimise an elected government. Given that Ghani was blindsided by the "framework" accord, it is no surprise that Washington did not care to take India, its "major defence partner", into confidence either.

Maldives latest: President orders state of emergency to investigate 'coup'

(Insider Bureau)- The President of the Maldives said Tuesday he ordered a state of emergency to investigate "this plot, this coup" involving a Supreme Court ruling last week that ordered the release of imprisoned opposition leaders, including many of his political rivals.

The island country lies south-west of India and Sri Lanka.

"This is not a state of war, epidemic or natural disaster, this is something more dangerous," said President Abdulla Yameen in a televised address. "This is an obstruction of the very ability of the state to function."

Yameen, who has rolled back a series of democratic reforms during his five years in office, has said that the court overstepped its authority in ordering the politicians released, saying the order "blatantly disrupts the systems of checks and balances."

Yameen's government has moved to assert its power since the Supreme Court ruling, announcing a 15-day state of emergency Monday night that gives officials sweeping powers, including to make arrests, search and seize property and

restrict freedom of assembly. Hours after the emergency was declared, security forces arrested two Supreme Court justices and a former ruler who is now an opposition leader.

"This state of emergency is the only way I can determine how deep this plot, this coup, goes," Yameen said.

Yameen's main political rival called on India to send an envoy - backed by its military - to free the imprisoned justices and opposition leaders.

Exiled former president Mohammed Nasheed, who was among the opposition politicians ordered freed by the Supreme Court and is now in neighbouring Sri Lanka, said in a statement that Yameen "has illegally declared martial law and overrun the state. We must remove him from power," calling for the Indian envoy and military to be sent. "We are asking for a physical presence."

He also called on the US to stop Maldives government officials from making transactions through US banks.

There was no immediate response from India or the US, though both have called on

Yameen to obey the Supreme Court order.

The spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was seriously concerned about the declaration of a state of emergency and the entry of security forces into the Supreme Court premises.

"The secretary-general urges the government of the Maldives to uphold the constitution and rule of law, lift the state of emergency as soon as possible, and take all measures to ensure the safety and security of the people in the country, including members of the judiciary," he said.

Yameen has cracked down on civil liberties since coming to power in 2013, imprisoning or forcing into exile nearly every politician who opposes him.

Hours after the emergency was declared, security forces in riot gear and blue camouflage stormed the Supreme Court building, arresting two of its judges, including chief Justice Abdulla Saeed. It was not immediately clear what charges they faced, if any. The whereabouts of the court's other two judges were not clear Tuesday.



Later, former dictator and opposition politician Maumoon Abdul Gayoom - President Yameen's half-brother - was seen on smartphone video taken by his daughter being quietly escorted from his home by security forces, hugging friends and family and waving to supporters before being driven away.

Shortly before his arrest he sent a message on Twitter saying a large deployment of police had surrounded his house: "To protect me or to arrest me? No idea."

His lawyer, Maumoon Hameed, said Gayoom faced charges including bribery and attempting to overthrow the government.

Gayoom was President from 1978 to 2008, when the Maldives became a multiparty democracy. The Maldives is an archipelago of more than 1,000 islands with fewer than 400,000 citizens, more

than one-third of them living in the crowded capital city, Male. Tourism now dominates the economy, with wealthy foreigners flown to hyper-expensive resort islands.

But it remains, in many ways, a small community. Gayoom, the former dictator, is the half-brother of President Yameen. The two men are now political enemies. Nasheed, the opposition leader, unseated Gayoom in the country's first democratic elections in 2008. He and Gayoom are now political allies in an opposition alliance.

Nasheed resigned during his presidential term following protests over the arrest of a judge. He lost the 2013 election to Yameen and then was convicted under Maldives' anti-terrorism laws in a trial widely criticised by international rights groups.

20 million people in Bangladesh are drinking water laced with arsenic, Human Rights Watch survey finds

(Agencies)- Each year, 43,000 Bangladeshis die as a result of drinking arsenic-contaminated water, a figure which has not significantly altered since steps were taken to clean up Bangladesh's water supply at the turn of the century.

Corruption and international neglect are to blame for the fact 20 million people in Bangladesh are still drinking water laced with arsenic, more than a decade after the extent of the problem was made clear, according to a new report by Human Rights Watch (HRW).

There is a high level of naturally occurring arsenic in Bangladeshi groundwater, as there is across South Asia. The poison can cause cancers of the skin, liver kidney, bladder and lungs, as well as cardiovascular and lung disease.

This does not normally affect the quality of water in large cities such as the capital, Dhaka, where water is drawn up from untainted aquifers deep in the ground, or purified before distribution. But in rural areas, around 10 million hand pumps still draw up potentially contaminated groundwater. The Bangladeshi government tends to extrapolate from the number of "clean water" wells available, publishing data suggesting that a large majority of its citizens can access clean water.

However, an independent 2013 survey of water at the point of use also found that 20 million Bangladeshis were still using arsenic-poisoned water.

This was the same as the figure the government published in 2003, following an international outcry about arsenic deaths. At

the time, the World Health Organisation called the government's failure to reduce the level of naturally occurring arsenic in its water "the largest mass poisoning of a population in history". The HRW survey said there was "little or no evidence of concerted efforts" to improve the situation for rural villagers.

In its survey of rural areas, HRW found that 60 per cent government water points were broken or restricted from public access. Analysing 85 per cent of the roughly 125,000 water points installed by the government between 2006 and 2012, HRW also found that around five per cent broke the government's own recommended maximum level of arsenic content.

"Politicians undermine the allocation of new government

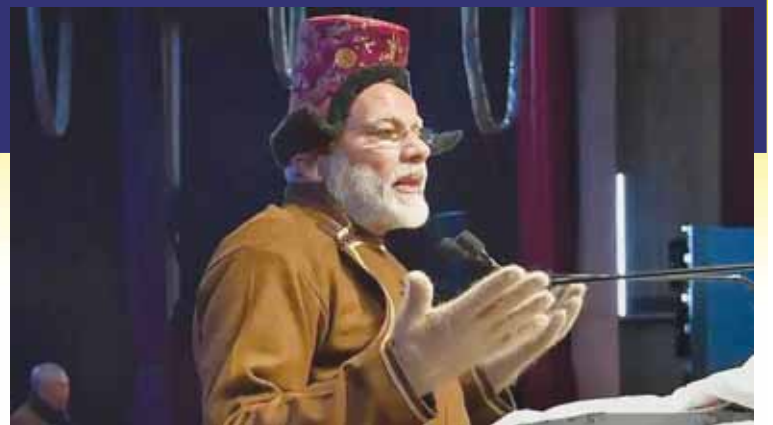


water points by diverting these life-saving public goods to their political supporters and allies," the HRW report claimed. In one recent project, 50 per cent of pumps were allegedly constructed in locations intended to benefit government officials. The problem is compounded by international indifference and the failure of NGOs to address the issue, according to the report. They suggest that NGOs such as UNICEF have blindly provided

funding to government clean-water initiatives, despite evidence that the government's water testing methods "barely function", and that the government expends "considerable resources in areas where the risk of arsenic contamination is relatively low". It is estimated that up to 5 million Bangladeshi children born between 2000 and 2030 could die after being exposed to arsenic in their water supply.

Rich people don't know what Rs 6000 means for poor farmers: PM

Speaking at an event in Leh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that the farmers of Leh and Ladakh will also benefit from the direct income support of Rs 6,000 that was announced in the budget by finance minister Piyush Goyal.



(Agencies)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday took a swipe at the Opposition for criticising his government's farmers' income plan, saying people sitting in air-conditioned rooms in Delhi do not know the importance of Rs 6,000 for a poor farmer living in distant and difficult areas.

To woo distressed farmers ahead of the general elections, the Centre has in the Interim Budget announced direct income support of Rs 6,000 per year to those holding cultivable land up to two hectare.

Speaking at the inauguration and laying of foundation schemes of various schemes, Modi said, Leh and Ladakh will also be benefited by this.

"Most of farmers here fill this criteria and will get Rs 6000 annually. It will be disbursed in three installments and first installment will reach soon. I will be sending guidelines to state government Sunday," he said.

Modi said during his days as a BJP worker in the region he used to get demands from people in Delhi to bring vegetables from Leh because

of their quality.

"Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) is a phenomenal scheme for farmers. People sitting in air conditioned rooms in Delhi do not know what Rs 6,000 mean for a poor farmer living in distant and difficult areas of the country," he said.

Modi was in Leh to launch the first-ever university in Ladakh region. It will be a cluster university comprising degree colleges of Leh, Kargil, Nubra, Zaskar, Drass and Khamti having administrative offices at Leh and Kargil.

The prime minister also laid foundation stone of the new terminal building of Kushok Bakula Rimpochee (KBR) Airport in Leh by unveiling the plaque.

The new terminal will be a modular, energy efficient and self-sustaining building of 18,985 sq. metres.

Modi also opened new tourist and trekking routes in Ladakh.

Ahead of elections, the prime minister also made a pitch for his return to the post, saying he will return to inaugurate schemes for which he is laying foundations

stones today. "I have inaugurated schemes which I had inaugurated earlier and I will come back to inaugurate schemes for which I am laying foundation stones today," he said.

He said the foundation stone for Rs 2,000 crore Leh-Kargil transmission line which will reduce power problems in the area was laid by him and he is inaugurating it too.

"Our work culture is different. Country has left behind work culture of delay and deflect ('Latkane' aur 'Bhatkane'). I have to oust this culture from the country in the coming five years. It is ensured that the project which is initiated is completed on time," he said.

He said weather brings to you a lot of hardship and the central government is committed to alleviate these problems of the area.

He said he has inaugurated and laid foundation stones of schemes and projects worth Rs 3000 crore.

"The projects which have been inaugurated or whose foundation stones have been laid will improve not only the power

situation but also connectivity of Leh region with other cities of the country, tourism, employment and education for the youth of the country," he said.

"We have to dream these things. In my mind I have such dreams," he said.

He said central is expanding connectivity to this region through Railways and Airways. "Work on railway connectivity and new airport terminal is going on. No thought was spared to expand 30 year old building. Today I have laid foundation stone for new building and soon it will be inaugurated too," he said.

He said the terminal will provide ultra modern facilities and enhanced passenger handling.

"The survey on Bilaspur Mandi railway line has started. Some places work has started. Once completed, Leh to Delhi distance will reduce. Roads get

disconnected during winters. This line will reduce this problem to a large extent," he said.

The PM said Leh is a important destination for spirituality, scenic beauty, art, culture, and adventure sports. "To improve tourism, five new trekking routes have been opened. The Centre has increased duration of protected area permit from 7 to 15 days. This will help tourists to take their time to enjoy their visits and increase employment of the youths," he said. Modi said three lakh tourists have visited the area and one lakh have gone to Kargil which shows that more than half of tourists in Jammu and Kashmir have come to Leh.

Forty percent of Leh population comprises young students who have been demanding a University which has been fulfilled today, he said.

This cluster University will use resources of degree colleges running in Leh, Nubra, Zaskar, Kargil, he said.

"Government is trying to reach people who have not been getting the benefit development. The Government has also taken a big decision for nomadic tribes who are difficult to reach for extending government benefits," he said. The government has decided to form a welfare development board for these people so that development benefits reach them quickly, he said.

"The budget of central government has emphasised on development of SC and ST. 30 per cent increase in funds for the budget of ST while 35 per cent increase in funds for SC community," he said.

"I am happy that Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act has been amended to give more powers to the Council in financial areas," he said.

"Now you do not have to go to Srinagar and Jammu for your needs. Most of the works will be completed here", he said.

Budget Cash dole for small farmers, but experts say it may fall short

(Agencies)- Admitting "reduced" returns in farming, the government in its interim budget on Friday announced a cash-transfer scheme for small farmers, along with a focus on non-crop sectors within agriculture, but some critics contended that the income support scheme falls short while analysts wondered why the government waited this long to respond to a brewing rural crisis.

Finance minister Piyush Goyal said in his interim budget speech that government would roll out the Kisan Samman Nidhi (farmers' honour endowment). Under it, small and marginal farmers will get Rs 6,000 a year as income support in instalments of Rs 2,000.

"I propose an outlay of Rs 75,000 crore for PM-KISAN for the FY 2019-20. I am also providing Rs 20,000 crore in the Revised Estimates (RE) of FY 2018-19," Goyal said.

Nearly 120 million farmers would qualify for the income transfers. These measures are aimed at ameliorating a lingering farm crisis due to falling prices of food. Marginal farmers are those owning up to one hectare of land, while small farmers are those with land holdings of between 1-2 hectares.

Goyal also announced a 2% interest subvention (discount on the interest rate for farmers taking agricultural loans) engaged in cattle and dairy farming and fisheries. A new department for fisheries will also

be set up.

Cultivators impacted by weather shocks will qualify for an additional interest subvention (discount) of 3% if they have been repaying loans on time. Farm loans usually attract a cheaper interest rate of 7% and those making timely repayments already get loans at 4%.

"These measures will really help farmers with an assured income support," said BJP leader Anil Baluni, a Rajya Sabha MP.

Critics, however, said the income support scheme falls short. "Income transfer is a step in the right direction, but it has to be sufficient of course and continuous. They are giving Rs 6,000. This may not be sufficient," said N Chandrasekhara Rao, an

agricultural economist with Delhi University's The Institute of Economic Growth.

This insufficiency argument is borne out by the fact that farmers will get Rs 6,000 a year while the NDA government's Volume 2 of "Report of the Committee on Doubling Farmers' Income" released in August 2017 states that the "average monthly consumption expenditure of a farming household" is Rs 6,223. Input costs, too, have risen by over a third in the last five years.

Congress president Rahul Gandhi added to the insufficient allocation argument when he tweeted that giving farmers Rs 17 a day is "an insult to everything they stand and work for".

Rs 15,000 cap may be relaxed for new pension scheme

The scheme, which intends to cover 100 million labourers from the unorganised sector, including domestic helps, street vendors, rickshaw-pullers and farm workers, was announced by Union finance minister Piyush Goyal in the interim budget on Friday.

(Agencies)- The government will make the income eligibility criterion flexible for its mega pension scheme announced in the interim budget on Friday so that beneficiaries remain in the fold even if their monthly incomes rise above the current cap of Rs 15,000.

The scheme, which intends to cover 100 million labourers from the unorganised sector, including domestic helps, street vendors, rickshaw-pullers and farm workers, was announced by Union finance minister Piyush

Goyal in the interim budget on Friday.

The social security scheme, Pradhan Mantri Shram-Yogi Maandhan, will give Rs 3,000 every month to beneficiaries after they attain the age of 60. Since it is limited to workers whose monthly income is up to Rs 15,000, there were some apprehensions that it would exclude several beneficiaries if their monthly income crosses the limit at some point during their working lives, said an official in the

Union labour ministry who asked not to be named.

The government has taken note of this problem and it will address this issue suitably before the scheme is launched this month, he added.

Economic affairs secretary Santosh Kumar Garg detailed two possible options. "The scheme is contributory. The government can take a view that at the entry stage we will have Rs 15,000 [criterion]. Even if it [the monthly income] goes up, he [the beneficiary] will



continue to contribute," he said. The second option is to adjust the income (Rs 15,000 per month) for inflation, Garg added.

Budget 2019: Govt proposes higher allocation for women's schemes; experts sceptical

In his budget speech on Friday, finance minister Piyush Goyal also focused on other schemes that are ostensibly aimed at improving the living and working conditions of women.

(Agencies)- With an eye on women voters, the Bharatiya Janata Party-led NDA government, in its interim budget, proposed higher allocations for women's protection and empowerment as well as childcare.

In his budget speech on Friday, finance minister Piyush Goyal also focused on other schemes that are ostensibly aimed at improving the living and working conditions of women, citing, for instance, the Ujjwala initiative to provide free cooking gas connections to below poverty level families. "In our election manifesto, we had promised that we will transform the quality of life of women in rural India by providing cleaner fuel," Goyal

said. "For securing the health of every home-maker in rural areas ...our government embarked upon a programme to deliver 8 crore free LPG connections under the Ujjwala Yojana. More than 6 crore connections have already been given and the remaining will get free gas connections by next year," he said. He went on to add that more than 70% beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana, which offers loans to micro and small enterprises, were women; they were getting affordable and collateral-free loans to start their own businesses. Women have become an increasingly important electoral constituency for political parties. Women's

turnout in the 2014 parliamentary elections was 65.63%, marginally lower than the 67.09% turnout of men, but in 16 out of 29 states more women turned out to vote than men did.

Ranjana Kumari, director of the Centre for Social Research, a women's advocacy group, said the government had made little investment in improving the living and working conditions of women. "The unemployment of educated women is on the rise; no investment has been made to create jobs. There is no proper utilisation of the Nirbhaya funds...". The Nirbhaya fund is a reference to a 2013 initiative that followed the brutal December 16, 2012 gang rape and murder of a 23-year-old woman on a bus



in Delhi that sparked nationwide outrage. The fund is to support initiatives to ensure women's safety. Goyal provided Rs 1,330 crore for the protection and empowerment of women, a hike of Rs 174 crore, or 6.7%, over the revised estimate for 2018-19. The other sector that received an increase in allocation was the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme. The government raised the

allocation under this head to Rs 27,584 crore from Rs 23,357 crore. Women and child development minister Maneka Gandhi said the increase in funds will help fight malnutrition and provide more efficient facilities for women and children.

Samajwadi Party spokesperson Rajesh Dikshit was sceptical about the increase in allocation and called it an election propaganda.

RSS offshoots give budget a thumbs-up

Last year, the labour wing of the RSS had called for a country-wide demonstration to protest against the "labour unfriendly" budget that, it claimed, failed to address the concerns of the labour sector.

(Agencies)- Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh affiliates that have been at loggerheads with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government over its purported failure so far to offer sops to farmers, the middle class and the labour force on Friday gave the interim budget a thumbs-up. Offshoots such as the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, Laghu Udyog Bharti and Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh were

unanimous in approving the ₹6,000 annual cash dole for farmers with a landholding of less than 5 hectares and the setting up of a Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog for the welfare of cows. The budget also contained a proposal to offer a monthly pension of ₹3,000 to unorganised workers such as a household help and rickshaw pullers. "The proposal to exempt income up to ₹5 lakh

from tax is a great relief for salaried employees who constitute major part of the middle class. The TDS threshold of interest [yielded by fixed deposits and post office deposits] being enhanced from ₹10,000 to ₹40,000 is highly beneficial for the old, who are dependent on savings deposits," said Saji Narayanan, president of the BMS. Last year, the labour

wing of the RSS had called for a country-wide demonstration to protest against the "labour unfriendly" budget. The BKS, an outfit that works with farmers, has also given the budget its stamp of approval. BKS general secretary Badri Narayan Chaudhari said the annual income support of ₹6,000 to farmers might seem little, but there was no chance of it being delayed or usurped as it would be transferred directly to beneficiaries' bank accounts. "We are happy...that a Kamdhenu Aayog will be set up, and also the

decision to support organic farming since there were subsidies for chemical fertilisers and equipment but nothing to help organic farming that has lesser produce but is safe for the environment," he said. The Laghu Udyog Bharti, which has been critical of demonetisation and the goods and services tax, has welcomed the provisions that will give small and medium enterprises relief. "Increasing the tax exemption and raising the threshold on interest will benefit the micro and small sector operations," said Jitendra Gupta, outfit's president.

Optimistic about Indian market despite changes in e-commerce FDI policy: Walmart

The Bentonville-based retailing major's statement came after a recent report by global consultancy firm Morgan Stanley, which had hinted that Walmart may quit Flipkart as the new foreign direct investment (FDI) policy came into effect.

(Agencies)- US retail major Walmart, which invested USD 16 billion in Flipkart, Wednesday said it is committed to the Indian market and is optimistic despite recent changes in the FDI policy for e-commerce firms in the country.

The Bentonville-based retailing major's statement came after a recent report by global consultancy firm Morgan Stanley, which had hinted that Walmart may quit Flipkart as the new foreign direct investment (FDI) policy came into effect, which would lower its profitability in the long run.

Morgan Stanley, in a report titled 'Assessing Flipkart Risk to Walmart EPS' dated February 4, claimed that "an exit is likely, not completely out of the question, with the Indian e-commerce market becoming more complicated." "Walmart's and Flipkart's commitment to India is deep and long term. Despite the recent changes in regulations, we remain optimistic about the country," said Dirk Van den Berghe, Executive Vice President and Regional CEO Walmart Asia and Canada.

He further added, "We will continue to focus on serving

customers, creating sustained economic growth and bringing sustainable benefits to the country, including employment generation, supporting small businesses and farmers, and growing Indian exports to Walmart's global markets." Tightening norms for e-commerce firms having foreign investment, the government, from February 1, barred online marketplaces like Flipkart and Amazon from selling products of companies where they hold stakes and banned exclusive marketing arrangements that could influence product price.



The revised policy on FDI in online retail, issued by the commerce and industry ministry, also said that these firms have to offer equal services or facilities to all its vendors without discrimination.

Last year on August 18, Walmart had completed acquisition of 77 per cent stake in Flipkart for about USD 16 billion (Rs 1.05 lakh crore), a deal which gave the US retailer access to the Indian e-commerce market.

How Jeff Bezos lost out to billionaire Mukesh Ambani in poll-bound India

(News Agencies)- Amazon.com and Walmart Inc.'s plans to dominate India's online retail landscape have been ambushed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's political priorities heading into a tightening election. Amazon.com and Walmart Inc.'s plans to dominate India's online retail landscape have been ambushed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's political priorities heading into a tightening election. The vote, which must be held by May, has increased the influence of local retailers that lobbied for growth-crimping curbs on the US giants. On cue, India this month rolled out constraints on foreign e-commerce players including Jeff Bezos-led Amazon and Walmart-owned Flipkart, which together control 70 percent of its online shopping. The tighter rules, aimed at protecting small traders, may end up benefiting, Mukesh Ambani, who is building a home-grown competitor. The Bharatiya Janata Party is still licking its wounds after being trounced in three key recent state polls and a year ago fighting an unexpectedly close contest in Gujarat -- Modi's home state. Among small businesses, which are a traditional support base, the government's popularity has

been eroded by 2016's surprise cash ban and the subsequent chaotic roll out of a new sales tax. The rules now bar Amazon and Flipkart Online Services Pvt. Ltd. from owning inventory, and require them to treat all vendors equally, throttling discounts and exclusives -- a huge advantage to homegrown companies including Ambani's new venture. His Reliance Industries Ltd., which owns India's largest retail chain and third-biggest telecom network, has the potential to evolve into a local version of Amazon or Alibaba Group Holding Ltd., UBS AG said last month. "Whether serendipitous or not, India's tightened regulatory regime for online retailers is a huge win for Reliance with its new retail ambitions," said Sanchit Vir Gogia, chief executive officer of consultancy Greyhound Research. "This could be a field leveler for them." Ambani wants his consumer offerings -- covering telecom, fiber-to-home broadband, media and entertainment and retail -- to contribute nearly as much to the conglomerate's overall earnings as its bread-and-butter energy and petrochemicals businesses. He's fresh from disrupting the nation's telecom sector, which he entered in 2016 with services so cheap that rivals have quit,

merged or gone bankrupt, including a carrier controlled by his younger brother.

Unique Model

On the back of that success, he last year unveiled plans to create a model that combines Reliance's consumer offerings into a "hybrid, online-to-offline new commerce platform."

Analysts at UBS predict Reliance can gain market share in new-age retail given its starting point of 280 million telecom subscribers, a broadband offering, extensive content and a web of 10,000 stores nationwide. The company also wants to partner with India's 12 million mom-and-pop shops to create distribution and delivery centers. Reliance resembles Alibaba in its ability to offer bundled services in a fast-growing, fragmented market with low online penetration, according to UBS.

"In retail/e-commerce, despite competition from well-funded global companies, Reliance's wide footprint of physical stores along with its omni-channel focus, subscriber reach and regulations governing foreign e-commerce entities," could help it gain market share, analysts including Mumbai-based Amit Rustagi wrote in a Jan. 24 report. Representatives for Reliance, Walmart, Amazon and India's commerce ministry didn't



respond to requests for comment. Meanwhile, the U.S. retail giants are being curbed in a market where they have committed billion of dollars and, till recently, looked to have already won. Both will have to cut back on cash-back payments and discounts -- a sore point for smaller sellers, who accuse the pair of predatory pricing. To meet rules, the companies have also removed thousands of products from virtual shelves, must redraw contacts with merchants and brands as well as brace for a full-fledged e-commerce policy that is under review. Flipkart's losses may rise 20 percent to 25 percent following the changes, according to Morgan Stanley, which said in a report that it didn't think Walmart was considering walking away from the investment. The world's largest retailer is "financially and

strategically invested in India," analysts including Simeon Gutman wrote, adding that it may make sense to exit if Walmart can't see a long-term path to profits. Other Setbacks Walmart has suffered other setbacks: During the course of its Flipkart acquisition and soon after, it lost the co-founders of its new purchase. Their know-how and connections would have helped the U.S. retailer better navigate this latest regulatory wrinkle. Reliance will probably use the opportunity posed by the government's tighter rules to make a "grand entry" into e-commerce, said Praveen Khandelwal, national secretary general for the Confederation of All India Traders, a lobbying group that had threatened political repercussions if the Feb. 1 rollout was delayed.

2018 Fourth Warmest Year in Continued Warming Trend, According to NASA, NOAA

Earth's global surface temperatures in 2018 were the fourth warmest since 1880, according to independent analyses by NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Global temperatures in 2018 were 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit (0.83 degrees Celsius) warmer than the 1951 to 1980 mean, according to scientists at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS) in New York. Globally, 2018's temperatures rank behind those of 2016, 2017 and 2015. The past five years are, collectively, the warmest years in the modern record. "2018 is yet again an extremely warm year on top of a long-term global warming trend," said GISS Director Gavin Schmidt. Since the 1880s, the average global surface temperature has risen about 2 degrees Fahrenheit (1 degree Celsius). This warming has been driven in large part by increased emissions into the atmosphere of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases caused by

human activities, according to Schmidt.

Weather dynamics often affect regional temperatures, so not every region on Earth experienced similar amounts of warming. NOAA found the 2018 annual mean temperature for the contiguous 48 United States was the 14th warmest on record.

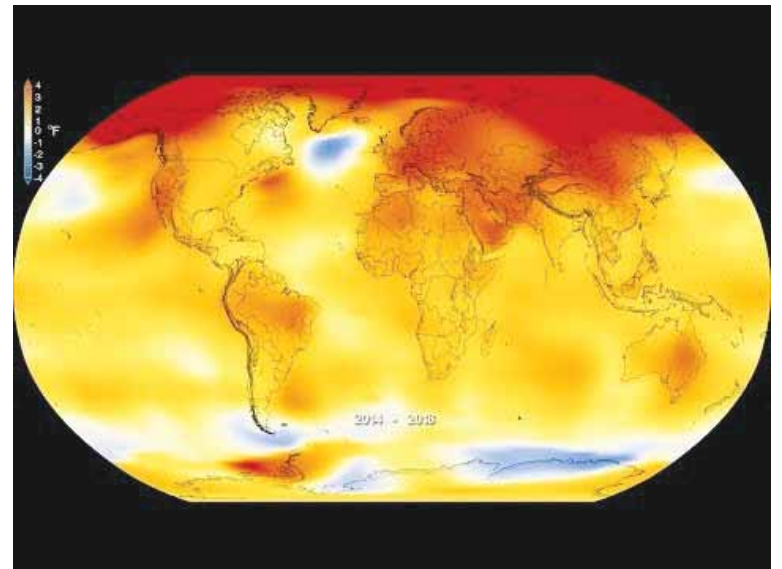
Warming trends are strongest in the Arctic region, where 2018 saw the continued loss of sea ice. In addition, mass loss from the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets continued to contribute to sea level rise. Increasing temperatures can also contribute to longer fire seasons and some extreme weather events, according to Schmidt.

"The impacts of long-term global warming are already being felt - in coastal flooding, heat waves, intense precipitation and ecosystem change," said Schmidt. NASA's temperature analyses incorporate surface temperature measurements from 6,300 weather stations, ship- and buoy-based observations of sea surface temperatures, and temperature measurements from

Antarctic research stations.

These raw measurements are analyzed using an algorithm that considers the varied spacing of temperature stations around the globe and urban heat island effects that could skew the conclusions. These calculations produce the global average temperature deviations from the baseline period of 1951 to 1980. Because weather station locations and measurement practices change over time, the interpretation of specific year-to-year global mean temperature differences has some uncertainties. Taking this into account, NASA estimates that 2018's global mean change is accurate to within 0.1 degree Fahrenheit, with a 95 percent certainty level.

NOAA scientists used much of the same raw temperature data, but with a different baseline period and different interpolation into the Earth's polar and other data poor regions. NOAA's analysis found 2018 global temperatures were 1.42 degrees Fahrenheit (0.79 degrees Celsius) above the 20th century



average. NASA's full 2018 surface temperature data set - and the complete methodology used to make the temperature calculation - are available at:

<https://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp>

GISS is a laboratory within the Earth Sciences Division of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. The laboratory is affiliated with Columbia University's Earth Institute and School of Engineering and Applied Science in New York. NASA uses the

unique vantage point of space to better understand Earth as an interconnected system. The agency also uses airborne and ground-based monitoring, and develops new ways to observe and study Earth with long-term data records and computer analysis tools to better see how our planet is changing. NASA shares this knowledge with the global community and works with institutions in the United States and around the world that contribute to understanding and protecting our home planet.

How Antarctica's melting ice could change weather around the world

New research shows that melting ice will lead to more trapped heat in some regions and colder temperatures in others.

Nearly 2.4 billion people, or 40 percent of the world's population, live within 60 miles of the ocean. And so it's clearly not good that higher average temperatures are causing water in the ocean to expand. Hotter weather is also melting ice on land, increasing the volume of water in the ocean. Scientists are now paying particularly close attention to warming in Antarctica, home to 90 percent of our planet's ice. If it were all to melt, it would raise sea levels by 190 feet. Oceans have already risen more than 8 inches since 1880, and between 1992 and 2017, Antarctica lost 2.71 trillion metric tons of ice. This is roughly the volume of three Olympic-size swimming pools every second. Half of these losses came in the last five years, a sign of an accelerating melt rate.

The big question then is what humanity should expect in the future as temperatures continue to rise. In two new papers published Wednesday in the

journal *Nature*, scientists narrowed down the scenarios for sea level rise stemming from melting ice in Antarctica. They found that the evidence for some of the more dire forecasts for sea level rise, upward of 3 feet by the end of the century, is not as robust as once thought. However, they report that melting ice in Antarctica has global consequences that extend far beyond sea level rise and into the overall climate system. These ripple effects stand to exacerbate extreme weather events that can hit people far from the shore.

It's a critical reminder that warming in even the coldest, most remote parts of the planet can have global consequences. Since scientists still have much to learn about Antarctica's ice, they are now in a race to learn as much as possible as it melts away before their eyes.

Scientists are getting better at estimating how high oceans will rise as Antarctica melts. Average global temperatures are

closely related to the amount of heat-trapping gases like carbon dioxide people pump into the sky, and climate researchers use this mechanism to anticipate future warming. However, predicting sea level rise as the climate changes is much more difficult because there are so many local and global factors at play. "There's always been quite a lot of uncertainty in sea level rise because it's hard to figure out how ice sheets behave," said Tamsin Edwards, a lecturer in physical geography at King's College London in the United Kingdom.

Edwards, the lead author of one of the *Nature* papers published Wednesday, decided to examine a particular kind of ice loss in Antarctica known as marine ice-cliff instability to try to get more clarity. Ice cliffs are the craggy sides of the ice sheet that can tower more than 300 feet high. An alarming 2016 paper theorized that when these cliffs extrude over coastal waters,



warming air and warming water could cause them to catastrophically collapse under their own weight. The fractured ice would then thaw and contribute to sea level rise, which would then melt more ice.

According to the 2016 paper, this mechanism explains the rapid rise in sea levels we saw near the end of the last ice age. If it comes into play in our current era of warming, it could lead to sea levels that are 3 feet higher by 2100, wiping out coastal metropolises around the world. However, in her analysis of several different models,

Edwards found that she could model past sea level rise events without incorporating this mechanism in a way that aligned with the paleoclimate record. "We found that we just didn't need this feedback to explain the past," she said.

That doesn't mean that ice cliffs won't become unstable in the coming decades, but the evidence that such a phenomenon would occur is weaker. The results are helping scientists zero in on a more precise estimate of sea level rise by bracketing out some of the more extreme projections.

LFW SR19: Suited-booted, flowy and flowery at the fashion week

From pantsuits to bandhgalas to ruffled gowns and earthy florals, the Lakme Fashion Week Summer Resort 2019 had all the trends that'll be in this season.

The ongoing Lakme Fashion Week Summer Resort 2019 had all the trends that would be in this season. Take a look:

Pantsuits

Designer Sneha Arora's collection had loose and flowy silhouettes. Pastel hues dominated the collection. Trend takeaway Sneha Arora showcasing pantsuits with a fun and flirty twist got us believing that pantsuits are going to rule 2019 as well.

Dress with boots

Gauri & Nainika unveiled their collection, The Art of Latte, which saw freeflowing silhouettes in shades of red, pink and blushing nudes, interspersed with bold floral prints. High-low dresses with floor sweeping trains, teamed with high boots were a staring style. Trend takeaway Team a printed dress with thigh high boots and a blazer to cut the cold. Go for dramatic eyes to elevate the look.

Oversized sari pins

Designer Varun Bahl debuted his prêt range that included saris, culottes, kurtas and dresses in pastel hues, showing his love for flowers. Trend takeaway Varun Bahl



brought those oversized sari pins back. Pallus of georgette and crepe saris pinned with sleeveless blouse are a sight for sore eyes.

Floral bandhgalas

Rohit Bal's collection titled

Guldastah was a tribute to Kashmir. It had long full-flared and anarkali kurtas, stately jackets and quilted boleros. Trend takeaway Rohit Bal's floral bandhgalas are the gift for men this season. The prints included sunflowers, poppies, tulips and

peonies.

Ruffled magic

Gaurav Gupta's collection, (Un)Folding, saw Lucknowi chikankari, hints of Benarasi brocade and a colour palette, featuring candy yellow, space

blue, lavender, sand pink, frost blue and coin grey, that were enhanced by tired ruffles. Trend takeaway Ruffled gowns are the perfect pick for an engagement ceremony. Team them with a straight wet hairdo.

Gauri Khan stuns at Lakme Fashion Week 2019

Shah Rukh Khan's wife Gauri Khan arrived dressed to the nines, turning every camera her way at Lakme Fashion Week summer/resort 2019. Neha Dhupia and many more joined Gauri at the celeb-filled audience on day 1 and day 2 of LFW 2019.

Gauri Khan attended Lakme Fashion Week summer/resort 2019 on Thursday, wearing what most would define as business attire. Keeping to her signature sultry-but-classy look, Gauri added interest to her black and white dress by styling it with a statement belt by designer label, YSL, which pulled the entire look together. The interior designer, and Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan's wife, was spotted wearing a Sachin & Babi dress, priced at Rs 42,315. Gauri's dress featured

a plunging V neck, a relaxed dolman sleeve bodice in satin and a knit trumpet skirt that hit above the knee. Take a look at Gauri Khan's LFW 2019 dress, which she paired with Christian Louboutin pumps, in the photos ahead: Gauri Khan wears the sleek look confidently. Now, is this dress something that is office appropriate for the average working woman? Maybe not, unless you love to push the envelope. But like Gauri, a look like this could be worn to a classy night out with friends, or could be fashioned to attend a date after work. And like Gauri Khan, you're

guaranteed to turn heads. Along with her, many other celebrities, including, actor Neha Dhupia, attended day 1 and day 2 of LFW 2019 and they didn't skimp on their outfits in the least bit. They all had one thing in common: An effortlessly chic sense of style with their fashion week-worthy designer bags, statement heels, and covetable shades. From It prints to cool layering techniques, keep scrolling to see the best-dressed celebrities from Lakme Fashion Week summer/resort 2019, whose sartorially savvy looks you could try to emulate:



Tata Memorial Hospital doctors try to decode cancer-pregnancy link

Pregnancy-related cancers or PACs are diagnosed either during pregnancies or one year after delivery. However, as the condition remains poorly understood, caregivers often recommend abortion.

Dr. Ashwini Bhalerao Gandhi, a gynaecologist at PD Hinduja Hospital & Medical Research Centre in Mahim called the study a much-needed initiative to understand this subset of patients. "With late marriages, women are getting pregnant late. Often there is a dilemma among doctors to decide a course of action when pregnant women are diagnosed with cancer, so we do need standardised guidelines."

Goregaon-based software engineer Shikha Khandelwal was diagnosed with stage-three breast cancer in the sixth month of her first pregnancy. Months before she was diagnosed, she noticed a lump, but her gynaecologist dismissed it as hormonal changes.

Khandelwal is among a rising number of Indian women getting diagnosed with pregnancy-associated cancers, or PACs. These cancers are diagnosed either during pregnancies or one year after delivery. However, as the condition remains poorly understood, caregivers often recommend abortion.

Now, for the first time, doctors at Tata Memorial Hospital (TMH) in Parel are trying to understand PACs, and are collecting data so that they can set treatment guidelines.

The doctors are focussing on pregnancy-associated breast cancer, which is most common among Indian women.

Dr Jyoti Bajpai, a professor of medical oncology at the hospital and her colleagues have started a registry and a study to record the incidence of PACs. In two months, the hospital plans to launch a national registry.

"We know nearly a third of Indian women are diagnosed with

breast cancer in their thirties, and the now simultaneous trend of late pregnancies has resulted in more women getting diagnosed with the disease during their pregnancies," Dr Bajpai said. "It is a known fact that late pregnancies are risk factors for cancers, while early pregnancies are protective," she added.

Internationally, pregnancy-associated breast cancer accounts for approximately 2% of primary breast cancer patients. So far, 80 women were enrolled in the registry, and Dr Bajpai and her team are treating them based on international guidelines set by the National Comprehensive Cancer Network. "While the focus is to cure the mother, we pay equal attention to save the pregnancies," said Dr Shylashree TS, professor, gynaecology,



TMH, who is co-leading the study. The Goregaon-based software engineer, Khandelwal, is a part of the registry. Since her diagnosis in 2016, she took treatment at the Tata Memorial Hospital, where she underwent chemotherapy and radiotherapy, and eventually had a normal delivery. "I was reluctant to start treatment before delivery as this was my first child. But after doctors assured me it was safe, I went ahead," she said. Doctors

said chemotherapy can be safely administered after the second trimester but radiotherapy and hormone therapy should be given only after delivery.

As a part of their study, the doctors will also follow up on the long-term health of the child after delivery. "For now, most babies of women who underwent chemotherapy are fine. For six women, we had to terminate pregnancies as they were metastatic," Dr Bajpai added.

IIT-Mandi finds new treatment for Zika virus

Researchers from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Mandi, have identified a drug target in the Zika virus that can bind with an existing antimalarial drug to inhibit the spread of the disease in the human body.

Researchers from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Mandi, have identified a drug target in the Zika virus that can bind with an existing antimalarial drug to inhibit the spread of the disease in the human body.

Zika is a viral disease transmitted by the aedes aegypti mosquitoes that also transmit diseases such as dengue and chikungunya. It is a self-limiting disease that causes fever, rashes, joint pain and red eyes,

but in pregnant women it has been associated with babies born with microcephaly (a small head and abnormal brain development).

The researchers found that hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), a drug that is used to treat malaria, can inhibit the NS2B-NS3 protease necessary for the replication of the Zika virus.

"Ours was a three part research. First, we looked through existing FDA approved drugs and

computationally discovered five molecules that could probably work against Zika. Then, we purified the protein target to see whether HCQ inhibited its functions. And, third, we did enzyme kinetic studies to find out the concentration at which the drug reduces the viral load," said Rajanish Giri, assistant professor, department of biotechnology, IIT Mandi.

Giri's team worked closely with Indira Mysorekar from Washington University at St. Louis, USA, to study the enzyme kinetic studies. Earlier, Mysorekar's team had suggested that the use of HCQ can prevent the transmission of Zika from mother to foetus.

"There is a need for either drugs or vaccine against Zika because it is a public health concern as it has been associated with microcephaly. Till now, there is



nothing. I haven't heard of this particular study, but if an already existing drug can be used against the virus, if there is a proof of concept or enough evidence, then the drug development will take less time," said PL Joshi, former director of the National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme.

As HCQ is already an approved drug in the USA and India, a

translational drug that can be marketed for Zika would be easy to develop.

"Repurposing approved drugs can be an efficient method to identify drug compounds, which may be capable of activating or inhibiting new targets. There is no need to prove the safety of the drug, it can directly go into preclinical animal studies for its efficacy against Zika," said Giri.



Discover South Korea's food and culture in this travelogue around Seoul

Stepping into Seoul is like taking a trip back into the past as well as peeking into the future. Even through fleeting first glimpses of this sprawling city, the juxtaposition of the old and the new becomes starkly visible to the first-time visitor. In all probability, you wouldn't have considered South Korea as a tourist destination, even a few years ago. Nestled between China, North Korea and Japan, this is a country often overlooked by travellers. But this tiny peninsula has a lot more to offer, than just their world-famous cosmetics and a skincare regime sworn by women all over the globe. With due thanks to the rising popularity of K-Pop, K-dramas and Korean cosmetics, people around the world now have their sights set on this tiny nation. Seoul is a megalopolis, where history and modernity coexist. Stepping into Seoul is like taking a trip back into the past as well as peeking into the future. Even through fleeting first glimpses of this sprawling city, the juxtaposition of the old and the new becomes starkly visible to the first-time visitor. Cradling the past

The Gyeongbokgung Palace, the biggest of the five grand palaces of Seoul, is an imposing structure. While a huge chunk of it was destroyed during the Japanese occupation of Korea in 1910, what remains today, stands as a testament to the rich cultural history of this country. Walking in through the main gate, you instantly feel like you've been teleported back to the ancient days and tourists wearing the Korean traditional dress, Hanbok (which gives you free entry into the palace), makes you feel that way, even more so. Once inside, make sure to watch the Changing of the Guard ceremony, with the guards dressed in traditional Korean attire. The palace grounds are also home to two museums - The National Folk Museum of Korea and The National Palace Museum of Korea, which are replete with interesting artefacts from the Joseon Dynasty. We woke up every morning to a splendid view of the Changdeokgung Palace, which was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997. With a stroke of luck, we visited it on the last Wednesday of the month, which is observed as a Culture Day at such tourist places. What made this palace special and



beloved for the kings was the Secret Garden situated in the heart of the palace grounds. On a bright sunny morning, we arrived at the Bukchon Hanok Village, a quaint, old winding lane, offering a slice of Korean history and culture right in the middle of the bustling city. It is lined on both sides by traditional wooden Korean houses, known as hanok. Being constantly inundated with tourists dusk, don't be surprised to find Korean volunteers, usually old ladies, holding up placards asking visitors to maintain silence, since most of the hanoks are still home for many families. A lot of Buddhist temples in Korea can be found nestled in the mountains. The Jogyesa Temple in Seoul, is an exception - being the only Buddhist temple located in an

urban setting. Originally established in the year 1395, it was moved and reconstructed at its current location in 1936. The temple ground is home to a centuries-old tree and offers a sense of calm and peace, amid the hustle and bustle of a big city. Food and Culture Food is a serious business in South Korea. Most Koreans have their dinner before 7pm and it is a tradition for office colleagues to have team dinners and drinks on weekdays. In fact, drinking alcohol is common in South Korea, given that it's cheap and a stress reliever, especially for Koreans, who clock in the longest working hours in the world. Even the subway carries the distinct smell of alcohol post sunset. A Korean restaurant will be unlike any other

- you'll see stoves set right out on the tables so you can have your stew piping hot. The chopsticks will not be wooden, but metal -- something that is needed unique. Dining, like everything else in Korea, comes with its own set of unique etiquettes. Having food alone is a socially weird prospect, so you're expected to have your food with some company. Similarly, you cannot pour a drink for yourself - it's considered to be rude. It's always the person accompanying you, who pours a drink for you and vice versa. And if you're with a senior or an elder, you must turn your face away from the person while drinking alcohol. While all of these can seem quite stifling for outsiders, it's something that the locals follow strictly.

Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga Movie Review:**Anil Kapoor and Sonam Kapoor take lesbian love mainstream**

Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga movie review: Sonam Kapoor and Anil Kapoor's film is a progressive drama that intentionally binds itself within mainstream convention. Rating: 3.5 stars.

Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga

Director: Shelly Chopra Dhar

Cast: Anil Kapoor, Sonam Kapoor, Rajkummar Rao, Juhi Chawla

Rating: 3.5/5

The grandmother's name is Gifty. Played memorably by Madhumalti Kapoor, this Mrs Chaudhury is quite the package: a film-loving matriarch who orders her son out of the kitchen, and tucks all objects of importance inside her cavernous blouse. The name exhibits an obvious mindset, one where women of the house are considered presents and trophies, objects of adornment as opposed to action. When Gifty's son wants to marry off his daughter - named Sweetie - his wishlist for a groom includes the word 'gundeya,' to imply toughness, as he wants a man who can take care of his girl. Sweetie has other ideas. Directed by debutant Shelley Chopra Dhar and co-written by

her and Gazal Dhaliwal, Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga is a progressive drama that intentionally binds itself within mainstream convention. It looks like yet another Punjab-based comedy about big weddings and eligible girls, but the trappings have been kept in place to comfort an easily offended audience while selling them on the big idea of accepting a same-sex relationship. As you may imagine, this is an uphill climb in a country where homosexuality was decriminalised only last year, and is still widely regarded an aberration. This film's syntax, however, is anything but radical. Instead, so preoccupied is this film with masala that the heroine's father is intoxicated by the scent of kasoori methi. Balbir Choudhury, an affluent manufacturer of undergarments, is called the 'Mukesh Ambani of Moga,' a small Punjabi town. He's played by Anil Kapoor, the actor who unforgettably lost his head twenty five years ago, to the song giving this film its name. His daughter Sonam plays his on-

screen child, Sweetie, repurposing that great RD Burman song to remind us that it isn't only boys who fall for girls.

The start is straightforward. It is hinted Sweetie has a secret lover, with speculation that this might be a Muslim man, which would predictably lead to consternation. Here enters unsuccessful young playwright, Sahil Mirza, optimistically imagining himself to be the rumoured paramour. This is all shadow-boxing, first revealed through a clumsy childhood flashback and later by a pained Sweetie herself, who tells Sahil about her lover. The film takes too long to get here, especially since you see the swerve coming. Only after the truth is out begins the true drama - featuring the staging of a drama, no less - and this is done with sensitivity and empathy, an ode to those who feel like others.

There is much self-awareness on display. The first song is the frequently remixed and overplayed Gur Nalon Ishq Mitha, and it's a smart move to show a



family letting their hair down to a song they - and we - would know. When Sahil casts a play with the Moga residents, he asks Balbir to play Sweetie's father, justifying it as a "real father-daughter connection." The film itself adheres strictly to Hindi film tropes, from longing glimpses between Anil and the ever-entertaining Juhi Chawla, right down to a Babuji-Simran 'go for it' endorsement straight out of Dilwale Dulhania Le Jaayenge. Anil Kapoor is in top form as the father challenged by extreme unfamiliarity, clearly marking his plight and his pain. He is never the cruel-dad cliché of yore, but finds his daughter's lesbianism hard to swallow - which may be

the reason he keeps drinking water. The dependable Rajkummar Rao is suitably over-the-top as the 'filmi' writer trying to be arty (and failing), both as person and artist. Juhi Chawla, playing an enthusiastic and talentless actress - a proud graduate of the plausibly named 'Amarinder Singh School Of Acting And Emotion' - is wonderfully warm. Sonam Kapoor brings anguish to the lead role of Sweetie, but there isn't much personality to the part - we never get to see what she's like, or even what she likes. Then again, this could be an attempt to universalise the character so people can identify more readily with this simple, sad girl.

Mary Queen of Scots movie review:**Margot Robbie, Saoirse Ronan star in a bloodless Game of Thrones**

Mary Queen of Scots

Director - Josie Rourke

Cast - Saoirse Ronan, Margot Robbie, Joe Alwyn, Jack Lowden, David Tennant, Guy Pearce

Rating - 2.5/5

Mary Queen of Scots is a handsome film, dressed to the nines in distracting costumes, which, once removed reveal a rather skeletal screenplay. Written by Beau Willimon - the master political dramatist behind The Ides of March and more popularly, House of Cards - the script makes the ill-advised decision to pit two prominent historical figures - both women - against each other, only to wag a disapproving finger at the audience for enjoying watching them squabble.

Saoirse Ronan and Margot Robbie play royal cousins, who find themselves in a battle of wits, deviousness, and power

against each other over the throne. Ronan plays Mary, the Catholic queen of Scotland, ideologically and religiously opposed to Robbie's Protestant Queen Elizabeth I of England.

The film would like for them to be seen as independently despicable characters, although even in villainy, they require cunning men to pull their strings. This is quite the opposite of how The Favourite, a remarkably similar film - both in setting and style - chooses to portray its women.

The historical liberties taken by Mary Queen of Scots have already been discussed, and (rightly) criticised. But as someone with next to no knowledge about Scottish history - my education is largely restricted to the famously fraudulent Braveheart - I can say that being armed with information can only make the experience

worse.

Because then, not only will you complain about the ridiculous drama, you will also exclaim in disbelief when the film suggests that the fate of England and Scotland was determined by a selfless act of cunnilingus. Even with my rudimentary knowledge, I can say that it wasn't.

Mary Queen of Scots has been described by debutante director Josie Rourke as 'a Renaissance version of Heat' - a description as broad as Willimon's feminism. Certainly, after keeping its two central characters apart for close to two hours, it ends with a verbal showdown that livens things up considerably. The scene catches Ronan and Robbie in top form, deftly one-upping each other - nowhere near as thrilling as Al Pacino and Robert De Niro's meetings in Heat, though - aided by the film's already excellent technical departments.



So when Ronan utters the resounding (and objectively inaccurate) words - "should you murder me, remember you murder your sister... and you murder your queen." - cinematographer John Mathieson's pillowy lighting accentuates the stunning makeup on her face, while composer Max Richter's violin adds to the emotional cacophony of the confrontation. But despite what Rourke says,

her film isn't the two-hander that Heat was. Robbie is restricted to a supporting role as the broadly villainous Elizabeth I, who does precious little other than pace about in her musty rooms and in one ghastly scene, survive small pox. Her character is more of a wildcard, unfortunately reminiscent - both visually and in the pitch of her performance - of Helena Bonham Carter's insane Red Queen from Tim Burton's Alice in Wonderland.

Kapil Sharma hosts third wedding reception in Delhi

Actor-host Kapil Sharma, who tied the knot with Ginni Chatrath in December, hosted a third wedding reception in Delhi. After the multiple receptions that followed Priyanka Chopra-Nick Jonas's Jodhpur wedding and Deepika Padukone-Ranveer Singh's Italy wedding, it is now the turn of Kapil Sharma, who hosted his third wedding reception on Saturday, this time in Delhi. The comedian shared a picture with wife Ginni Chatrath ahead of the party and captioned it, "Celebrations are unstoppable.. need ur blessings #love #blessings #family #friends#delhi #reception #celebrations#gratitude @ginnichatrath." Decked up in a navy blue achkan, Kapil twinned with wife Ginni, who dazzled in an embroidered anarkali. Videos and pictures from the reception show Kapil getting into the party mood by playing the drums, as singer



Mika sings the party number Subah Hone Na De. Another video shows him shaking a leg with actor Sohail Khan. Among the other guests who attended the lavish gala were cricketer Suresh Raina with wife Priyanka, and the Ambassador Of

France To India, Alexandre Ziegler. An invite for the party had surfaced on the internet a few days ago. The actor had tied the knot in twin ceremonies as per Hindu and Sikh traditions on December 12 in Jalandhar. This was followed by a

wedding reception in Amritsar on December 14 which had several popular Punjabi singers and actors in attendance. He then went on to host a lavish reception in Mumbai on December 24 for the film fraternity. Everyone from Deepika,

Ranveer, Anil Kapoor, Karan Johar to Rekha had attended the star-studded party. On the work front, Kapil is currently hosting the second season of The Kapil Sharma Show. The Simmba team of Ranveer, Sara Ali Khan and director Rohit Shetty appeared on the season's first episode. Salman Khan, who is also the producer of the show, arrived next and was accompanied by father Salim Khan and brothers Arbaaz Khan and Sohail Khan. In an interview to Hindustan Times ahead of his wedding, Kapil had said, "We had decided that we would get married but due to my hectic schedule, we couldn't lock a date. My mum stays in Amritsar and worries about me. Now that I am getting married, I think it was destined. I feel marriage is an essential part in our lives as it brings stability. Then the next phase is parenthood, which is another important step in a person's life."

Shilpa Shetty, Shamita Shetty goof around in swimsuits in new video from Thailand vacation

Actor Shilpa Shetty shared a video showing her and sister Shamita Shetty goofing around in the pool in stylish swimwear.

Actors Shilpa and Shamita Shetty were recently in Phuket, where the latter celebrated her 40th birthday. Shamita flew off with her friends and family to the scenic destination and spent her birthday swimming and basking in the Thailand sun. Continuing the generous flow of their beach pictures and videos from the vacation, Shilpa shared a new video on Instagram with Shamita. The siblings are seen goofing around in the pool in stylish swimwear. She captioned it, "Be a mermaid and make waves @shamitashetty_official .. This one way to make the pool hot #birthdaygoals #sistersquad#sisterlove #waterbabies#soakingupthesun #love #gratitude#phuketdiaries." She had also shared a video of the



birthday girl with a sweet message, and jokingly called it her 18th birthday. Shamita can be seen lighting a lamp before letting it off in the sky in the video that went with the caption, "Now that you are finally 18 u can go and vote.. but in the meanwhile I vote u the best sister in the world.. Happy

Birthday @shamitashetty_official ,my crazy, fun , hottie and magnificent #tunki may your spirit be full of fire and you light up all our lives with your brilliance. Wishing all your dreams to manifest cause u deserve it and more Shine on my #shamster #birthday #birthdaygirl #sistersquad#sis #love #friends #phuketdiaries#memories". Shamita had also shared candid pictures of the entire group a day before her birthday. All of them could be seen sporting white T-shirts with Shamita's picture printed on it with the caption 'SHAMSTERS'. A friend also shared a video showing the women practising yoga by the pool side. Shilpa is currently a judge on dance reality show Super Dancer Chapter 3 along with choreographer Geeta Kapur and Anurag Basu.



Shatrughan Sinha says he's fortunate he hasn't been named in the MeToo movement, despite everything he's done



Veteran actor-politician Shatrughan Sinha on Wednesday said behind a successful man's fall is a woman but clarified that he was not making fun of the #MeToo movement and his comments should be taken in the "right humour". "Today is the time of #MeToo, and there shouldn't be any shame or hesitation to say that behind a successful man's fall is a woman. Behind the troubles and infamy of successful men, there have been mostly women that I've seen in this movement," he said at the launch of the book A Touch of Evil by author Dhruv Somani. "I really call myself fortunate that in today's times, tamam harkate karne kay bawajood (despite everything that I've done), my name hasn't come out in the #MeToo movement. Hence, I listen to my wife and often take her as a shield with me so that even if there's nothing, I can show, 'I am happily married, my life is good.'" Sinha said his wife, Poonam, is a "goddess" and his "everything". "Even if anyone wants to say anything about me, please don't say," he added. The #MeToo movement hit Bollywood last year and saw several women coming out with their horror stories of sexual harassment and rape by actors and filmmakers from the industry. When asked whether he was making fun of the movement, Sinha backtracked and said his statement should be taken in "right humour". "Don't take it otherwise. Please take it with a plain sense of humour. I highly appreciate and applaud the women, who, better late than never, have come forward... I salute their courage and guts."

Love Island star Katie Salmon shows off her enviable curves in tiny yellow bikini

As she holidays in Cape Verde with friend India Jennings

Fans are used to seeing the beauty in a bikini after she soared to fame on Love Island. And Katie Salmon, 22, ensured all her assets were in view as she posed on the beach in Cape Verde as she holidays with her pal India Jennings. Proving that the girls are enjoying their girlie getaway under the African sun the duo put on a sizzling display over the weekend. Katie showed off her fabulous hour-glass figure in a canary yellow triangle bikini top paired with matching thong bottoms that flaunted her toned physique. Glowing, the reality TV personality arched her back and

popped her hip to showcase her pert bottom and washboard stomach. The beauty kept her long raven locks braided and shaded the sun from her eyes with aviator style sunglasses. India, looked every inch of a beach babe in a black swimsuit that featured a cut out detail on the midriff and a high leg design that grazed up her posterior - highlighting her peachy bottom. The friends playfully tugged at their swimwear as they posed by the sea for snaps. Katie is certainly no stranger to causing a stir after her Love Island 2016 appearance.



She is best known to viewers of the ITV2 show for pairing up with the late Sophie Gradon on the reality dating series. Sophie was originally partnered with Tom Powell but later coupled up with Katie after he quit the show. However, Sophie later dumped Katie and bowed out of the show to be with Tom again, leading Katie to pair off with Adam Maxted. Their romance was short-lived, lasting just two weeks after the series drew to a close. Katie opened up about the abuse she received from the LGBT community, following her same-sex romance with late Love Island star Sophie. Speaking on the Victoria Derbyshire programme in September, Katie admitted she was the subject of much uproar after her relationship with Sophie, who was tragically found dead in June aged just 32. She said: 'In the villa I was so scared because I didn't know what the outside world was thinking, what my family was thinking, what my friends were thinking, so I was really upset that they'd not supported me from my own community.'



Cardi B steals the show with a risque pink leather ensemble and rainbow hair as she leads stars at Bud Light Super Bowl Music Fest



She turned down the chance to perform at the Super Bowl Half Time Show with Maroon 5. But Cardi B still turned heads on Saturday when she arrived at day three of the Bud Light Super Bowl Music Fest in Georgia, Atlanta. The 26-year-old beauty was unmissable in a skimpy pink ensemble complete with a rainbow wig. Cardi stunned in a pink leather outfit that had a belted bra and matching hot pants to keep her modest. On top of the buckle bra was a matching jacket with bedazzled diamonds and a fringe. The new mom flaunted her incredible post-baby body with her stomach on show and added a pair of fishnet stockings. Cardi added to her 5'3" stature with a pair of hot pink heeled sock boots. The I Like It singer completed her stellar look with a long rainbow

wig that reached to the bottom of her hot pants. Her glam featured a contoured cheeks With a bold smokey eye that too featured various colors. Her husband Russel Wilson's team the Seattle Seahawks may not have made it to Super Bowl LIII, but Ciara and her man still stepped out to party on Saturday. The Level Up singer kept things casual in a statement T-shirt underneath an oversized black fur coat. She teamed the look with black drop pants that drew attention to her long and lean legs. Ciara's glam was kept simple with blushed cheeks and a nude lip. She styled her long her out and straight. Russel matched his wife in a black ensemble with layers of various shirts. Ashanti also joined in on the fun in a killer risque frock on Saturday night.



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