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Panth And A Foreign Hand

A new real threat of Khalistani -terror, fuelled and funded by foreign gurudwaras patronised by liberal white politicians, has revived memories of a blood-drenched era of Punjab's history

**Canadian
Parliamentarian
refers to Punjab
as a 'country'**

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Finance Ministry Has No Information About Vijay Mallya's Loans

The CIC during a hearing on the matter pulled up the ministry with a strong remark saying the ministry's response was "vague and not sustainable as per law".



(By Our Staff Reporter) New Delhi The Central Information Commission (CIC) has pulled up the union finance ministry for saying that it has no information about industrialist Vijay Mallya's loans. (Contd on page 23)

Fractured Auction of Sahara Aamby Valley Allowed

(News Agencies) New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday allowed fractured auction of Sahara's Aamby Valley property after two attempts for international auction of the entire asset at one go failed and asked court-appointed liquidator and receiver of the property to complete the task within two months.

A bench of chief justice Dipak Misra and Justices Ranjan Gogoi and A K Sikri allowed (Contd on page 24)



Owner Of Information Technology Companies Admits Visa Fraud And Tax Crimes

(By Our Staff Reporter) NEWARK, N.J. – An owner of two IT staffing and consulting companies today admitted using phony documents to fraudulently obtain H1-B visas for foreign workers and submitting false tax returns, U.S. Attorney Craig Carpenito announced. Sowrabh Sharma, 33, of New York, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Kevin McNulty in Newark federal court to a superseding information charging him with conspiracy to commit visa fraud and subscribing to false tax returns.

"For years, Sharma and others working at SCM Data and MMC systems lied about hiring full-time foreign workers in order to secure H1-B visas," U.S. Attorney Carpenito said. "In reality and contrary to immigration laws, these workers were often 'benched' without pay while the companies created false documents to cover-up the scheme. This investigation, which has resulted in the conviction of an owner and several employees, including an

immigration attorney, shows that businesses that use the H1-B visa program better do so with the utmost adherence to this nation's immigration and labor laws."

"This conviction shows that even those with powerful business interests are not immune from HSI's long and expert investigative reach when it comes to visa fraud and worker exploitation," said Michael McCarthy, Acting Special Agent in charge of HSI Newark. "Such activities not only have a negative impact on the U.S. economy, but are harmful to the overall work environment of companies and individuals."

"Sowrabh Sharma misused the H-1B program in order to enrich himself at the expense of the foreign workers he sponsored for H-1B visas. His company submitted false documents to the Departments of Labor and Homeland Security in order to perpetrate this fraud. The U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General will continue to work with Homeland Security

Investigations and our other law enforcement partners to vigorously pursue those who commit fraud involving the foreign labor certification programs which are jointly administered by the Departments of Labor, Homeland Security and State," stated Peter Nozka, Acting Special Agent-in-Charge, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General New York Region.

According to the documents filed in this case and statements made in court:

SCM Data Inc. and MMC Systems Inc. offered consultants to clients in need of IT support. Both companies recruited foreign nationals with purported IT expertise, often student visa holders or recent college graduates, and sponsored them for H-1B visas with the stated purpose of working for SCM Data and MMC Systems' clients throughout the United States.

Sharma admitted today that from 2010 through April 2015, he and others falsely represented to U.S. Department of Homeland

Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigrations Services (USCIS) that dozens of foreign workers had full-time "in-house" positions, and would be paid an annual salary, as required to secure the visas. However, Sharma and his companies only paid the foreign workers when they were placed at a third-party client, or a company that entered into a contract for services with SCM Data and MMC Systems.

Sharma also admitted that in some instances, foreign workers who were "benched" between projects and not working were told that if they wanted to maintain their H-1B visa status, they would need to come up with what their gross wages would be in cash and give it to SCM Data and MMC Systems to generate phony payroll checks.

In addition, Sharma also admitted that he intentionally overstated and claimed false expenses pertaining to SCM Data and MMC Systems on his individual tax returns for 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014, resulting in a tax loss to the United States

of approximately \$1,114,824.

Sharma faces a maximum potential penalty of five years in prison on the visa fraud conspiracy count and three years in prison on the tax fraud count. Both charges carry a maximum \$250,000 fine. His sentencing is scheduled for May 30, 2018. U.S. Attorney Carpenito credited special agents of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Newark Field Office, under the direction of Acting Special Agent in Charge Michael McCarthy, the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Acting Special Agent in Charge Peter Nozka in New York, and IRS – Criminal Investigation, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Jonathan D. Larsen in Newark, with the investigation. The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Joyce M. Malliet and Francisco J. Navarro of the U.S. Attorney's Office's National Security Unit in Newark.

Trump picks Warren ally, former CFPB assistant director Rohit Chopra for FTC post

Also served as senior adviser at Department of Education in Obama administration



(By Our Staff Reporter) Chopra's selection comes as bit of surprise, considering that Chopra is a close ally of Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., a former member of Hillary Clinton's transition team, a former Obama administration official, and a former assistant director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

But due to FTC rules, some bipartisanship is necessary among the FTC Commissioners.

The FTC is lead by five commissioners, which are

nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate. Each commissioner serves a seven-year term, and no more than three commissioners can come from the same political party.

There are currently two FTC commissioners – Acting Chairman Maureen Ohlhausen and Terrell McSweeney. Ohlhausen took over as FTC chair when Edith Ramirez resigned in February.

According to an announcement from the White House, if confirmed, Chopra

would serve the remainder of a term that expires on Sept. 25, 2019.

Chopra is currently a Senior Fellow at the Consumer Federation of America, where he focuses on consumer protection issues facing young people and military families, according to the bio provided by the White House.

Chopra worked at the CFPB from 2010-2015 as an assistant director, where he focused on student debt. Chopra also served as student loan ombudsman at the CFPB during his time with the bureau.

It was during that time that Chopra was particularly outspoken about the impact of student loan debt on the first-time homebuyer.

In October 2013, Chopra said, "We are already seeing signs of economic drag from student loan debt. The impact on the housing market is the most troubling part."

Chopra has also been closely associated with Warren, the driving force behind the founding of the CFPB.

Two years ago, Warren

reportedly lobbied New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and others in his office in an attempt to see Chopra named as the superintendent of the New York Department of Financial Services, New York's top financial regulator.

While Cuomo was in the process of selecting a replacement for Ben Lawsky as NYDFS superintendent, Warren spoke out in favor of Chopra getting the job.

"I've had a chance to work closely with Rohit Chopra at the new consumer agency and over the time since," Warren posted on Facebook in June 2015. "He is smart as a whip, independent, hard-working, and loaded with integrity. The New York banking superintendent is an important overseer of Wall Street, and I think Rohit would be phenomenal in that role." Ultimately, Cuomo named Maria Vullo, a former staffer of Cuomo's who served as Executive Deputy Attorney General for Economic Justice when Cuomo was the New York State Attorney General, as the NYDFS superintendent.

Chopra instead joined the Department of Education as a senior adviser during the Obama administration, before leaving to serve as Senior Fellow at the Consumer Federation of America. Now, he could be moving to the FTC, pending Senate approval, of course. Trump also picked Joseph Simons, who is currently a partner and co-chair of the Antitrust Group at the law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, to serve as FTC chair. Simons previously served at the FTC under President George W. Bush. During his first tour at the FTC, Simons was in charge of antitrust enforcement, serving as Director of the Bureau of Competition from 2001 to 2003.

If approved by the Senate, Simons would serve a seven-year term beginning Sept. 26, 2017. Both Chopra and Simons would join the FTC at a time when the agency is investigating the massive data breach at Equifax that exposed the personal information of 145.5 million U.S. consumers to hackers.

IALI - Women's Forum Event organized

(By Our Staff Reporter) IALI - Women's Forum had their 1st program on February 2nd in Mint restaurant. Women's Forum chair, Veena Lamba, her co-Chairs - Lalita Mansukhani and Shalini Pawa, committee members - Rachna Shahdarpuri, Riz Malik and Ravi Kanta Verma were all present. The 2018 IALI President Gunjan Rastogi was also there along with Events Advisor, Jyoti Gupta, Media Chair Indu Gajwani and Meditation co-chair Sujata Seth. It was well attended by 42

ladies, who come to meet their friends and relatives enjoy shopping and eat good food. Mint's lunch and service was exquisite.

All the ladies participated in playing Bingo and lots of prizes were given. Another good game was Antakshri, in which 2 groups were formed and the ladies enjoyed singing. Meenu Kumar had lovely stuff and ladies enjoyed shopping. Special thanks to events Advisor Jyoti Gupta for handling the music system and Dolly Nanda for taking wonderful pictures.



Founder of Chicago firm charged in crackdown on futures 'spoofing'

(By Our Staff Reporter) The founder of a Chicago technology consulting firm was among eight people and three multinational banks charged Monday by federal authorities with committing commodities fraud through so-called spoofing trades.

Federal officials said Jitesh Thakkar, founder of Loop-based Edge Financial Technologies, was arrested Monday in Illinois.

In a criminal complaint, Thakkar, 41, of Naperville, is accused of developing a software program that helped an unnamed commodities trader engage in "spoofing," placing thousands of bids or offers on the E-mini S&P, a market on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, with the

intent of canceling the trades before they were executed, but after bids were placed on the other side of the market. Thakkar was not immediately available for comment.

The Commodity Futures Trading Commission also filed suit in federal court in Chicago against Thakkar and many of the others accused of spoofing fraud.

Also Monday, regulators and the Justice Department said they settled spoofing allegations against UBS, HSBC and Deutsche Bank. Deutsche Bank will pay a \$30 million penalty; UBS, \$15 million and HSBC, \$1.6 million. Criminal charges also were filed in federal court in Chicago against James Vorley,

37, of the United Kingdom, and Cedric Chanu, 39, a French citizen, who are accused of placing orders for gold, silver, platinum or palladium futures contracts on the futures exchange owned by the CME Group. Edward Bases, 55, and John Pacilio, 53, both of Connecticut and based in New York City, were charged in a criminal complaint with commodities fraud.

Jiongsheng Zhao, 30, of Australia, was charged in a criminal complaint with wire fraud, commodities fraud, making false statements to the CME and spoofing in the e-Mini S&P 500 futures contract market on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange



from 2012 thru 2016. Similar charges were filed against two other men. Krishna Mohan, 33, of New York City, was charged in a criminal complaint in federal court in Texas in connection with activities while he worked at an unnamed proprietary trading firm in Chicago. Charges in Connecticut against Andre Flotron, 53, of Switzerland, were related to his role as a UBS precious metals trader. On a call with reporters Monday, federal regulators vowed to aggressively pursue those who engage in spoofing, which they described as "an emerging fraud trend," said Chris Hacker, deputy assistant director of the FBI's criminal investigative division, which assisted with the cases.

International Customs Day '2018 Celebrated



(By Our Staff Reporter) Mumbai Customs celebrated International Customs Day '2018 with great zeal and enthusiasm on January 27, 2018. The formal function was organised at Y.B Chavan Centre, Nariman Point, Mumbai at 10.00 AM. Shri Chennamaneni Vidyasagar Rao, Honourable Governor of Maharashtra was the chief guest on the occasion. Maharashtra Minister for Housing Shri Prakash Mehta, Flag officer Commanding in chief Western Naval Command Vice Admiral Girish Luthra and Ms. Zia Mody, Founder & Managing Partner ABZ & Partners were the other guest who graced the occasion. Senior officers of the department Shri Rajeev Tandon, Chief Commissioner of Customs Zone-I, Shri Vivek Johri, Chief Commissioner of Customs, zone-II and

Shri Amrit Pal Suri, Chief Commissioner of Customs, Mumbai Zone-III were also present on the Dias along with the guests. This year the World Customs Organization (WCO) theme was "Security of the Business Environment". Shri Rajeev Tandon, Chief Commissioner of Customs, Zone-I, Mumbai, welcomed the Chief Guest and the other Guests present on the dais and also gave introductory speech on the subject. Thereafter Vice Admiral Shri Girish Luthra and Zia Mody gave his speech on the topic "Security of the Business Environment". Shri Chennamaneni Vidyasagar Rao, Honourable Governor of Maharashtra lauds the Customs department for its role in preventing smuggling, contraband goods and fake currency entering the country. He also

hailed the department in generating revenue, in nation building and making Indian economy safe and secure. He also laid emphasis in improving infrastructure and simplification of procedure by the customs department. Serving and retired officers and staff were also facilitated by the Honourable Governor. Among the special awardees Shri Bharat Gade, Superintendent of Customs, New Custom House, Mumbai who have been conferred the President's award for the year '2018 for his outstanding contribution to the Customs Department was felicitated by Honourable Governor of Maharashtra on the occasion. Mumbai Customs Coffee Table Book was also released by Honourable Governor of Maharashtra on this occasion.

Further, the cultural programme was

organised in the evening at Shanmukhanand Hall, Sion, Mumbai. In this event, several prominent personalities including Bollywood stars "Shahrukh Khan, Ranveer Singh, Karan Johar, Ranveer Kapoor, Ritesh Deshmukh, Alia Bhatt, Anushaka Sharma, Sushmita Sen, Annu Malik, Annu Kapoor, Bappi Lahari were present and enthralled the crowd. GST song which was sung by Smt. Amruta Devendra Fadnavis was also launched on the occasion. Music CD for the same was inaugurated by Smt. Amruta Devendra Fadnavis, Shahrukh Khan, Shri Rajeev Tandon, Chief Commissioner of Customs Zone-I, Mumbai, Shri Vivek Johri, Chief Commissioner of Customs, zone-II, Mumbai and Shri Amrit Pal Suri, Chief Commissioner of Customs, Zone-III, Mumbai on the occasion.

New York Publisher Gets Vishwa Gujarati Samaj Award



(By a staff reporter) Indian-American physician, philanthropist and publisher, Padma Shri Dr. Sudhir M. Parikh of Parikh Worldwide Media, LLC, was honored with the Vishwa Gujarati Samaj's top award for a non-resident Indian Feb. 1, in Ahmedabad.

Gujarat Governor O. P. Kohli presented the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Vishwa Pratibha International Personality Award 2017 to Dr. Parikh on behalf of the Vishwa Gujarati Samaj (VGS), at a ceremony held in the Gujarat Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and attended by more than 300 people from the business world, professionals, academia, and government, as well as leading Gujaratis from United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany.

The Governor also awarded VGS's Kanjibhai Desai Gujarat Pratibha Award 2017 to Dr. Ashok Vaidya, a Mumbai-

based physician engaged in research popularizing Ayurveda and other systems of medicine.

Besides the citation, a memento and shawl, the award to Dr. Parikh included a check of Rupees 250,000, which Dr. Parikh donated to the Vishwa Gujarati Samaj for its children and women's empowerment projects.

Congratulating the award winners, Gov. Kolhi praised them for their social work and dedication to uplifting the poor. He exhorted those present to not only to help their children get a higher education but teach them to use their talent in the interest of society at large and repay the debt to the nation.

Krishnakant Vakharia, president of the Vishwa Gujarati Samaj, in welcoming the Governor and others, outlined the VGS's social welfare and other activities. Dr. Parikh expressed his gratitude and



said he was proud to be in the company of the likes of other non-resident Indians like U.S. astronaut Sunita Williams, and Chicago businessman Sam Pitroda, Raj Mohan Gandhi, and others, in receiving the award. Parikh, who has received the Padma Shri as well as the Pravasi Bhartiya Sanman, said that besides his chain of newspapers he recently launched the think tank, Parikh Foundation for India's Global Development, aimed at discussing and spreading awareness about India's emerging global role, and relations with the U.S. and other countries. He also disclosed that he will soon launch a new television news and entertainment channel in the U.S. Dr. Vaidya, in his speech, dwelt on spiritual development being an intrinsic part of any development work, and Gujarat with its historical links to leaders like Mahatma

Gandhi and Dayanand Saraswati who were born in Gujarat.

"He has done a lot of services not only for the Gujarati community but humanity at large," Vakharia, president of the VGS, told Desi Talk. "He helped at the time of the earthquake, the tsunami, and he has done humanitarian work in other countries," Vakharia added. He also credited Dr. Parikh for furthering U.S.-India relations. "In our view, the United States is the only great power now, and that relationship is very important for any country," Vakharia said. Some other noted guests who attended the ceremony included Krishna Pujara, leader of the National Congress of Gujarati Organizations in the U.K., and eminent architects Hemant Naik and Kalpana Naik from Brisbane, Australia. Himanshu Patel, representative of the Germany Gujarati Samaj, also attended.

'Own Your Health, Change Your Destiny' Offers Powerful Advice for People who Want to Take Back Their Health

Rita Panahi, L.Ac., Dipl. O.M, offers to-the-point book designed to help readers improve their long-term quality of life

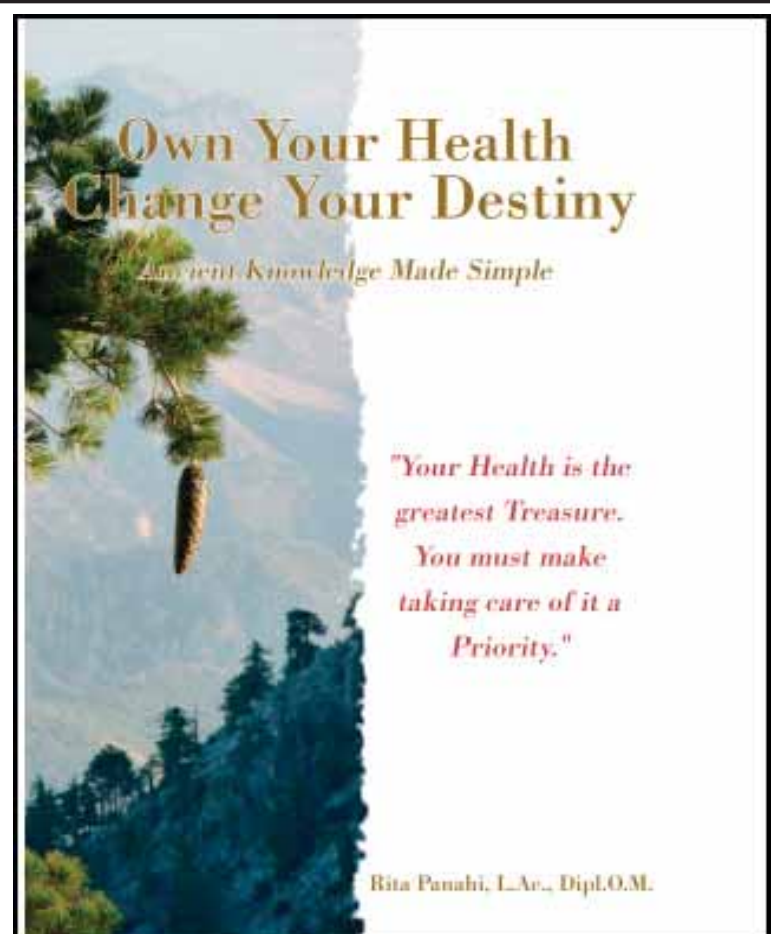
(By Our Staff Reporter) Rita Panahi, L.Ac., Dipl. O.M., has announced the release of her brand new book on the market. Own Your Health, Change Your Destiny: Ancient Knowledge Made Simple offers concise steps, in a simple format, based on ancient knowledge that forms the foundation for anyone who wants to be healthier and lose weight as an added bonus. Rita Panahi is a licensed acupuncturist and Chinese Medicine expert who has trained with renowned masters. She also holds a Masters in Chinese Medicine with more than 3400 hours of pre and post-Masters training. She has compiled her vast knowledge and experience to deliver the powerful tips and strategies found within Own Your Health, Change Your Destiny: Ancient Knowledge Made Simple. "Don't wait until you fall ill to take care of your health. Start with one step. Just one step from this book can improve your health for the better. Without your health, the quality of your life would be lost," says Panahi. She goes on

to comment, "Have long term visions for your health, not just short term. Understand consequences." She has used this information to transform her own life as well as the life of her patients. Chapters in the new book

Book Review

offer lesser-known information about the ideal temperature of beverages, the best time to drink water, fake energy versus real energy, simple powerful cleansing steps, meditation, sleep, and how stress is the root of disease. Her fresh perspective, in tandem with the book's relatively low density of just 80 pages, makes Own Your Health, Change Your Destiny: Ancient Knowledge Made Simple a refreshing reminder of the importance of self-care while offering effective tips for increasing overall well-being for the long-term. It's a small price to pay for the priceless value of the information contained

within it that can change and improve your life. "What people are saying about 'Own Your Health Change Your Destiny': 'Love that it is short and easy to read – it is the perfect book to go back and re-read as you start your health journey or even if you are healthy to be reminded of amazing healthy tips to live your best life!' RC "Great but simple advise. This book is a treasure." RR "Great tips on how to improve the way you feel! Change always feels daunting, but Rita Panahi makes just a few simple suggestions to improve the way you feel internally and externally. Excellent read to jump start your new year! I have already implemented some of her ideas about purchasing more organic foods items, how I am treating my body, and how I am treating my surrounding. I recommend this quick read to anyone who needs a reminder of how just a nudge in the right direction can make a powerful impact in your well being."



Bigotry And Islamophobia In Bhansali's "Padmaavat"

By Rana Ayyub

Sanjay Leela Bhansali's highly controversial historical drama "Padmaavat" was released a day before the unfortunate Kasganj incident when the country was celebrating Republic Day. A vicious narrative of nationalism in the small town in Uttar Pradesh resulted in a communal feud and led to the death of a young man.

I saw "Padmaavat" early last week and missed the first five minutes of the film which include a disclaimer that the film has nothing to do with historical correctness. Seated next to me in the theatre in Navi Mumbai was an elderly couple. The husband dressed in a kurta-pyjama, waistcoat, mojdi attire helped me understand the immediate implication of an allegedly historic film.

The film begins with Raza Murad as Jalaluddin Khilji with a flowing red beard, tearing into a big chunk of flesh, followed by his savage nephew, Alauddin Khilji, a kohl-eyed, debauched caricature of a Muslim prince. Alauddin has sex with a girl just before his nikaah with Mehrunnisa and treats his wife like a slave on their wedding night.

In the sequence right after, we are introduced to Raja Ratan Singh who is enamoured by the beauty and bravery of Padmavati, marries her without seeking the consent of his first wife, and introduces her as the maharani of the kingdom while his first wife fades away, thoroughly eclipsed by the glamour of the new queen. But Ratan Singh, being a Rajput, is allowed to enter your consciousness as the righteous, and

Alauddin Khilji as the morally damned.

The moral corruption of Khilji continues with unsubtle references to his homosexual relationship with his slave Malik Kafur who pines for the attention of his king. If homosexuality is frowned upon in the Bhansali scheme of things, it is an attribute attached to Muslim rulers who by now are established as depraved, unscrupulous, two-faced opportunists. Each time Khilji backstabs or attacks a Rajput, you are not allowed to miss the symbolism. He does this while the green flag with the star and crescent is displayed boldly on the screen during the attacks on the sovereignty of the righteous nationalists. Present day Kasganj is pitching for a similar narrative.

Further on, just before Khilji kills his own nephew, his slave and confidant is seen reciting aayats from the Quran. Namaz can be heard in the background of Padmavati's entry into Khilji's kingdom where he plans to betray and conquer her. When Khilji deceives Ratan Singh and stabs him in the back, a pattern that runs through the film, the uncle sitting next to me tells his wife, "Aise hi toh hotay the ye sab mulla, hamesha peeche se maarte the sab Mughal log (Muslims have always been backstabbers)".

The theme of a debauched Dilli sultanate runs through Bhansali's narration of Mughal rulers. In his previous outing, "Bajirao Mastani", the nizams and Dilli Darbaar are the bearded kohl-eyed brutes who attack the nationalist Peshwas to have absolute control over

the country.

While "Padmaavat" bears no pretence of being a faithful account of events in history or even the fictional account of the poem it claims to be based on, it is disturbing to see Bhansali's account of Amir Khusrau, the 14th-century mystic, historian and poet. Amir Khusrau is one of the pillars of Sufi Islam and Persian literature, also referred to as "Tuti-i-Hind" (Singing Bird of India). His poems and literary work which talk of the Brahmins of Somnath and Hajis at Mecca in the same breath are a metaphor to the secular idea of India. Yet Khusrau is reduced to being another court jester in "Padmaavat", a yes-man to the savagery of Alauddin Khilji.

Bhansali has the cinematic liberty of giving a historical film a spin of its own. Mainstream and popular cinema cannot afford caveats to historical narratives. It is his democratic right to be able to express his point of view and it is our moral responsibility as a country to oppose the vandalism and terror unleashed by the hooligans of Karni Sena on him and the rest of the country. But here lies the irony. Bhansali published a page-long advert to pacify the Rajput community and convince them that the film was a paeon to Rajput valor. He has been bending over backwards, requesting the Karni Sena to watch his film and give it a certificate of approval, going on to change the title of his film to ensure no sentiments are hurt. But

does portrayal of Rajput valor demand vilification of another community?

In India, as in democracies around the globe, mainstream cinema has been a powerful tool that shapes public opinion and narrative. In a communally sensitive atmosphere in the country where lynchings and murders in the name of religion are becoming a norm, Bhansali has strengthened the stereotype of the evil, diabolic, murderous Muslim, a trope that forms the basis of right-wing hate of minorities. The calls for demolition of the Taj Mahal or disparaging comments about the iconic monument by leaders of the BJP has been an extension of this narrative that chooses to see the Taj Mahal as a Muslim monument built by the Mughals.

Bhansali can indulge the exaggerated idea of Rajput bravado but should that necessitate vilifying a community that increasingly finds itself powerless in the present polarizing narrative? Beneath the grandiosity and stunning frames of "Padmaavat" lies a disturbing attempt at selling dangerous stereotypes that might yield immediate favors for Bhansali but leaves a disturbing impression of a community on a generation that seeks great inspiration from popular cinema.

Bhansali was awarded the Padma Shri in 2015. With greater fame and honour comes greater accountability, if not to the truth, then to the idea of a country whose founding principle was based on fairness and the absence of bias for the less privileged.

Questioning The Budget Does Not Make Me Anti-National

By Derek O'Brien

In many ways, the Economic Surveys of the NDA government have tended to be more honest documents than Budget speeches, especially with the sleight-of-hand of budgetary and economic figures.

Take agriculture and the impact of climate change. The Economic Survey, released at the end of January, had a stark message: "Climate change can dent farm incomes by as much as 25 per cent in rain-fed areas over the medium term." The implication was clear. A vast majority of India's people are employed in agriculture. It is important for our food security, our economy and our social stability. As such, fighting climate change and investing in climate change mitigation efforts is a national imperative. It has to be more than a set of slogans and alliterations, whether in English or Hindi. And in real terms it boils down to a single, five-letter word: water.

It was expected - or logical to expect - that the Budget would respond to these concerns. What did it do? It devoted some attention to how farmers access water. The core irrigation scheme for this is the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY), for which Rs. 9,429 crore has been allotted.

This is a 27.56 per cent increase when compared to the Revised Estimates of Budget 2017-18. That sounds impressive, I have to admit. But it also needs to be said that serious flaws and drawbacks of the Yojana have been ignored.

A prominent component of this scheme is called "Har Khet ko Paani" - water for every field. This component has been allocated 2,600 crores to develop groundwater irrigation in 96 districts. Now, read the fine print: 2,290 crores is meant to pay the interest of the Long Term Irrigation Fund. So that leaves a measly 310 crore for "Har Khet ko Paani" to develop irrigation infrastructure in 96 districts. That is a little over 3 crores per district! The research fees paid to interns who worked on the Economic Survey probably worked out to more.

That's not all. When launching PMKSY in 2015, the government had said that it would allocate 50,000 crores to the scheme over five years - or 10,000 crores a year. However, the Actual Estimate of 2016-17 - revealed in the 2018-19 budget documents - states that 5,133 crores was set aside in 2016-17. That was the first full year of the scheme. Now, for 2018-19, the third full year of the

scheme - and the fourth year overall - (the scheme was inaugurated in the middle of 2015-16), the allocation has gone up to 9,429 crores.

In not one of the four years has the target of 10,000 crores been reached. Not one. As a direct consequence of such dereliction, there has been even greater depletion of underground water. This has led to low productivity and smaller incomes for farmers even though the 2017 monsoon was above average. Who is responsible? Taking a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his promise of doubling farmers income in five years, Dr. Manmohan Singh said it is another election jumla with the government having no concrete plan to achieve the target. Manmohan Singh further said it was a hollow assurance as "To reach the kind of numbers they promised, India's agricultural growth needs to be in double digits estimated to be around 12%."

Climate change has an impact on agriculture but is, of course, a cross-cutting phenomenon. The Economic Survey warns of it. The World Economic Forum, in its Environmental Performance Index, rated India at 177 out of 180 countries and served another

warning. The Budget remains impassive. Allocation for the Climate Change Action Plan or the National Adaptation Fund, which is under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, is unchanged.

It's not just money that's a problem. A big role in India's climate action plan is played by the coal cess. This cess, the Clean Energy Cess as it is called, contributes to the National Clean Energy Fund (NCEF).

According to a CAG report made public in December 2017, "Rs. 53,967.23 crore was collected as Clean Energy Cess during 2010-11 to 2016-17. Against this, only Rs. 15,483.21 crore had been transferred to the NCEF...resulting in short transfer of cess to the earmarked fund by Rs. 38,484.02." In other words, only a little over a third of the cess collection has been transferred to NCEF. Of what has been transferred, only half - just short of 7,000 crores - has actually been spent on projects.

Where is the rest of the money? Where is two-thirds of the coal cess? What has been done about the government's capacity to spend even what has been made available to NCEF?

Shh ... Don't ask such questions. It's anti-national.

Do You Think Donald Trump Is Ready for a Real Financial Crisis?

The global financial markets are not in crisis. Though some pundits stoked panic with their coverage of several days of market plunges before Tuesday's leap, stock prices are still near their record highs, the economy is creating jobs and many workers are finally getting decent raises after years of stagnant wages.

Which doesn't mean that there's nothing to worry about. In recent months, time after time, both the current administration and its allies in Congress have called into question their credibility and competence to manage the economy or handle a financial crisis if one were to occur. President Trump has repeatedly patted himself on the back for a surging stock market, seemingly unaware that stocks can go down, not just up. His Treasury Department in December released a one-page analysis that made outlandish economic assumptions to justify giant tax cuts for corporations and wealthy families. Republican lawmakers in Congress went even further, attacking the Congressional Budget Office and Congress's Joint Committee on Taxation, both nonpartisan, because those analysts had the temerity to warn that the tax law would add to the federal deficit.

Mr. Trump wants everyone to know that his election delivered a booster shot to the economy and stocks. "The reason our stock market is so successful is because of me," he told reporters in November. Truth is, the president was just lucky enough to have inherited a growing economy and a rising stock market. Though his tax cuts were an expensive gift to investors, he has not been in office long enough to have fundamentally changed that trajectory. But his erratic behavior and poor policy choices are clearly worrying the majority of Americans who disapprove of the president.

One reason some investors have become nervous recently is they fear that the tax cuts, which Mr. Trump and Republican lawmakers sold as a way to stimulate the economy, could end up hurting the economy in the not so distant future. The tax law and a push by the Trump administration to increase military spending will reduce federal revenue and force the Treasury to borrow more money when the economy is close to full employment. This could stoke inflation and prompt the Federal Reserve to tighten monetary policy. That, in turn, would slow the economy.

The prospect of a recession or financial crisis on Mr. Trump's watch is unnerving, because he is as confident in his own abilities as he is lacking in knowledge and sound judgment. When confronted with criticism, he lashes out like an intemperate child. On Monday, he said Democrats who did not applaud during his State of the Union address were un-American and treasonous. If the stock market falls further, will the president try to reassure the public, or will he launch a Twitter fusillade blaming the drop on, say, a conspiracy hatched by the Senate minority leader, Chuck Schumer, and Tom Steyer, the billionaire hedge fund manager who wants Mr. Trump impeached?

Many people would have been more sanguine about the Trump presidency had he surrounded himself with competent aides and advisers. Instead, he has stacked his administration with incompetent yes men, right-wing ideologues and Washington swamp dwellers. Consider the Treasury secretary, Steven Mnuchin, a former investment banker, who unnerved the currency market last month by suggesting that the United States was trying to weaken the dollar. His statement broke with the longstanding practice followed by Treasury secretaries from both parties to avoid making careless public pronouncements about American currency. Mr. Mnuchin and Gary Cohn, the White House's chief economic adviser, also debased their credibility last year by arguing with no evidence whatsoever that the Republican tax cut would pay for itself. Over in Congress, the Republican House speaker, Paul Ryan, tried to pass off as good economic news that a public school secretary would take home an extra \$1.50 a week as a result of the tax law. Then there is the harm wrought by the tax law. By greatly expanding the deficit, it will limit the federal government's ability to stimulate the economy in the future when it actually needs a jump-start. In many ways the tax law is already having a perverse effect. Mr. Ryan, for one, is citing the deficit to make the case that the government needs to slash Medicaid, Medicare and other important government programs. Other members of his party are using the deficits to argue that the government cannot afford to repair and upgrade the country's dilapidated infrastructure. A big drop in stock prices focuses minds, especially when it comes after years of relatively steady gains. But the real crisis is in Washington, not on Wall Street.

It's Time for an Immigration Enchilada

Immigration has been on the United States-Mexico agenda for years. In recent times, three American attempts at comprehensive immigration reform, which included amnesty for undocumented Mexicans in the United States and a temporary-worker visa program, have failed. A bilateral effort between 2001 and 2003 also collapsed.

Nothing affects Mexico more than United States immigration policy, and the centrality of the issue in American politics is more prominent than ever. The most urgent challenge is to find a way forward for the so-called Dreamers, the beneficiaries of President Barack Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. Nearly 800,000 young people brought to the United States by their parents as children applied for and were given protected status by the Obama administration. Thanks to DACA, they no longer needed to fear deportation, were able to work legally and had realistic hopes that one day they would be on a path to citizenship in the only country they knew. More than three-fourths of the Dreamers are Mexican. That's why people here follow their fate closely.

President Trump rescinded Mr. Obama's DACA policy. He has proposed a four-pillar overhaul of American immigration policy that most Democrats and Latinos in the United States detest. Strangely enough, however, it might benefit Mexico, especially if it is accompanied by additional changes in the issuance of temporary-worker visas, and in particular those known as H-2A and H-2B.

The first pillar of Mr. Trump's proposal — regularizing the status of the Dreamers and a million other young people who also could qualify for DACA status with a long and winding road to citizenship — works to Mexico's advantage. Somewhere near 1.5 million of these young people are Mexican; that is roughly one-quarter of all undocumented Mexican citizens in the United States. Granting them the equivalent of amnesty, with the beacon of eventual citizenship, satisfies one of Mexico's most crucial immigration demands.

The second pillar — \$25 billion for a border wall — is obviously offensive to Mexico, but the country's lame-duck president, Enrique Peña Nieto, has been much more adamant in his opposition to paying for the wall than to its actual construction. Mr. Peña Nieto either doesn't believe it will ever see the light of day or lacks the backbone to oppose it. But Mr. Trump's wall is something Mexico can simultaneously reject and live with, particularly if it will take years to build and if it merely complements segments of fences erected by Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama.

Mr. Trump's third pillar is the most insulting for many Americans, since it eliminates the family reunification principle for accepting legal immigrants from abroad. Intended to deter "chain migration," it would replace the family criterion with a merit-based system. In the future, only spouses and underage offspring (as opposed to parents and siblings today) of American citizens would be allowed permanent residence, and eventually citizenship. The net effect would be to "whiten" immigration and limit the share of Mexicans.



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The steady but precarious move towards universal health coverage

Greater clarity is needed on the architecture of the National health Protection Scheme – will state based health insurance schemes be incorporated within NHPS? What will be the annual premium amount? How will it be borne?

The National Health Protection Scheme (NHPS) is commendable, both in terms of quantum of funds and population coverage. The devil, however, lies in the detail and demands that we orient ourselves to the nuances of this proposition.

The move towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is unprecedented. We first heard of NHPS in FY 2016-17, when it proposed a health cover up to rupees one lakh per family. Even as NHPS was not launched that year, Rs 1,500 crore was allocated towards the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and 31% was utilised. The budget fell by 33.3% (Rs 1000 crore) in FY 2017-18 – the only year that NHPS appeared in the expenditure budget. RSBY currently aims to reach seven crore economically marginalised families with an annual cover of

Rs 30,000 per family. In 2017, 3,63,32,475 beneficiary households were enrolled – 51.9% of the target population. The 10 crore families to be covered under NHPS will shift this goalposts further and cost Rs 12,000 crore per year. This year, RSBY has received an allocation of Rs 2000 crore – 16.6% of the requisite amount.

Greater clarity is needed on the architecture of this scheme – will state based health insurance schemes be incorporated within NHPS? What will be the annual premium amount? How will it be borne? Meanwhile, RSBY has been ineffective in reducing the financial burden on poor households. Providers either persuade families to avail of procedures not covered by RSBY or completely deny care due to delayed reimbursements.

Consequently, out of pocket expenditure (OOPE) remains stubbornly high at 62%. RSBY provides coverage for low-cost in patient care but over 70% of all OOPE is on outpatient care and medicines.

Not only do people lack appropriate financial protection, poor service quality compels them to seek expensive routes to care. Specialists are in short supply with CHCs reporting a deficit of over 80%. Even as the budget was tabled, 2.75 lakh NHM workers were on a nationwide protest to demand formalised work status and better pay. Resource gaps have led to secondary and tertiary care being overloaded by cases that could be solved by comprehensive primary care. In this regard, 1.5 lakh subcentres are to be transformed into Health and Wellness Centres. But when



the allocated Rs 1,200 crore is split across 1.5 lakh centres, the Rs 80,000 per centre is too low for any meaningful transformation.

Also, the Economic Survey did not rub off on the health budget. The health budget was silent on the three dimensions of gender equality posited in the Economic Survey - agency, attitudes and outcomes. The budget for the Pradhan Mantri Matritva Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) fell by 7.5%; reproductive and child health, communicable diseases and NHM as a whole received allocations that were less than FY 2017-18.

For the past five years, public health expenditure has been below 1.5% of GDP. By one estimate, public health spending will have to increase by 26.2% annually to attain the target of 2.5% of GDP by 2025. Beyond these targets lies the fact that battling an illness is tough enough without the added burden of high and, at times, catastrophic healthcare costs. Unless we infuse our health system with meaningful investments, we are only safeguarding our position as the disease capital of the world. This is a good place to start, if one is to steadily but surely progress towards UHC.

Falcon Heavy is a game changer in the space race

Falcon Heavy, which is essentially an assembling of three Falcon 9s, is now way ahead – and by ahead, really ahead – of competition. It can place about 64 tonnes payload, which is more than twice the payload of its nearest competitor Delta 4 Heavy, in a single launch into the Lower Earth Orbit



On Tuesday, the world's most powerful rocket ever was launched from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, United States. SpaceX's Falcon Heavy was successfully tested on its first attempt, an achievement that is important for two reasons: One, Falcon Heavy, which is

essentially an assembling of three Falcon 9s (SpaceX's workhorse), is now way ahead – and by ahead, really ahead – of competition in the so-called heavy-lift category. It can place about 64 tonnes payload, which is more than twice the payload of its nearest competitor ULA's

Delta 4 Heavy, in a single launch into the Lower Earth Orbit (LEO). The scientific and commercial windows this opens are many. It will enable the launch of heavier payloads, encourage the private sector to participate in space-related missions, and also, as seen across social media, get planetary

scientists discussing its impact. Simply put, Falcon Heavy is a game changer in the space race.

Second, SpaceX, a company promoted by Elon Musk, has shown that it can not only easily reach the LEO (and go beyond), but has also done this using reusable boosters which will drastically cut the costs of launching satellites. At an estimate of about \$90 million per launch, it already costs only about a fourth the current rate for launches in that payload category.

It's not that the launch was a complete success. There were a few hiccups. Mr Musk's Tesla Roadster, the mock payload on Falcon Heavy, which was supposed to revolve around the Sun at a distance of the Mars' orbit, has overshot its trajectory and is now in the asteroid belt, between Mars and Jupiter and precariously close to the Ceres' orbit. The second hiccup – one which should be bothering Mr Musk more – is the failure of the main booster to dock on the

drone ship, showing that the rocket's ocean-borne landing is yet to be perfected.

With Tuesday's launch, Mr Musk proved that he is not only an entrepreneur, but also a great public relations tactician (and, of course, fan-boy par excellence). The Roadster can be seen as space junk, because except for its novelty factor, there's no scientific or academic purpose for sending an automobile into space. Adding to this is the fact that the mannequin in the driver's seat is wearing a SpaceX spacesuit, and David Bowie's Space Oddity is playing in endless loop on the radio in the car, and the glove compartment has a copy of Douglas Adams' The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy. The car's dashboard also has a message that says "Don't Panic", the enduring tenet of the Hitchhiker books.

As Mr Musk said: "It's kind of silly and fun, but silly and fun things are important."



Aadhaar must not be made mandatory for any purpose

A strong data protection law must be enacted and penalties imposed on irresponsible handling and leakage of private data

prudence demands that Aadhaar must not be the sole requirement even to avail rations and pensions. Letting different modes of identification to coexist will allow the people of this diverse country to make the transition towards an all-digital system. Of course, where Aadhaar can genuinely speed things up, it is only fair that those who provide Aadhaar enjoy expedited services.

Second, Aadhaar should move away from being a single number to a one-time token based system. Apart from a limited number of government departments (police, tax and passports, for instance) no public or private entity should be allowed to ask for or retain Aadhaar numbers. Instead, all authentication should be done on the basis of one-time tokens. Instead of offering the personal Aadhaar number, the user will give a one-time token that is freshly generated for every new authentication. This will ensure

that no two service providers — public or private — will have the same number on their records, making mass profiling extremely difficult. Yes, there will be technical challenges in getting the entire population to use one-time tokens, but these are not insurmountable and will get easier with time.

Third, users should be allowed to replace or cancel their Aadhaar numbers. Like in the case of a lost credit card, if my Aadhaar number has been leaked, I should be able to ask UIDAI to cancel it and give me a new one. The UIDAI itself can issue new Aadhaar numbers to people if it determines that the privacy of their numbers has been compromised.

Further, there might be some who no longer want an Aadhaar. Allowing people to cancel their Aadhaar, together with expunging of the accompanying biometric data, will be respectful of the individual's liberty.

Fourth, a strong data

protection law must be enacted to prohibit the collection and storage of Aadhaar numbers, and impose penalties on irresponsible handling and leakage of private data. The prohibition and penalties must apply both to government and private entities, including to UIDAI itself, while allowing aggrieved citizens to register complaints with the police.

Finally, the regulatory architecture must be recast to reflect the vastly different use Aadhaar is being put to now. UIDAI cannot be the service provider, regulator, enforcement agency and adjudicator. Each of these roles must be structurally separated from the other.

We can reap the benefits of Aadhaar while addressing concerns over equity, liberty and privacy. A good, constitutional balance is possible. Of course it won't be easy. But that is what we should demand of our technocrats and policymakers.

(News Agencies) Let me start with full disclosure: the Nilekanis were among the earliest donors of the institution of which I am a co-founder. The proposals in this article are entirely my own and they have neither sought nor had any influence in the writing of it.

Much of the ongoing national heartburn over Aadhaar is due to the profound change in "the use case" between that of the UPA government which initiated it and the Modi government which seeks to proliferate it.

We thus have a governance framework that was meant for a voluntary instrument to avail of government entitlements, while Aadhaar itself became effectively a mandatory ID for a whole range of public and private services. Under the Modi government, the governance framework is playing catch-up even as use cases are sprinting far ahead into areas such as

eKYC, digital payments and so on.

The governance gap has led to unscrupulous behaviour by service providers and enrolment agencies. It has also led to odd scenarios such as the email I received from my bank, requiring me to link my Aadhaar to my credit card account under money laundering prevention laws, and informing me that I will be doing this voluntarily under Aadhaar regulations.

This doesn't mean we should undo Aadhaar. Rather, it means we must close the gap between what Aadhaar can be used for and the rules governing how it is used. There are five high-level changes that have to be made in the governance of Aadhaar.

First, Aadhaar must not be mandatory for any purpose. Indeed, given the reports of how some very vulnerable people are being denied public services,

Why states must back Modi govt's new tribal outreach plan

The Centre plans to reach remote villages to open value addition centres in tribal households, organise tribal people in self-help groups, set up godowns for storage and initiate massive awareness programmes involving state governments and elected representatives.

(News Agencies) All those who watched the Republic Day Parade might not have noticed the ministry of tribal affairs tableau, which had the theme: "Uchit Daam Hak Se Maang" (Fair and Equitable Deal to the Tribals). Expand the thought and it means: Tribals, one of the poorest communities in India, must get a fair price for the Minor Forest Produce (MFP) they collect from jungles and sell at the 5,000-odd weekly pop-up markets that dot the country's rural landscape.

Minor Forest Produce (MFP) includes non-timber forest products such as bamboo, canes, tusser cocoons, honey, waxes, tendu/kendu leaves, and medicinal plants. While the economic value of raw MFPs is about Rs 2 lakh crore per year,

the tribals hardly earn much because of two reasons: first, their reach is limited to the village markets, and second, they don't do any value addition to the products. Instead, middlemen make a killing by buying these MFPs, adding value to them, and then selling at larger markets.

The ministry plans to break this vice-like grip of middlemen on the supply chain to ensure better income generation opportunities for tribals from the sale of the MFPs. This scheme is important because it could change the lives of India's 100 million-strong tribal community that depends on MFPs for food, fodder, shelter, medicines and cash income. The economic activity also has strong linkages to women's empowerment as most of the MFPs are collected and sold by



women. The Centre has also announced that it will double the number of MFPs for a guaranteed minimum support price. A critical component of the plan to increase the incomes of tribals is the idea of setting up value-addition centres for MFPs. Here's why: "Raw tamarind doesn't fetch any price. But if deseeded and the outside husk removed, it can fetch double the price," Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India

(TRIFED) managing director Pravir Krishn said recently. TRIFED is the nodal agency for rolling out the scheme. Krishn should know. As the collector of the tribal-dominated Bastar region in Chhattisgarh (then a part of Madhya Pradesh) in the late-1990s, he tried to eliminate middlemen from the MFP trade by creating self-help groups through the panchayats. The scheme took off well but collapsed after Madhya Pradesh

was bifurcated.

Twenty states have agreed to team up with TRIFED to roll out the new MFP programme. But for it to succeed, states will have to play a much stronger role. They must invest heavily to streamline the forests-mandi linkage, build procurement and value-addition centres and godowns in rural areas, set up self-help groups, creating an auctioning system and the technology backbone to integrate and run this project..

BJP faces catch-22 in Vasundhara Raje's Rajasthan: Alwar, Ajmer bypolls point to disaster, but no replacement for CM at hand



The dilemma within the BJP played out earlier this week in two contrasting events. First, a BJP leader did the unimaginable — till a few months ago — by writing to Amit Shah, and demanding that Raje be removed. Then, a day later, state BJP president Ashok Parnami, whose own job is reportedly under threat, announced that Assembly elections scheduled later this year would be fought under Raje's leadership. As a footnote, he added that rumours of his possible removal were grossly exaggerated.

The BJP finds itself between Raje and a hard place because of the results of the recent Lok Sabha by-elections in Ajmer and Alwar constituencies, and Mandalgarh Vidhan Sabha constituency. The three elections covered nearly 40 lakh voters and 17 Assembly segments: Eight each in Alwar and Ajmer. The BJP trailed in all of them,

resulting in an 0-17 score line. In Alwar, which the party won in 2014 by a margin of nearly 2.65 lakh votes, a 25 percent swing away from the BJP led to a humiliating loss. In most Assembly segments, the average swing away from the BJP was 10 percent. The consensus within the party is that voters need to be coddled with definitive measures to beat anti-incumbency and visible disenchantment with the government. One of the measures being talked about is change in leadership.

But the problem is that the BJP simply has no other options. Raje, for the moment, is the BJP, and BJP is Raje. Its second line of leadership is sub-par. Most would struggle to win their own seat. Apart from Raje, nobody is known across the state or has the ability to cut across caste and geographical divides. Another factor that contributes to the

Catch-22 situation is this: Removing Raje in a bid to win elections may break the party. A divided party would certainly not win. This fear has always troubled the BJP since its experiment with BS Yeddyurappa in Karnataka. Raje has stared down the Delhi leadership many times in the past, though not in the Amit Shah-Narendra Modi era. So, the BJP has reasons to worry that a scorned Raje may unleash the fury of hell in the next elections, leading to the kind of denouement brought about by Yeddyurappa in 2013. In short, the BJP doesn't have a fail-proof option in Rajasthan. In spite of a visible anti-incumbency and fears of an impending loss, it may have to just grin and bear Raje. After a strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis, it may just ask Raje to carry on, with the advice that she tighten up her game before the semi-finals in 2018.

(News Agencies) Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje would have inspired Joseph Heller to write a political version of his novel Catch-22. The premise of Catch-22: You can't quit flying fighter planes until you are declared insane, you can't be called insane till you keep flying sorties.

In Rajasthan, a similar plot is

unfolding. The BJP doesn't seem to be in a position to win the upcoming Assembly elections with Raje. It doesn't seem to be able to win them without her either. The predicament was best explained by a BJP leader who, speaking to Firstpost on the condition of anonymity, said: "She is our best bet. She is our biggest weakness."

SC cancels all mining leases in Goa, says they can't operate after March 15

The Supreme Court cancelled 88 mining leases given by Goa government for violating procedure.



he said. The mines ordinance approved on January 12, 2015 did not conceive of a renewal process, Bhushan said. All permits were renewed before the ordinance came into force, with 31 leases being renewed on January 12, 2015. The mines and minerals amendment ordinance was subsequently placed before Parliament and passed on March 27, 2015. The Goa Foundation's petition, a copy of which Mint has reviewed, alleges that the miners and government authorities colluded to circumvent not just the ordinance but also the Supreme Court ruling of April 21, 2014. According to the petition, 56 leases were reissued between January 6 and 12, shortly before the ordinance was passed.

The petition named 20 miners. Some of these companies had earlier moved the Bombay high court seeking directions for the Goa government to grant a second renewal of mining leases.

(News Agencies) The Supreme Court on Wednesday quashed 88 mining leases granted by the Goa government for violating procedure and ordered that fresh licences be granted through a bidding process. These leases, which were renewed for the second time, would run till March 15 after which they would lapse, a bench headed by justice Madan B Lokur said.

The court said the government's process of renewing the mining permits was "in violation of law". It also directed setting up of a special

investigation team (SIT), which would include a chartered accountant, for recovery of money the companies made after the mining permits were renewed.

The court was responding to a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by Goa Foundation in 2015, questioning the lease renewal.

Goa Foundation's lawyer Prashant Bhushan had said the state's policy did not conform to the apex court's line on optimum utilisation of natural resources.

The state government should have taken the auction route instead of renewing the permits,

Jaypee Infra accused of 'fraud' in insolvency court

(News Agencies) NEW DELHI: The insolvency resolution professional for Jaypee Infratech has accused the ailing company of "fraudulently and wrongfully" mortgaging 858 acre land to secure the loans of Jaiprakash Associates, its parent company. It has also alleged that the transaction amounted to "asset stripping".

In a petition filed before the National Company Law Tribunal bench, which had ordered the initiation of insolvency proceedings against Jaypee Infra in August, the IRP has said that the land was valued at Rs 5,000-6,000 crore and was mortgaged to secure loans taken by Jaiprakash Associates Ltd (JAL) from SBI, ICICI Bank, IDBI Bank and Standard Chartered Bank. The move took place at a time when banks had started classifying Jaypee Infratech as a "non-performing asset" due to loan defaults.

The company also had outstanding liability of Rs 132 crore to fixed deposit holders and was running behind schedule in delivering flats to home buyers.

The petition by IRP, a court appointed professional to oversee restructuring of Jaypee Infratech, has said that the land could have been sold or mortgaged to raise funds and



complete the construction of flats and prevent value erosion. Of the 33,000-odd apartments due to be delivered by Jaypee Infratech, nearly 25,000 are yet to be completed and are delayed until 2021. The mortgaged land parcels are in Gautam Budhh Nagar, Aligarh and Agra. "The mortgage of land is in the nature of asset stripping and entered into with the intent to defraud the creditors of the corporate debtor (Jaypee Infratech)," it said. Under the Insolvency Code, creditors includes lenders, other creditors and even home buyers. A detailed questionnaire sent to a Jaypee spokesperson on Tuesday evening remained unanswered. The IRP has made a case for asking the directors and promoters of Jaypee Infratech to "make contributions", implying that the land be restored to the company.

(News Agencies) NEW DELHI: At a time when FIR against Armymen and withdrawal of cases against stone-pelters is a subject of hot debate in J&K, children of two Army officers took an unprecedented step to move the National Human Rights Commission, asking it to protect army personnel's human rights being violated daily by stone-pelters.

Preeti, Kajal and Prabhav, children of two Lt Colonels and a retired Naib Subedar, presented NHRC chief Justice



Army kids move NHRC against stone-pelting at personnel

H L Dattu with a complaint, which complimented the apex human rights body and Amnesty International for zealously protecting the human rights of locals in disturbed areas of J&K but complained that they are turning a blind eye towards the plight of Army personnel who face threat to life daily from stone-pelters. They said a sub-optimal war was being waged in J&K since independence and the state as well as the Centre have

decided to enforce AFSPA to require Army to assist the 'failed state machinery'.

Read also: J&K govt okays withdrawal of stone-pelting cases against 9,730 people "The Army has been deployed in J&K since the state machinery was incapable of handling the law and order situation. But the irony is that the very administration which the Army seeks to assist and support has failed to safeguard the human rights of the armed forces personnel,"

their petition said.

"Do personnel of armed forces, facing grave and serious violations of human rights, not deserve the attention and empathy of the custodians of human rights? As young Indians and citizens of this great country, especially as children of Army personnel, we are concerned about the state of affairs of the troops serving in disturbed areas," the petition said and sought urgent intervention of NHRC to hold inquiry into

stone-pelting incidents and protect human rights violations of armed forces personnel.

Referring to the Shopian incident of Army personnel firing in self-defence and registration of FIR against them, they asked why no FIR has been registered against stone-pelters and only against soldiers who were acting in self defence. The petitioning children told NHRC that Shopian was not an isolated incident and

recounted five such FIRs lodged against armed forces personnel for taking action to secure the area from militants and stone-pelting crowd. They said neither the state government nor the Centre did anything to protect them.

"On one hand, the Army is expected to curb unlawful and disruptive activities by trouble-makers but while doing so they are expected to face attacks on them without having the human rights to defend their lives. They are expected to watch their troops suffer injuries, deaths and also witness their vehicles burnt, rifles snatched etc. All these actions are violations of human rights of the personnel," the petition said. They said other countries have prescribed stringent punishment for those throwing stones at armed forces personnel. In the US, they said, a person or group of persons throwing stones at armed forces personnel can be jailed for life. In Israel it was up to 20 years, New Zealand it is 14 years, Australia 5 years and UK 3-5 years.

PM Modi on triple talaq: Hindu men too go to jail for offences

(News Agencies) NEW DELHI: Replying to the debate in the Rajya Sabha on the Motion of Thanks for the President's address, PM Modi was particularly scathing on Congress and other opposition parties for opposing the Triple Talaq bill, saying a strange argument is being put forward that men of a certain community will go to jail and this will hurt their families. He said, Hindu men too go to jail for offences and there might be some discomfort for that reason. He also blamed Congress for delaying the bill to accord constitutional status to the OBC Commission. "Look at what all you mocked - Swachh Bharat, Make in India, surgical strikes, Yoga Day. You are free to mock as you please but why are you blocking the bill for OBC Commission? Why are you blocking Triple Talaq Bill. Are you not sensitive to the aspirations of OBCs," he asked. The Prime Minister also called for a "constructive discussion" on holding of simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies for the greater good of the country. He also sought suggestions from all parties for his government's new healthcare programme 'Ayushman Bharat'.

Srinagar central jail – A paradise for terrorists

(News Agencies) JAMMU: The security lapse that led to the escape of Pakistani Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist Naveed Jat from Srinagar Central jail on Tuesday was waiting to happen.

From smartphones with internet data packs to Kashmiri 'wazwan' mutton delicacies, all luxuries of the free world are available to inmates in the jail where several dreaded terrorists have been lodged.

Jail sources told the TOI that every rule in the book is brazenly flouted in the prison, with little or no intervention from higher authorities in the state government.

For example, Kashmir media regularly gets press releases of Qasim Faktu alias Ashiq Faktu, who is undergoing conviction in Srinagar Central jail for the killing of human right activist H N Wanchoo. One of the top terrorist undergoing life imprisonment is often visited by dozens of devotees who consider him a godman and receive 'taveez' (amulets) from him, sources said.

Convicted militant leaders openly use cell phones to keep in touch with their associates in other jails and their organizations both in Kashmir and across the border in Pakistan. The 2010 unrest, according to sources, was also orchestrated from within the Central jail by the dreaded



anti-India Islamist separatist Masarat Alam using mobile phones. Official sources revealed that a pharmacist, Mansoor Ahmad, has been posted in Central jail for the last ten years and developed a close rapport with the inmates. Mansoor, according to sources, helps the jailed terrorists with medical consultation and check-ups in various Srinagar hospitals. Dr Zeenat Nizami, the medical officer who referred Naveed Jat and five other inmates for a medical check-up in SMHS hospital, has been on the jail duty for over three years. Along with her, the health department has also posted Dr Sajjad Ahmad, who is supposedly sick and remains on

leave often, sources said. The militants are also known to get 'wazwan' (Kashmiri cuisine) mutton dishes inside the jail. Almost ten years ago, CRPF conducted a crackdown on the jail and recovered mutton choppers and knives for mincing and making 'kebabs' and dozens of cell phones. However, the crackdown did not change anything in the jail. Sources said such lavish treatment of militants in Central jail was extended under the patronage of the jail superintendent Hilal Ahmad Rather. However, the superintendent, who has risen from ranks, denied the charges and said, "We follow the jail menu strictly."

Oppn demand to disclose Rafale deal details unrealistic, says defence ministry

The government statement comes amid a Congress president Rahul Gandhi-led attack on the Centre, alleging a scam in the 36 Rafale fighter jet deal with France

weapons systems specially designed to augment effectiveness and lethality of assets, impact our military preparedness and compromise our national security," said the statement.

Congress president Gandhi, who has been attacking the government for its "silence" over the 36 Rafale jet deal with France since the Gujarat elections last year, on Tuesday cited defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman's statement in Rajya Sabha refusing to disclose the price of

the contract to target the BJP again.

On Wednesday, too, Gandhi brought up the Rafale deal after the prime minister's address to Lok Sabha, saying Modi "talked for one hour, but did not utter a single word about the Rafale deal..." But the government hit back at the opposition for raising "doubts" over the deal and reiterated that it was better in many aspects than the one "notionally negotiated" by the Congress regime, which could not conclude it in 10 years.

The deal was better in aspects such as capability, price and equipment, it said in a statement.

"It is also stressed once again that the procurement of 36 Rafale aircraft through an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) with France to meet the urgent need of the IAF is strictly in accordance with the Defence Procurement Procedure in all aspects..." it said.

The present government had completed the negotiations in just about one year, it said.



(News Agencies) The Narendra Modi government on Wednesday termed the opposition's demand to disclose details of the 2016 Rafale aircraft deal as "unrealistic", a day after Congress president Rahul Gandhi alleged a "scam" in the contract.

"Demand that Government disclose details and value of the contract for the Rafale aircraft contracted in 2016 is unrealistic. The approximate acquisition cost...has already been provided to the Parliament," said the ministry of defence in a statement.

"Provision of exact item-wise cost and other info will reveal, inter alia, details regarding various customisations and

Saudi Arabia allows Air India to use its skies for flights to Tel Aviv: Israeli daily

Saudi Arabia does not recognise Israel and the route has so far been off-limits to Israel-bound commercial planes.



(News Agencies) Saudi Arabia has allowed Air India to use its airspace for flights between Delhi and Tel Aviv, Israeli daily Haaretz reported.

However, a spokesperson for Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation was quoted in another media report denying that any such permission was granted to Air India.

It could not be confirmed from either the ministry of civil aviation here or Air India, whether the national carrier has been given right to use Saudi airspace for flight to Tel Aviv.

According to a spokesperson of the airline, the national carrier has sought permission from regulatory body DGCA for thrice-a-week flight services between Delhi and Tel Aviv from March, which is awaited.

Another Air India official said the airline is also waiting for slots at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International airport and Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion International Airport.

Many Arab and Islamic nations do not recognise Israel and, therefore, disallow airlines from using their airspace for flight

services to that country. According to the official, an approval from Saudi Arabia to use its airspace will allow Air India to take a shorter route by flying over Ahmedabad, Muscat, Saudi Arabia and then land at Tel Aviv.

This route will lead to a shorter flight duration between the two cities by two and a half hours and save fuel costs, the official said.

As of now, Israel's El Al flights between Tel Aviv and Mumbai take a seven-hour circuitous route and fly over the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and then enter India and avoid countries that are on the direct flight path such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Due to route overflying issues Air India was earlier also examining the possibility of operating flights from Mumbai to Tel Aviv.

Israel's tourism ministry has announced a one-time grant of 750,000 euros to Air India for flight operations. External affairs minister Sushma Swaraj is on her maiden visit to Saudi Arabia. She arrived in Riyadh on Tuesday.

1984 anti Sikh riots victims to protest outside Sonia Gandhi's residence

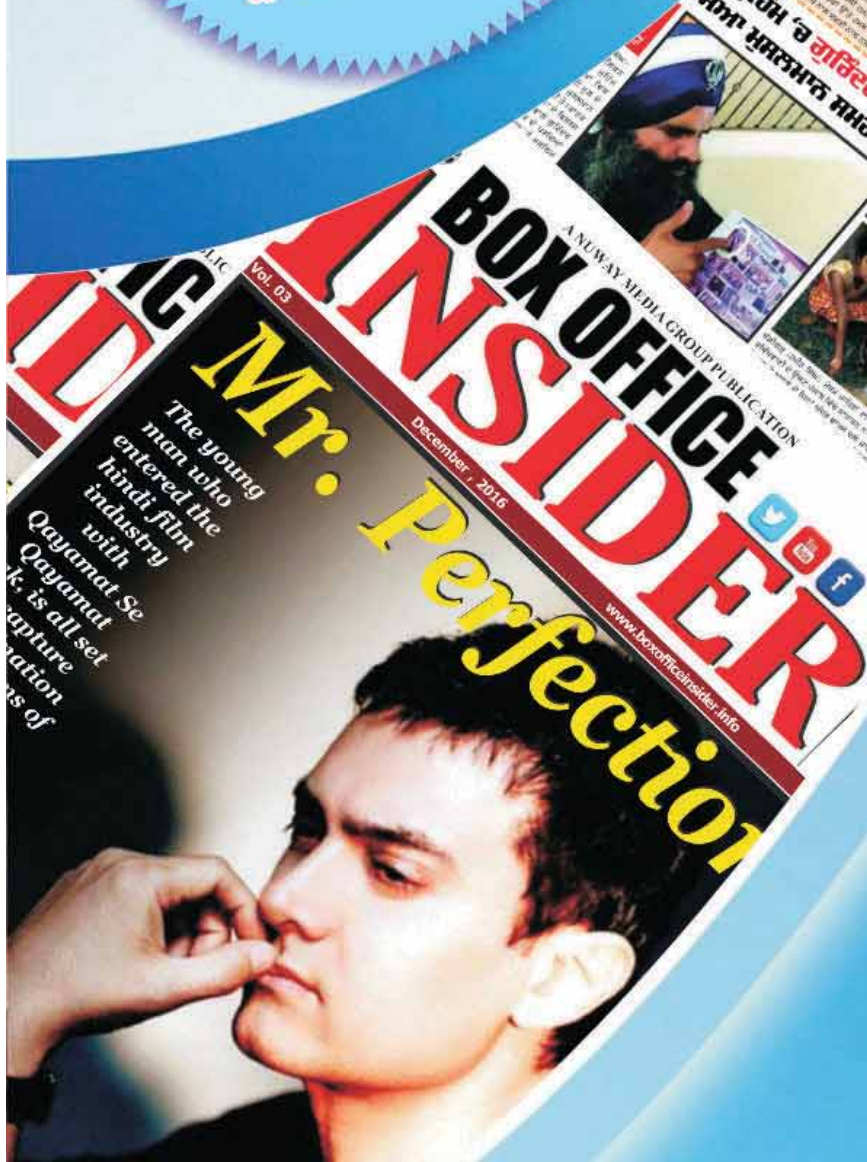


(News Agencies) After the sting operation video went viral against Congress leader Jagdish Tytler which showed Tytler detailing his role in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. Victims of 1984 Sikh massacre are going to protest outside the residence of Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi. They are demanding that Tytler should be arrested and he should be expelled from the allies of Congress. The victims of 1984 anti-Sikh riots on Monday urged the Centre to set up a special court to settle their cases and also requested to arrest Congress leaders Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar. 1984 anti Sikh riots victims protest "We urge the Centre to provide us with a special court. Sajjan Kumar and Jagdish Tytler are the culprits and the whole country is aware of it. They themselves have accepted their crime. We want the government to first arrest them and then further lead the investigation," Anti-Sikh Riots Victim Society president Atma Singh Lubna told ANI. 1984 anti Sikh riots victims protest After the video of a sting operation against Congress leader Jagdish Tytler, almost all the sikh organizations have been demanding the arrest of Jagdish Tytler. In video clips Tytler accepting his role in the riots, and demanded that he be "arrested and prosecuted, before he left the country." 1984 anti Sikh riots victims protest According to a report by The Indian Express, an unidentified person had left a pendrive with the video files at Singh's doorstep. Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal called for Tytler's immediate arrest and registration of a fresh case to fix Congress leader Rajiv Gandhi's "direct role" in the riot killings. According to IANS, Badal was referring to an alleged video of Tytler that went viral on Monday, wherein the controversial Congress leader made sensational disclosures regarding the killing of the Sikhs in Delhi and elsewhere. 1984 anti Sikh riots victims protest Union Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal too demanded that Tytler be arrested. "Manjit Singh has five video clippings of a sting operation against Tytler, wherein he admits to killing 100 Sikhs and other offences.



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Trump breaks his silence on market chaos

President Trump doesn't sound happy with the stock market.



(News Agencies) He broke his silence Wednesday about the market turmoil: "In the 'old days,' when good news was reported, the Stock Market would go up," he wrote on Twitter.

He added, "Today, when good news is reported, the Stock Market goes down. Big mistake, and we have so much good (Great) news about the economy!"

Trump's complaints came two days after an awkward split-screen moment: The Dow was plunging more than 1,000 points just as he was giving a televised speech touting the economic benefits of his tax plan.

Wall Street's darkest day since 2011 put the president in a tough spot because he took so much credit for the market's big gains after he was elected.

So what is Trump talking about?

He has a point about good news and bad news: The market did indeed plunge in recent days after positive economic

news. Though that's not a new thing — it happens from time to time. And there is some logic behind it, even if it's frustrating to presidents and everyday investors alike.

Consider the rude reaction on Wall Street to Friday's jobs report, which showed that wages grew at the fastest pace since 2009. That's a clear win for Main Street after years of weak pay increases for workers.

Yet the stock market had a hellish day. The Dow plunged 666 points, or 2.5%, its worst day in more than a year.

Wall Street was focused on the short term. Investors worried that wages could grow so quickly that they will put a dent in record corporate profits and make the Federal Reserve nervous about inflation.

"We're back in this perplexing phase where good news for the economy is treated as bad news for financial markets," said Candice Bangsund, portfolio manager at Fiera Capital.

If the Fed aggressively raises interest rates to fight inflation, it will remove one of the drivers of the bull market. Because of that fear, investors sold bonds, which drove yields to four-year highs. Higher yields make risky stocks look less attractive by comparison. Thus the sell-off.

So in that sense, Trump was right: Good news for Main Street was viewed as bad news by Wall Street.

But this happened under Trump's predecessors, too.

More than once under President Barack Obama, Wall Street became nervous that good economic news would force the Fed to raise rates. And in other cases, the opposite happened: Bad jobs news drove stocks higher because it meant the easy money wasn't going anywhere.

This inverse reaction was so common that sometimes, as with a strong jobs report in August 2016, it was noteworthy

that good news was treated as good news.

Of course, the recent market turbulence is about more than the good news/bad news situation Trump alluded to.

The stock market boom since Trump's election became overheated. Euphoria set in, making the market more vulnerable to sharp setbacks. A cool-off period was long overdue — and may prove to be a healthy thing.

"Markets do better over the long term when they experience corrections periodically," Capital Group CEO Tim Armour said in a recent report. "They can't go up all the time."

In the past, Trump himself loudly cheered for the market to keep rallying. After the Dow hit 20,000 in early 2017, he said "Now we have to go up, up, up." It was a big reversal from during the 2016 campaign when he called the market a "big, fat, ugly bubble."

Poland's Holocaust law should terrify you

When politicians manipulate history for political purposes, we should worry. When they write laws, ordering prison terms for those who counter their version of history, we should challenge them.

(News Agencies) Polish President Andrzej Duda just announced he will sign a controversial bill making it illegal to accuse Poland of complicity in the Holocaust. The developments in Poland come at the intersection of two troubling trends taking place in many countries -- the upsurge in Holocaust denialism and the political manipulation of the truth for political purposes.

Poland's bill rises from a legitimate concern. After behaving in largely heroic ways during World War II, Poles are tired of hearing others blame them for the horrors of the Holocaust, some of whose worst chapters took place on their soil. The law aims to defend the "good name of Poland," but instead it criminalizes talk about historical truths.

The Nazis built Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka and other death camps there, murdering 3 million Polish Jews. The Poles, whose country suffered horrifically under Nazi occupation, have bristled when hearing people refer to "Polish death camps." Soon using words such as these could land you in jail for three years. The law will inevitably turn the world's attentions to the fact that even though Poland resisted and fought the Nazis and many Poles risked their lives to help Jews, there were, indeed, Poles who actively helped the Nazis. That is a historical fact, recounted by people who survived the massacres.

Instead of drawing attention to the heroism of the Polish nation, the law will highlight the misdeeds of these individuals. So why would the government make such a foolish, counterproductive move? Because it's good politics at home. Poland's ruling Law and Justice Party, a right-wing nationalist party that has steadily eroded democracy in Poland and is turning it into a magnet for xenophobes, has found an issue that resonates

across the nation, and is exploiting it to inflame "patriotic" feeling. The more the world complains, the more Poland's ruling party can boast of defending the nation against the world.

The United States has warned Poland of "repercussions" -- or costs to its international relationships -- if it does not reconsider the legislation, and its alliance with Israel -- until now a close friend of Poland's -- is in crisis.

Israel's centrist opposition leader, Yair Lapid, tweeted his condemnation of the proposed law, writing that "hundreds of thousands of Jews were murdered without ever meeting a German soldier." When the Polish Embassy in Israel responded that the law was to

"protect truth against such slander," Lapid fired back, "I am a son of a Holocaust survivor. My grandmother was murdered in Poland by Germans and Poles. I don't need Holocaust education from you." The Israeli parliament is considering changing the law banning Holocaust denial to include "denying or minimizing the involvement of the Nazi helpers and collaborators."

Poland's efforts to rewrite history are a new twist on Holocaust denial, which is a perverse maneuver that always has political and ideological objectives but usually hides under the deceptive claims of pursuing historical accuracy.

Denial goes hand in hand with other forms of ideological extremism. Not surprisingly,



Holocaust deniers don't hate only Jews; they are also prejudiced against other minorities.

In the United States, a Holocaust denier and brazen anti-Semite is on track to become the Republican nominee for Illinois' 3rd Congressional District. Arthur Jones, a retired insurance salesman, has run for the seat seven times. This time no other Republican is on the ballot. His website describes the "Holocaust racket" as a Jewish scam, uses the Confederate flag as "a symbol of White Pride and White resistance," and his blog blames leftists for the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, where an admitted neo-Nazi has been charged with murder in the death of Heather Heyer, who was protesting against white supremacists.

Not surprisingly,

Not surprisingly,



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Maldives crisis: China suggests India should not intervene as Nasheed calls for Delhi's help

China said the international community should play a constructive role that respects the Maldives' sovereignty instead of taking measures that could complicate the situation.

(News Agencies) China on Wednesday opposed any external intervention to resolve the political crisis in the Maldives while responding to former president Mohamed Nasheed's call to India to use its military to end the turmoil in the island nation.

Nasheed, currently in self-exile in Sri Lanka, was undeterred by China's stance and reiterated his demand for Indian intervention on Wednesday, saying Maldivians were looking to India for help as they see the country playing the role of a liberator.

China's foreign ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang didn't mention India at a regular news briefing but left no doubt which country he was referring to when he said Beijing opposed foreign intervention.

"The international community should play a constructive role on the basis of respecting the

Maldives' sovereignty instead of taking measures that could complicate the current situation," Geng said when he was asked about Nasheed's remarks.

"The current situation in the Maldives is its internal affairs. China follows the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of others," Geng said in response to a question on allegations by Maldivian opposition parties that Beijing is backing embattled President Abdulla Yameen as he had approved Chinese projects.

Nasheed had asked India on Tuesday to send an "envoy, backed by its military" to free two Supreme Court judges and former president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who were detained on the orders of Yameen. "We request a physical presence," he said. Brushing aside China's opposition to foreign intervention, Nasheed tweeted on Wednesday: "Saying 'resolve things internally' is akin to asking

us to escalate the revolt, which can lead to chaos...

"Maldivians see India's role positively: in '88 they came, resolved the crisis, and left. They were not occupiers but liberators. This is why Maldivians look to India now." The Maldives, an archipelago off India's southern coast, plunged into political turmoil after the Supreme Court last week cleared Nasheed of terror charges, ordered the release of eight jailed opposition leaders. Yameen refused to comply with the order and instead imposed emergency on Monday. The government detained two top judges, including the Chief Justice, and former president Gayoom before judges perceived as loyal to Yameen rolled back the order on Tuesday. Geng said China believes "relevant parties" in the Maldives should find a solution internally. "We hope relevant parties in the Maldives can



properly resolve the issue through consultations and restore national stability and social order as soon as possible," he said. Geng refuted allegations by Maldivian opposition parties that China is tacitly backing Yameen because he has approved several Chinese projects and signed a controversial Free Trade Agreement during his visit to Beijing in December.

"China maintains friendly cooperation with the Maldives, including the FTA which serves the common interests of the two countries," he said. An editorial in the nationalistic Global Times tabloid said India should not

interfere in the Maldives' internal affairs.

"When Yameen's government signed a free trade agreement with China and joined the Belt and Road Initiative, Indian public opinion reacted harshly. To maximise the country's best interests, Yameen was perhaps considering developing diplomatic ties with all major powers. This infuriated New Delhi," the editorial said. "Political struggles are supposed to be internal affairs, and New Delhi has no justification to intervene in Malé's affairs. The Maldives must be under huge pressure from India," it added.

Pakistan bans media coverage of Valentine's Day celebrations



(News Agencies) Valentine's Day (on February 14) ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's electronic media watchdog on Wednesday directed the local media to refrain from promoting and showing celebrations of Valentine's Day as such activities were against the Islamic teachings.

The Islamabad High Court in a verdict passed on a petition submitted by a citizen on February 13, 2017, had prohibited the celebration of

Electronic and Print Media," the PEMRA said in a statement.

"No event shall be held at official level and at any public place. Chairman, PEMRA is directed to ensure that all the TV channels shall stop the promotion of Valentine Day, forthwith," it said.

PEMRA directed countrywide broadcast media to "desist" from promoting the day. Religious parties have been long demanding to ban all kinds of events and celebration related to the Valentine's Day in the country as such activities were against the Islamic teachings.

President Mamnoon Hussain also urged to abstain from Valentine's Day activities they were part of West traditions.

"Valentine's Day has no connection with our culture and it should be avoided," he said during a speech in 2016.

The Valentine's Day activities have often been disrupted in the past in the Muslim-majority country by the supporters of hardline parties like Jamaat-e-Islami.

NASA launches new anti-harassment policy for employees

(News Agencies) Taking a firm stand against workplace harassment, NASA has launched a new campaign for its employees saying that the space agency will not tolerate any kind of harassment. "Harassment, including sexual harassment, has no place here at NASA and will not be tolerated. It's not consistent with our values, our employee engagement, and our high-performance culture. It's wrong and it's not acceptable," Robert Lightfoot, Acting NASA Administrator, was quoted as saying in a video message released at the space agency's YouTube channel this week. Lightfoot outlined the procedures for all NASA employees and contractors to report harassment of any kind. NASA launches new anti-harassment policy He also encouraged all NASA members to be "vigilant and immediately report any inappropriate conduct" in helping towards preventing and stopping workplace harassment. "All reports will be treated appropriately, with a prompt, impartial and thorough investigation. Individuals reporting harassment will have their identity kept confidential," Lightfoot said. The new campaign requires all current and new members of NASA to undergo anti-harassment training by the end of 2018. Besides, NASA will also partner with the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to learn about current developments in anti-harassment. "We need to provide a safe workplace so that our workforce is effective," Lightfoot said. NASA launches new anti-harassment policy In October 2017, media reports emerged about Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein's numerous sexual misconduct accusations, following which several victims of harassment worldwide united and shared their stories under the social media hashtag #MeToo.



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

-Sharanjit Singh Thind
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India-China Tensions Flare Vying for Indian Ocean Region Control



The competition between India and China is heating up in the Indian Ocean region with the regional powers' moves to exert influence in the domain through development of port facilities and military patrols.

This is effectively counterpoised by the recently inked pact signed between India and Seychelles which allows India to develop, manage, operate and maintain facilities on the Assumption island as part of its quest to boost influence in the Indo-Pacific strategy. Historically India has viewed the Indian Ocean as its 'backyard' which first manifested during the Cold War period where it wanted the major powers to withdraw themselves from the region as it constituted a threat to India's presence in the region.

However, China's increasing reliance on energy security and its trade with the Indian Ocean littorals act as determinants to its increasing strategic calculus in the region. Compounded with the economic imperatives, China's motive to utilise the Indian Ocean as the space for its power projection capabilities has complicated the regional stability. The Chinese doctrine of 'String of Pearls' coined in 2005 has been a prominent factor in the Indian public debate about China and its intentions in the Indian Ocean region. The 'String of Pearls' is aimed at expanding China's footprint into the Indian Ocean region by allowing the PLA navy to develop bases or have access to facilities across the northern Indian Ocean.

The strategy gained significance in the 21st century with the US military and economic retrenchment in Asia that paved the way for the Chinese upsurge of influence in the region. An appraisal of the above Chinese strategy will need us to consider China's perception of maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean region. The crux of it points towards its 'two ocean strategy' formulated by the Communist Party of China (CPC) way back in 2005. The narrative behind this is to regain control of the waters surrounding it so as not just end its 'century of humiliation' but to project the Chinese power both regionally and globally.

Heavily influenced by Alfred Mahan's depiction of importance of naval power in his seminal work *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783* where State power was equated with assuming a stronghold in the seas in terms of trade and commerce, Liu entertained a similar vision.

He envisaged China as a vibrant sea power whose maritime ambitions manifested themselves in a navy capable of protecting seagoing trade and staking the nation's claim to great power.

A natural corollary of the above strategy is its Maritime Silk Road initiative, colloquially termed as the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) that includes the construction of new overland pathways to South Asia and maritime pathways across the Indian Ocean connecting China with the Indian Ocean region.

The BRI initiative initially advocated by the Chinese, purely in the pursuit of improving its domestic economy, has a strong strategic implication. Through controlling the construction, expansion and operation of the numerous port facilities by the Chinese companies, BRI serves to expand its political and economic footprint in the region.

In this sense, India's maritime policy has been constructive in the recent past where policymakers are concerned about China's assertive policy towards the country as well as its growing influence in the Indian Ocean that they view as an attempt

to gain permanent access to the waters and 'encircle' India strategically.

Further the aspiration of positing itself as the 'net security provider' has been echoed consistently in the present times with the epithet 'securing' the seas forming a key term in the Indian Navy's revised official maritime strategy in 2015.

Although India is making some incremental policy advancements in its backyard with policies like 'Act East' and 'Neighbourhood First' initiatives designed to buttress India's strategic position in the IOR, the scenario is fraught with challenges. A tangible demonstration

includes the recent US strategy that emphasised the concept of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific'.

This policy under Trump was carefully structured to give the US a policy continuity where they have the option to withdraw in the future rather than being a pivot that resulted in a deep void in the regional balance of power.

Where India is looking forward to pursue its global ambitions, it has to show leadership in its own backyard. The latest India-ASEAN summit and India's increasing bilateral engagement with the IO littorals marks a positive step in this direction.

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'Sikh Extremists In Canada, The UK And Italy Are -Working With ISI Or Independently'

Talking to Outlook, Punjab CM Captain Amarinder Singh explains the role of 'foreign hand' in reviving Khalistani extremism in the state.

On returning as Punjab chief minister last year, Captain Amarinder Singh found the state reeling under a drug problem and attempts to revive Khalistani extremism. In this interview with Ushinor Majumdar, he explains the role of the 'foreign hand' and how the state is dealing with it. Edited excerpts:

Is there a resurgence of Khalistani extremism, considering the number of recent incidents and killings?

There has been no resurgence. In fact, since the Congress took over, the Punjab Police has cracked the "targeted killings" and busted several terrorist modules, with no fresh cases in the past several weeks. For the supply of weapons and other logistics, the radicals had started using the criminal gangs that had mushroomed over the past decade. Vicky Gounder, killed in a recent encounter, was an example. Unemployment and the drug menace emerged over the past 10 years, making Punjab's youth vulnerable to external influences and pressures. Various external forces are constantly trying to ruin our nation's peaceful fabric. As a border state, Punjab is particularly susceptible to forces such as the ISI. The Akalis were too busy promoting their vested interests to secure Punjab. The police were pressured not to act against organised crime.

Was there an intelligence failure?

The gangster-radical nexus is not new; it grew during the Akali regime. So there's no question of there being an intelligence failure. The Vicky Gounder operation shows that intelligence has been strengthened multifold in the past few months. To break the nexus, we issued strict instructions to prison officials to prevent gangster activities. We have installed mobile jammers in jails, conducted surprise prison raids to seize mobile phones and installed more CCTVs. When I took over, we gave an option to all criminals to surrender, but I also made it clear that anybody who uses firearms will be met with firearms. As a result, most criminals are off the streets now. Weapon supply is being choked. We cannot undo

the problems of the past 10 years in just 10 months, but things are under control and will improve in the months ahead. My government will not allow this nexus to grow. I have personally ensured that the police and other agencies have a free hand in cracking down on such elements. We need development, for which we must have stability in law and order for investments and industries to come in.

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Doesn't the proposed PCOCA law give the police too much power?

PCOCA doesn't grant unbridled powers but enough authority to the police to take action against criminals and gangsters. It is targeted at criminals and gangsters, and we have ensured sufficient checks and balances under the Act to prevent misuse or excesses. Tough problems need tough solutions and PCOCA is our answer to a festering problem that has grown out of proportion in the past 10 years of Akali misrule.

One cannot blame the ISI alone. Is it clear which 'foreign hand' is driving this entire nexus?

It is not about blaming the ISI or anyone else. Evidence gathered by the police and other agencies points to the ISI as the key perpetrator of extremism in Punjab. Increasingly, as investigations have revealed, the ISI is using foreign soil to promote its anti-India agenda. So we have seen the names of countries such as the UK, Canada and Italy crop up in connection with probes into various cases. Extremist groups in these countries could be working in tandem with the ISI or independently. These things are under investigation by Punjab and national agencies.

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Is there a clear link to Canada?

In one case currently under investigation, the police have found a link for money that was used to buy an Uzi submachine gun for extremists. It will be revealed once foreign authorities cooperate with Indian and Punjab agencies. On the face of it, there seems to be evidence that there

are Khalistani sympathisers in (Canadian PM) Trudeau's cabinet.

Why are youth in Punjab today attracted towards religious extremism?

On the face of it, there seems to be evidence that there are Khalistani sympathisers in (Canadian PM) Trudeau's cabinet.

I would not say that the youth are attracted to religious extremism. They have become vulnerable due to drugs and unemployment. History shows that unemployment is likely to lead to drug addiction and provokes fascist tendencies among youth. We have broken the back of the drugs network in the state and have successfully weaned away most of the youth who had become addicted to drugs during the rule of the Akalis. We issued 25,000 job letters through job fairs and more will follow in the coming months. Industrial development is a prime focus area for us and it will also help end unemployment.

Important issues that need to be worked out—labour, agriculture and farm loan waiver, river water-sharing, language—are being drawn into the larger demand for Khalistan....

While these issues trigger passion, the majority of the people do not see them from the Khalistani lens, but as problems that their elected government should resolve. People know how to distinguish between Punjabi identity and extremism; and between issues of individuality and of livelihood. Language, for instance, is an issue of identity and individuality, while labour and agriculture are relevant for survival. All these issues cannot be clubbed together to generalise on that basis.

Water-sharing, which once aroused passions, is today an issue related to the survival of Punjab and its people. We cannot share what we don't have; hence, for our survival, we are fighting on every possible forum, be it legal or dialogue, to protect the water rights of our citizens. At our behest, and on the directives of the court, the central government is facilitating talks on the issue among all



stakeholders, and I am hopeful of its resolution in our favour.

There is a strong demand for a separate religious identity for Sikhs....

The Akalis raise the pitch on Sikh religious identity every time they are out of office. But we are all Indians and the Sikhs, with their five 'Ks', are already recognised with a separate identity among Indians. So what new will a legislation do? This is just a way to disturb peace. Had Sikh identity really been an issue, why did the Shiromani Akali Dal not pursue it when they were in power in the state? In fact, they are in power at the Centre right now.

Trudeau is scheduled to visit in February. Will you personally welcome him or accompany him during his visit?

Neither I nor my government has received any official communication so far from Canada or from our own Ministry of External Affairs on such a visit. But I have made it clear on several occasions that if and when we received any such communication, I would be happy to meet Justin Trudeau or welcome him as per the protocol accorded to any state guest of his stature.

You have reached out to the Sikh diaspora to "connect with your roots". At the same time, you have spurned Sikh political leaders such as the Canadian defence minister last year....

There is no question of spurning genuine Sikh political leaders. It is only the radicals and the Khalistani sympathisers with

whom I have a problem, just as every person who loves Punjab and India should have.

The "connect with your roots" programme has no political agenda. It is aimed at specifically connecting with the Punjabi youth settled in other countries, whom we want to apprise about their or their ancestors' historical links and rich cultural traditions. I do not see how protesting against extremist elements sends a wrong message to the Sikh diaspora. In fact, it sends the correct message—that Punjab is a strong state that is fully capable of protecting its people from disruptive forces.

The day may not be far when an Indian-origin Sikh is elected as the PM of Canada. Can we afford to have a less-than-warm relationship between Canada and Punjab?

Tomorrow, if an Indian-origin Sikh becomes the prime minister of Pakistan, would that be a good enough reason for us to change our approach towards the neighbouring country? Relations between two countries are guided not by the colour of the skin or the turbans on the heads of their leaders. They are guided by mutual trust. Every Sikh settled in Canada does not have pro-extremist leanings. So if an Indian-origin Sikh who is concerned about the interests of India takes over, I see no problem in forging close relations with him. But if the person has antagonistic approach towards Punjab or India, then naturally I will not engage with him, be it a Sikh or anyone else.

Revival Of Electoral Fortunes Of The Congress Is A Good Omen For Secular And Democratic India

While BJP offers a conservative, rightwing, majoritarian brand of politics, Congress Party is the only party in the country, with a matching alternative base and ideology to challenge it.



The unexpected fighting result in Gujarat election followed by spectacular success in Rajasthan by-election has not only galvanised Congress Party cadres all over the country, it has also brought the hope that the 2019 election is not a done deal for Modi-Shah duo.

The new President of the Congress Party, Rahul Gandhi has been doing all the right thing and making all the right noises these days as expected from him by the political pundits of the country. Since his Berkeley performance, not only the BJP leaders have almost stopped mocking him, but some of BJP's partners in NDA have started showing appreciation of his leadership potentials. The rumor of rebellion by senior Congress leaders after his takeover of the Congress presidency has also disappeared. Rahul Gandhi's well-publicized temple visits have unnerved the Hindutva outfits as it threatens their design to acquire the sole ownership of Hindu voices. BJP finds it difficult to target Rahul Gandhi on the issue of religion as it fails to get the same traction as of its strategy against his mother, Italian born Sonia Gandhi since mid-1990s. Slower economic growth and more importantly failure to create jobs have brought doubts over Modi's electoral invincibility. Adding to the BJP's electoral trouble in the western states, its most dependable ally of all time, Shiv Sena in Maharashtra has decided to go alone in 2019 election. In the South, another ally TDP has already given a notice. In Bihar, a realignment of BJP's allies in the cards. Modi and Shah occasionally talk about a 'Congress Mukh Bharat' these days, but the slogan is fast losing its sheen. This is a good and hopeful sign for Indian democracy. The call for a 'Congress Mukh Bharat' is in all practical purposes, a call for 'Opposition Free India'. The regional parties, except RJD, have sometime or other become the ally of the BJP and lack an ideological clarity vis-à-vis Hindutva politics. Moreover, besides the Congress Party, no other party in the opposition has a national presence to challenge the ruling party, BJP and to be a national alternative

politically. Thus, if there is no Congress, then there is no viable opposition to the ruling BJP. India, whose survival as a country is critically dependent upon maintaining its character as a secular democracy, it will be suicidal to provide an opposition free open space to majoritarian BJP and authoritarian Modi to get elected and rule unchallenged.

It is not only in May 2014, political pundits in India have for the first time started writing the obituary of the Congress Party. They wrote it in 1967, 1977, 1991, and in 1997. In 2004, not even Congress Party had any hope returning back to power being led by a foreign-born reluctant and reclusive leader, who was reading her speeches with a heavy accent, while the party in power then, BJP was being led by a charismatic and popular orator and intoxicated with 'Shining India' campaign blitzkrieg. Still, Indian electorates voted the Congress back to power and kept it there for 10 years. Congress Party, in spite of its declining influence, is still a pan-India party, with a glorious history and an unchallenged leadership. Electorates in any democracy always prefer to have an alternative option to make a choice at the time of election. That choice for them to be rational, there has to be a party and leader available with a different ideological platform and policy agenda. While BJP offers a conservative, rightwing, majoritarian brand of politics, Congress Party is

the only party in the country, with a matching alternative base and ideology to challenge it. It will be self-destructive act for Indian democracy and its believers to keep denouncing and destroying Congress Party further and hoping for another political constellation to emerge nationally to be able to challenge the BJP. No one knows, what the country will get as an alternative. Moreover, the process might take too long and it might be too late.

The growing rural discontentment and failure to create enough job opportunities for increasingly aspirational youth population are the reasons for BJP's vulnerabilities and opposition's possibilities. Hard Hindutva and ultra-nationalism have limitations and cannot take BJP too far while the economy has failed to bring the promised 'achhe din'. No doubt, India is passing through a very difficult time. At this point, it is vital for the voters to get a viable alternative to BJP in the next election. The Congress Party with its new President is playing a smart politics in avoiding to take on BJP on Hindutva issues, but targeting it where it is most vulnerable, on the issues of economy and governance. Moreover, Rahul Gandhi unlike his mother can project himself as a Hindu as good as anyone else in BJP. The ruling party had not taken this factor into consideration before the Gujarat election. There is no doubt, Rahul

Gandhi has a lot to do to be able to defeat foxy Modi-Shah duo in the next election. He needs to use this momentum of success in recent elections fast to bring necessary leadership changes at the state level, and to stitch key alliances with the help of his mother. Indian democracy and Indian electorates need a stronger Congress to challenge BJP in the next election.

A robust opposition is a basic need for any healthy democracy. The position of opposition determines the democratic character of the country's institutions and pluralistic nature of the political system. A democracy without opposition is not a democracy, but an authoritarian rule somewhat legitimized by a farcical electoral exercise. As a precondition for democracy, an institutional presence of the political opposition is critical. Democracy, as French philosopher Raymond Aron describes "in which the peaceful rivalry for the exercise of power exists constitutionally." The need for a strong ideological opposition with clear commitment to secular values is particularly vital for a multi-religious country like India, which is being ruled by the BJP under Narendra Modi, with an open admiration for rightwing majoritarian politics. Thus, the revival of the Congress Party under Rahul Gandhi as a powerful political alternative is to be seen more important for the country than for the party and its supporters.

India may raise with Washington issue of Pakistan using US-made anti-tank missiles

(News Agencies) India is likely to raise with the Trump administration the use of US-made anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) by Pakistan Army to target Indian troops along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir, defence ministry sources indicated on Saturday. The Pakistan Army had used the ATGMs during heavy shelling on an Indian Army team along the LoC in Rajouri district of J-K last Sunday in which four army men including a captain were killed, the sources said. Army sources had said that

the Pakistan Army used 120mm mortars and the ATGMs in the Rajouri attack, adding usually Pakistan uses 80mm mortars to target Indian posts along the LoC.

The security establishment here is understood to have been concerned over use of US-made ATGMs by Pakistan considering the expanding Indo-US strategic ties. "We are going to raise the issue with them (the US)", said a source. The defence and security ties between India and the US have been on an up-

swing. In June 2016, the US had designated India a "Major Defence Partner" intending to elevate defence trade and technology sharing with India to a level commensurate with that of its closest allies and partners.

The Army last week had clearly indicated that it would take retaliatory action against the killing of four army men. The sources said that Pakistan has been escalating the hostilities along the LoC and in hinterland in J-K to vitiate the atmosphere ahead of panchayat polls in the state.

'This is third world bulls***'



Osama Bin Laden



White House has downplayed the possibility of such a ceremony.

Navy hero turns on Prez over his plan for a military parade

PRESIDENT Donald Trump's plan to hold a military parade in Washington, DC, is being criticised Thursday by the Navy SEAL who claims to have killed Osama bin Laden.

Robert O'Neill, who was part of the successful SEAL Team 6 raid on the Pakistani compound used by bin Laden as a hiding spot in 2011, broke with Trump over a plan to hold a procession in the nation's capital featuring US military hardware.

'A military parade is third world bull****,' O'Neill tweeted on Thursday.

'We prepare. We deter. We fight. Stop this conversation.'

In a follow-up tweet, when someone mentioned that military parades were common in France and Russia, O'Neill replied: 'Yes. Third World. If Russia or France were powerful enough to take

over the world, they would. We are yet we don't. That's called First World.'

O'Neill, who has been a Trump supporter since the presidential campaign, had dinner with the president at the White House this past fall.

The two even took a picture together.

O'Neill is regarded as a national hero for

his role in the bin Laden raid, although there is dispute as to whether he is the one who fired the fatal shots which killed the Al Qaeda leader.

He says that he was the one who took out bin Laden, but a conflicting account from a former SEAL Team 6 comrade in arms,



US Navy SEAL Robert O'Neill (above-left), a Trump supporter, criticised the President's plan for military procession.

Matt Bissonnette, claims that the arch-terrorist was killed by a number of SEALs after he was initially wounded.

The Pentagon has disavowed Bissonnette, who got in trouble because he failed to turn over the manuscript of his book to the Defense Department before it was published.

Bissonnette is also under investigation for allegedly revealing

classified information, according to The Intercept.

Trump's plan for a military procession even drew criticism from another supporter of the president, Fox News' Brian Kilmeade.

On Fox & Friends, the show which Trump praises consistently, Kilmeade said on Thursday that a military parade would 'seem like a waste of money.'

Trump lied about \$1million discount for Melania's ring

DONALD Trump lied about the \$1million (£6 crore) discount he received for a 10-carat Graff Diamonds engagement ring bought for Melania in 2005, reports state.

Graff Diamonds' chairman, Laurence Graff, claims Trump's admission to the New York Times was a lie.

Graff asserted — in an email sent from his home in Gstaad, Switzerland, on January 26 — that while it was 'a pleasure to do business with' Trump, he was given 'no favours' when he bought the D-flawless cut 10-carat diamond.

The company was said to have received increased publicity as a result of the discount Trump received, the Times reported.

'Only a fool would say, 'No thank you, I want to pay a million dollars more for a diamond','' said Trump in 2005.

'We don't sell items for publicity value,' explained Graff CFO Nicholas Paine to Forbes.

While Graff and Paine refused to disclose the price, the Times



Melania posed with the ring for her White House photos.

had reported that the ring was retailed for \$1.5million.

'He paid for [the ring] in full, and immediately,' said a third source, with direct knowledge of the transaction, to Forbes. They further said that Trump did indeed lie about the deal.

Trump purchased a second Graff diamond for Melania for their 10 year anniversary in 2015. Melania famously posed with the large 25-carat ring for her official White House photos. It is reported to be worth \$3million.

THE Eiffel Tower has been closed and authorities are telling drivers in the Paris region to stay at home as snow and freezing rain have hit a swathe of northern France.

The company that manages France's most-visited monument said the 19th-century Eiffel Tower will be closed all day Friday and Saturday 'to ensure the security of visitors'.

Workers with hand shovels will carefully clear snow from the intricate ironwork and de-ice stairs and platforms.

The company said they cannot use salt because it could corrode the metal and damage the elevators.

Heavy snowfall across northern France overnight caused widespread travel disruption on Wednesday with hundreds of motorists spending the night in their cars and around 700 travellers sleeping in two Paris train stations.

French authorities set up makeshift shelters at roadsides across the Paris region, near Orly airport to the south of the capital and at the Austerlitz and Montparnasse stations in the city.

In all, around 1,500 people had to be sheltered between Tuesday night and Wednesday morning.

Some flights were cancelled at Orly, according to

Eiffel Tower closed amid 'deep freeze'

Eiffel Tower will be closed till Saturday 'to ensure visitor security'.



the airport's travel information. More snow is forecast on Friday and authorities are warning of dangerous conditions in about a quarter of the country.

Meanwhile, ISIS on Thursday threatened to invade Paris in a new video showing an attack

on the Eiffel Tower. The French city is described as the 'capital of degeneracy' by jihadists who warn of a siege by militants and a surprise raid launched from 'ground tunnels'.

The footage shows what is described as a 'French military vehicle' representing the 'Army of Satan' and extremists launching an ambush.

More snow is forecast on Friday & officials are warning of dangerous conditions

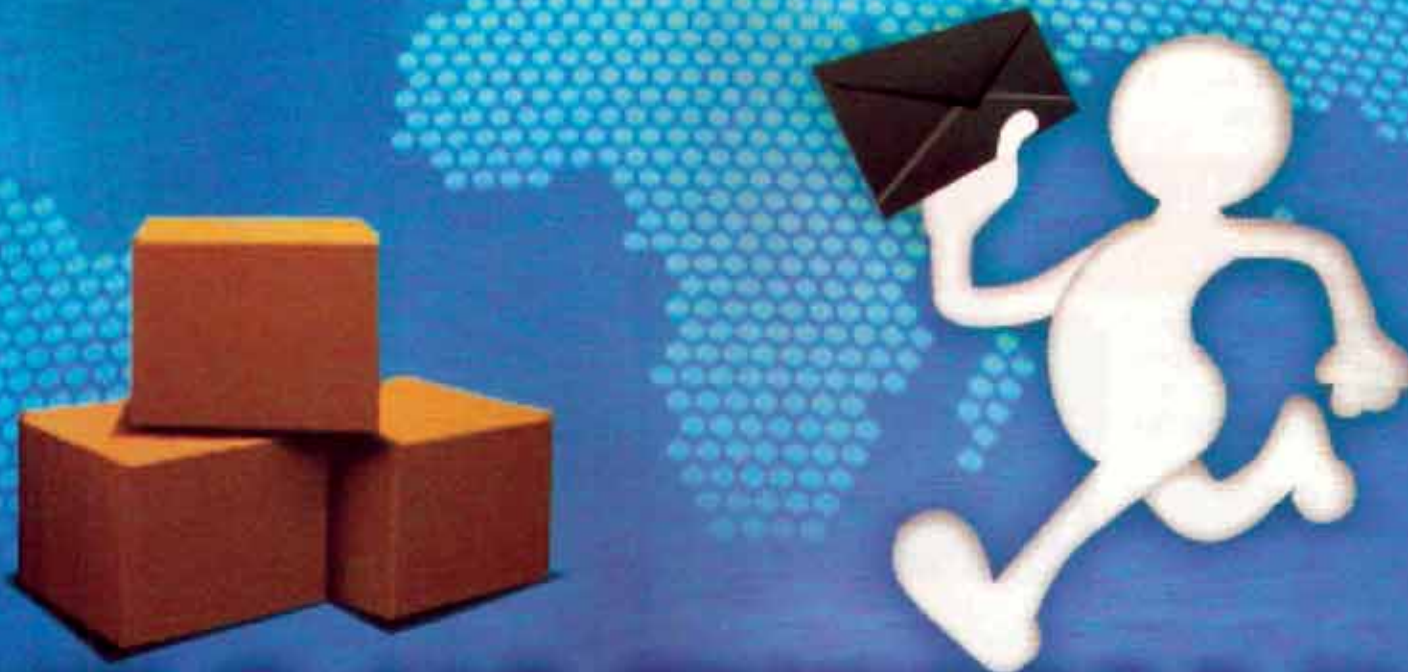
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Panth And A Foreign Hand

For those who believe history moves in a straight line, and what's past is past, some signs can set you thinking. Like you're being awakened to a bad dream—a strangely familiar one—and bits and pieces of memory flash by, brought back to life. Words that recall a time of great tumult—Khalistan, Sikh radicals, Bluestar, 1984 pogrom—are abuzz again. If your attention has been focussed elsewhere, little pieces of news are recalling an epoch filled with thousands of unknown victims, marking out new stirrings full of old forebodings.

'The foreign hand'...rings a bell? It was one of the oft-heard phrases of the 1970s—both bogey and shadowy -reality. Is it making a comeback of sorts, in a new avatar? Why are overseas gurudwaras banning Indian authorities—not just politicians, even diplomatic functionaries? Is there a new mistrust on all sides? What exactly is going on in Canada and the UK, two countries that host the Sikh community's busiest hubs outside India?

The ban came, like a fort's gates clanging shut, in December 2017, when the management committees of 14 gurudwaras in Canada issued a terse statement: "Pursuant to the Trespass to Property Act (1990), the management of these gurudwaras reserves the right to bar entry to officials of the Indian government, including but not limited to Indian elected officials, Indian consular officials and members of organisations who seek to undermine the Sikh nation and Sikh institutions." The word 'nation', of course, floats ambivalently between the old sense of community and the more modern meaning.

Soon, similar declarations followed in the UK—forming a rather unprecedented chain of events. Apparently, these firmans formalise a soft ban that was already in place. Hardliners mince no words, saying it's meant to prevent Indian mission officials from "running pro-India and anti-Khalistan propaganda". That speaks of a much higher level of ideological hardening—and counter-engagement—than may have been suspected by common Indians. Even so, a ban is more of a statement, since no one could have addressed a gathering at gurudwaras without permission from the management anyway. And it's a delicate line: despite the ban, an Indian official in the UK paid a personal visit to a gurudwara, which has not been barred.

What set off this new drawing of borders, if you like? One immediate provocation was the November arrest, in Punjab, of Glasgow-based Sikh activist Jagtar Singh Johal (Jaggi), who had come down for his wedding in October. Police suspect him of involvement with a series of political murders over the past two years, including of RSS/right-wing figures, but talk of Jaggi being implicated in a false case and custodial torture soon spread among the diaspora. Some UK gurudwaras protested the arrest: as British media kept up a sharp focus, even premier Theresa May had to mention it.

The first physical ban was in Melbourne

where a Sikh stopped an Indian mission official from entering a guru-dwara to protest Jaggi's arrest. Then came the ban in Canada, followed by a similar ban by 96 gurudwaras in the US, which also extended it to members of the Shiv Sena and the RSS. The 'Free Jaggi Now' campaign is truly global.

Punjab Police have found links between two terror modules busted in 2017 and four Sikhs currently living in Canada. Not all these voices are radical or secessionist—many Sikh rights groups openly disavow extremism—but it's part of the spectrum, and a growing part. What lies behind this resurgence of Khalistani politics? Several factors. At one level, deep anger over the thwarted justice for the 1984 pogrom blends with the radical charter that predated it. Canadian politics, where migrant Sikhs are now major players, offers a hospitable space to cultivate this hard dissent towards India. If one end of it articulates genuine human rights issues, at the other there's a whole ecology built around Khalistani politics and activism; indeed, an economy too. The UK differs perhaps only in the concentrated pitch of voices. Into this mire come accusations that Indian officials are into spying and manipulation of events in gurudwaras.

This offshore radicalism is also organically linked, and bleeds right back, to the narrative unfolding in Punjab. An extreme, religion-tinged language is never too far away from mainstream politics in the state—and this sector of opinion links back to Canada and the UK. Since the mid-1990s, when militancy faded out here, the public sentiment backing it also largely petered out. Strands simmered in the fundamentalist corners of panthic politics, occasionally manifesting itself—such as in incidents targeting the many Dalit religious and cultist movements. The recent killings too fall into these shadow zones. Some non-violent activist groups such as the Dal Khalsa have officially aligned with Kashmiri separatists in common demands for a referendum on self-determination. In India, news of the ban was received with dismay. It's being read as coming out of a view that equates Indian officials with Hindutva footsoldiers: an unfortunate collapsing of categories because the Indian State, while it has security concerns that are real and as valid as any other country's, flows from a secular constitutional code. But its rejection is fairly pointed: the Canadian ban was declared on a day when gurudwaras were observing the death anniversary of Indira Gandhi's assassins. Though, to be sure, some other gurudwaras have started to question the ban, saying places of worship are not meant for politics. Yet, Khalistani separatism is no covert creed: its activists operate both under-ground and "overground". Jaggi's website neverforget84.com, an online database, is a regular haunt for sympathisers. It has no direct espousal of violence—only history, protest songs/poetry, writing on Sikh issues—but it's coloured by Khalistani themes and a section describes

slain militants as "Khalistan shaheeds" (martyrs). The roster features fallen members of the Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan, Khalistan Commando Force (KCF), Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF), Sikh Students Federation and ISYF, Khalistan Liberation Army and so on—many of them proscribed terrorist organisations. Such online exhortations for solidarity also help create sentiment in favour of families of the slain extremists and those in jail, serving sentences or awaiting trial. Hardliners in gurudwaras routinely pass around donation boxes to raise money for their "welfare". That's the benign end; the keener edge moves below the radar. Its GPS map has to be inferred from piecemeal lines.

Sources in the police claim Jaggi was linked to Gursharanbir Singh, an alleged BKI member, and the two had met in France in 2014 shortly after the arrest of KLF chief Harminder Singh 'Mintoo' in Delhi. Gursharanbir regarded Mintoo's arrest as a loss and decided to become more active in India. He is believed to have planned many of the recent attacks. Jaggi's family and lawyers vehemently deny he had any direct or indirect links to terror activities.

Anyway, hardliners soon decided Jaggi's arrest was a result of Indians

spying on Khalistani sympathisers at offshore gurudwaras. Neutral observers believe RAW spooks do keep a watch on activities in these zones because of the extremist presence, but linking that to Jaggi's arrest may be flawed reasoning. Punjab Police seems to have relied on traditional policing, ploughing its trail through arrests and interrogations. The police do not, as yet, think Jaggi was a "mastermind", but are keenly following the spoor. A vital element that links the stories, with usual ingredients like handlers in Pakistan, is also money.

The old terrorism was fuelled differently—an ex-RAW man calls it a "simpler" matter of Afghan drug money funding the guns, logistics and livelihoods. Now, police tracking the flow of funds into Punjab's radical circles trace it back to small donations in gurudwaras abroad, raised during regular cultural events: martial arts displays, kabaddi, wrestling, turban-tying competitions et al.

"Radicals have taken over most gurudwaras in Canada, the US and the UK, and organise events where the themes of Khalistan and persecution of Sikhs in 1984 are a running refrain," says a senior police officer. The "cultural glorification of slain -terrorists as martyrs in films and songs" is routine, he says.

Canadian parliamentary secy refers to Punjab as a 'country'



(News Agencies) A member of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government has referred to Punjab as a "country" in a statement made on the floor of the Canadian Parliament's House of Commons.

Kevin Lamoureux, a Liberal Party MP from Winnipeg in the province of Manitoba, made the faux pas on Wednesday while presenting a petition during routine proceedings of the House. According to the official report on the proceedings, he said, "Mr Speaker, I have a petition that has been signed by many constituents in regard to Canada's super visa for individuals who want to visit from abroad, whether it is from the Philippines, Punjab, or any other country." That had Indian officials shaking their heads, since Lamoureux also happens to be the parliamentary secretary to the leader of the government in the House of Commons, who is Indo-Canadian Minister Bardish Chagger. And the incident came just days prior to Trudeau's weeklong visit to India.

When contacted on the matter,

Lamoureux emailed a response with the transcript of the same petition presented the following day, with India replacing Punjab in the text: "For people from countries like India, the Philippines, and many others, it is of critical importance in the sense that it allows individuals to come to Canada for up to two years, go back home, and then return to Canada for another two years."

In the response to the Hindustan Times, he said, "Thank you for asking, earlier this morning I did another petition." He added, "It is my opinion that the Punjab is like many other communities a part of India. 95% of the correspondence that I send to India is related to the constituents of mine who have family/friends in the Punjab."

The Super Visa allows parents and grandparents of Canadian citizens or permanent residents to remain for up to two years in the country while visiting. The "concern" expressed by Lamoureux was that "many of them are not being allowed to have their visas renewed for the additional two years after their initial visit."

(News Agencies) Amid chants by the Opposition, Prime Minister Narendra Modi today accused the Congress party of dividing the country, in the Lok Sabha. The PM was replying to the debate on the motion of thanks to the president's address in the Lok Sabha. "Aapne Maa Bharat ke tukde kar diye, iske bavajood ye desh aapke sath raha, aap uss zamane mein desh mein raaj kar rahe the jis samay vipaksh na ke barabar tha," (You divided Bharat Mata, despite that this country stood by you. You were ruling the country when there was almost no opposition," Modi said amid chants of Opposition's loud slogans of ' 'jhutha bhashan bandh karo', 'jhutha ashwasan bandh karo' (Stop your false speech, stop giving false hopes.)

Modi alleged that Congress party only focussed on the glorification of the Gandhi parivar.

"Aapne (Congress) pura samay ek parivar ke geet gaane me laga diya, ek hi parivar ko desh yaad rakhe saari shakti usi mein laga di. Agar neeyat saaf hoti toh ye desh jahan hai, usse kahin aage hota, (You spent your entire time to glorify one family. You spent your entire energy to make the country remember just one family. If your intentions were right, this country would have been much ahead of where it is now)," he said.

"Loktantra Congress ye Nehru ji ki den nahi hai, Loktantra hamari ragon mein hai hamari parampara mein hai, (Democracy is

Opposition Chants 'Jhute Bhashan Band Karo' As Modi Speaks In Lok Sabha



not Congress or Nehru's charity. It's in our blood, our culture.")

"Aap loktantra ki baat karte ho.. ? Aapke PM Rajiv Gandhi ne Hyderabad Airport par utar ke apni hi party ke Dalit CM ko khule aam apmanit kiya tha. Aapke (Congress) muh pe Loktantra shobha nahi deta! Isliye kripa karke aap humein Loktantra ka paath mat padhaiye, (You talk about democracy? Your PM Rajiv Gandhi had humiliated a Dalit CM of your own party. You don't teach us lessons on democracy,)" he went on to say. In a direct attack at the Congress party, Modi also said that had Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

been our first Prime Minister, 'entire Kashmir would have been ours.' Slamming Congress for its 'arrogance', Modi said no Congress leader has ever acknowledged contribution of previous governments in the country's growth.

"Yeh Narendra Modi Lal Qila se kehta hai ki desh aaj jahan hai usmein peechli saari sarkaron ka yogdaan hai, aisa kisi Congress neta ne kabhi nahi kaha, (This Narendra Modi says from Lal Quila that wherever the country is today is because of contribution of previous governments. No Congress leader has ever said this.) "You are playing 'Hit and run'

politics, throwing dirt on the other party and running away, but the more dirt you throw at Lotus, the more it shall bloom," he further added. The BJP has issued a whip asking its members to be present in the House today and tomorrow, as the government may introduce some important bill on Thursday in the Lok Sabha where the ruling NDA has a big majority. The debate on the motion of thanks to President Ram Nath Kovind's address to the joint sitting of the two Houses of Parliament on the opening day of the Budget Session began Tuesday. It was initiated by the BJP's chief whip Rakesh Singh.

Supreme Court allows fractured auction of Aamby Valley assets as no bidder for whole

the proposal of selling the property in parts after liquidator and receiver told that two corporate houses—Mahindra and the Piramal Groups—had expressed interest in buying some of the assets of Aamby Valley.

Aamby Valley is Sahara's most valuable project, comprising luxury resorts, man-made lakes and an airport. A meticulously planned city with world-class infrastructure and facilities, Aamby Valley is spread over 10,000 hectares near Pune in Maharashtra. Senior advocate Darius Khambata, appearing for the receiver, told the bench that Aamby Valley was a huge property and it might not be possible to sell it at one go as no one participated in the auction process which was advertised not

only in India but in other countries also. He said that there were many saleable assets within Aamby Valley, including international school, golf course, hotels and restaurants, which could be sold to raise the money which the company was to pay to SEBI. He also told the bench that movable properties, including 23 Mercedes cars and hundred other vehicles, could also be easily sold.

He said that process had already been initiated for identifying the saleable properties and the list would be prepared by the end of March.

Senior advocate Arvind Datar, appearing for SEBI, told the bench that Sahara was still to pay Rs 11,569 crore out of Rs 25,781 crore of the principal amount to the market

regulator.

Sahara's advocate Vikas Singh, pleaded the court not to put the assets under hammer and contended that the company had already refunded the money to its investors. He asked the court to direct to direct SEBI to first hold verification of investor documents and proposed to give bank guarantee for the due amount. He said that the company had already paid Rs 50 crore for digitization of the document but the market regulator was not verifying it,

The apex court, which had earlier attached Aamby Valley property, said that selling of the assets could not be stayed and gave green signal for fractured auction of the property to fetch the amount due on Sahara.

In January 2012, Sahara valued the property at Rs 34,000 crore but the liquidator has pegged its worth at Rs 43,000 crore. It had on July 25 last year allowed official liquidator, appointed by it, to auction the property under the supervision of Company Judge of Bombay HC and Justice A S Oka. Instead of monthly exercise of fixing the instalment to be paid by Sahara group, the apex court had decided to go whole hog to fetch over Rs 9,000 crore which was still to be paid by the corporate house to SEBI.

Sahara chief Subrata Roy who was arrested and spent almost two years behind bars for not paying the amount was released on May 6 last year and has been out of jail since then.

CIC Pulls Up Finance Ministry For Saying It Has No Information About Vijay Mallya's Loans

According to a report by the news agency, PTI, the CIC during a hearing on the matter pulled up the ministry with a strong remark saying the ministry's response was "vague and not sustainable as per law".

Chief Information Commissioner R K Mathur, while hearing the matter of one Rajiv Kumar Khare, told the finance ministry official that the Right to Information (RTI) application filed by the applicant should be transferred to the proper public authority.

The finance ministry official may have claimed that the ministry does not have information on the loans sanctioned by different banks to Mallya or the details of

the guarantee given by Mallya against those loans, but the ministry had responded to questions in this regard in Parliament in the past.

Union Minister of State for Finance Santosh Gangwar had responded to a question on Mallya on March 17, 2017, stating that the person, whose name was mentioned (Mallya), was given a loan in September, 2004 and that it was reviewed in February, 2008.

The Rs 8,040 crore loan was declared a non-performing asset (NPA) in 2009 and the NPA was restructured in 2010, he had said.

"As reported by PSBs, an amount of Rs 155 crore has been recovered by

conducting a mega online auction by selling from the seized properties from defaulting loan borrower Vijay Mallya," Gangwar had told the Rajya Sabha on March 21.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, during a debate on demonetisation in the Upper House on November 17, 2016, had termed the loan issue of Mallya a "terrible legacy" that the NDA government had inherited from the previous UPA regime.

But as Khare failed to get a response from the finance ministry to his RTI application, seeking details of Mallya's loans, he had approached the CIC.

The term "information" under the RTI Act means any record which is held by or

under the control of a public authority.

Khare was initially told by the ministry that the information on Mallya's loans could not be given because of the exemption clauses in the RTI Act related to personal safety and prejudicial effect on the economic interest of the State.

"The respondent (the finance ministry official) further stated that the said information was not available with the ministry. He stated that the information sought by the appellant might be available with the banks concerned or Reserve Bank of India," the chief information commissioner noted. He directed the ministry to transfer the application to the public authority that held the information.

By Lipa Negi

LOOKING for some adventure this summer? There is no better one than tracking the footprints of leopard or watching a tiger fiercely chasing its prey. Catching the big cats in your camera or spotting them while the sun sets in the background makes up for a thrilling holiday.

If it is indeed your calling, then the coming summer could be the perfect time to go shooting the tigers. With your camera, of course. The wild animals in this season often come out in open, looking for water or prey near a water body. This makes them easier to spot. It is also a good thing that India's more than 500 sanctuaries and forest reserves are teeming with wildlife, so good experience is often guaranteed.

With improved infrastructure and carefully designed safaris, a tourist nowadays can easily get a taste of exotic and wild experience at these sanctuaries. "Nothing beats sipping hot soup on a cool night under the wooden roof amidst the jungle," says Karan Anand, Head (Relationships) at Cox and Kings Ltd.

According to him, the increasing inquisitiveness among people to explore the wild has made wildlife sanctuaries a tourist hotspot. "We have seen an increase of 5-10 per cent during the last five years," he says.

He adds that nowadays an increasing



Summer is the best time to catch the big cats and other wild animals as they come out, looking for water or prey near a water body. India's more than 500 sanctuaries and forest reserves are teeming with wildlife.

WILD SUMMER

Head to these sanctuaries to experience the best of India's rich wildlife

number of holiday goers plan at least one trip to a wildlife sanctuary in a year. "In recent times, many hotels and accommodation facilities have popped up, giving luxury stay to people even when they are on a wildlife tour," says Anand.

Others in the tourism industry agree with him. "Better hotel infrastructure, improved connectivity to remote wildlife reserves, luxury camps, jeep safaris and customer-focused facilities provided by various travel operators have changed the perception of wildlife holidays," says Neelu Singh, Director and CEO, Ezegol. So these sanctuaries are not only attracting photographers and students but also families and working professionals, looking for a thrilling break from their daily routine.

Also, these various conservation drives have helped bring these sanctuaries in spotlight. Eager to head into a jungle? Here



One-horned rhino is unique to Assam's Kaziranga National Park.

are a few wildlife sanctuaries that you can consider this summer:

KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK, ASSAM

Some animals are unique to India, at least now. One-horned

rhino is one such animal. And it lives in the Kaziranga National Park, which is its only remaining natural habitat. To catch a glimpse of this rhino, you will travel to Golaghat district of Assam where the Kaziranga Park is situated. The best time

to visit the park is from November to April, which means if you want to go now, you should hurry up. Apart from the rhino, the park is also a home to the wildlife unique to India's Northeast.

BANDHAVGARH IN MADHYA PRADESH

Chase the shyest inhabitant of the wild — the Chinkara — in Bandhavgarh. And if you get lucky, you can also get to spot the park's rarely sighted leopards. Bandhavgarh is home to more than 25 species of mammals and over 250 species of birds along with 80 types of butterflies and a number of reptiles!

CORBETT NATIONAL PARK, UTTARAKHAND

Nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, the Corbett National Park is the abode of the tigers. You can spot the big cat here against the backdrop of the

lush-green forest. It also has a considerable population of black bears of the Himalayan origin, jackal, sloth bear and of course the marten which is yellow throated jungle cat.

RANTHAMBORE NATIONAL PARK, RAJASTHAN

One of the largest national parks in north India, Ranthambore National Park lies at the edge of a plateau, and is bounded to the north by the Banas river and to the south by the Chambal river. Its unique location is one of its many attractions. There are several lakes in the park. The historic Ranthambore fortress lies within the national park. Besides tigers, it is also home to sambar deers, panthers, marsh crocodiles, civets, wild boars and leopards. With more than 250 species of birds nesting here, the park is a birdwatcher's delight too.



Anupama Dayal, fashion designer

'Travel is the way I reward myself'

Designer Anupama visited Nagaland and found inspiration for her new collection

■ What is your idea of a perfect holiday?

A mix of relaxation, creativity and some inspiration to come back with.

■ What do you enjoy most on holidays?

Leaving the city and my various roles behind. I enjoy being me on holidays.

■ One holiday destination you keep going back to.

Chiang Mai in Thailand. From massages to its craft villages, the place offers a creative break from the chaos of the city. In India, it has to be Kashmir — there is no place like it.

■ What's your happiest holiday memory?

Beaches of Puri with my grandparents

— sun baked and stuffed with prawns.

■ What do you like to do while on a holiday?

I like to immerse myself in the local culture and cuisine.

■ What does travel mean to you?

It's the way I reward myself for being alive and kicking.

■ What is your favourite fashion destination?

Paris because the city has taught me so much about fashion.

■ Any destination that's on your bucket list. And why?

There are too many. I am seriously hoping to get some time to visit Chile

and Bolivia this year.

■ Your favourite shopping destination. There are three — India, Turkey and Thailand

■ A destination you recently explored. Nagaland was on my bucket list from a very long time. My visit to this North-eastern state has inspired my latest Fall/Winter collection — 'Fight & Feast'. With high aesthetic quality and design, the weaves of Nagaland are compelling.

■ A place where you would like to have your holiday home?

I am a mountain and jungle girl. So it would be somewhere in the Himalayas.

— As told to Lipa Negi

Yoga may benefit people suffering from high blood pressure and sugar

Yoga might serve as an effective lifestyle intervention to reduce chronic inflammation and manage high blood pressure, finds new research.

(News Agencies) Suffering from increased blood pressure and high blood sugar? One year of yoga training may help, a new study suggests.

According to the researchers from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, one year of yoga training decreased pro-inflammatory adipokines – signalling proteins released by fat

tissue – and increased an anti-inflammatory adipokine in adults with metabolic syndrome and high-normal blood pressure.

The findings support the beneficial role of yoga in managing metabolic syndrome by favourably modulating adipokines, the researchers mentioned.



Metabolic syndrome is a cluster of conditions – increased blood pressure, high blood sugar, excess body fat around the waist and abnormal cholesterol – that occur together, increasing your risk of heart disease, stroke and

diabetes. “These findings help to reveal the response of adipokines to long-term yoga exercise, which underpins the importance of regular exercise to human health,” said senior author Parco Siu from the University of Hong Kong. For the study, published in the Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science in Sports, researchers investigated the effect of yoga on people suffering from metabolic syndrome with high-normal blood pressure by exploring modulations in pro-inflammatory adipokines (leptin, chemerin, visfatin and plasminogen activator inhibitor-1 or PAI-1) and an anti-inflammatory adipokine (adiponectin). Participants in the yoga group underwent a yoga

training programme with three one-hour yoga sessions weekly for a year. The participants’ serum were harvested and assessed for adipokines. Generalised estimating equation (GEE) was used to examine the interaction effect between one-year time (pre vs post) and intervention (control vs yoga). GEE analyses revealed significant interaction effects between one-year time and yoga intervention for the decreases in leptin and chemerin and the increase in adiponectin concentration in the serum examined.

Yoga exercise might serve as an effective lifestyle intervention to reduce chronic inflammation and manage aspects of metabolic syndrome, the researchers noted.

Acne may put you at risk of major depression. Here’s what new research says

The study found that the risk for major depression was highest within one year of acne diagnosis and decreased after that.



(News Agencies) Acne is associated with increased risk of developing major depression in the first years after the condition appears, reveals a study.

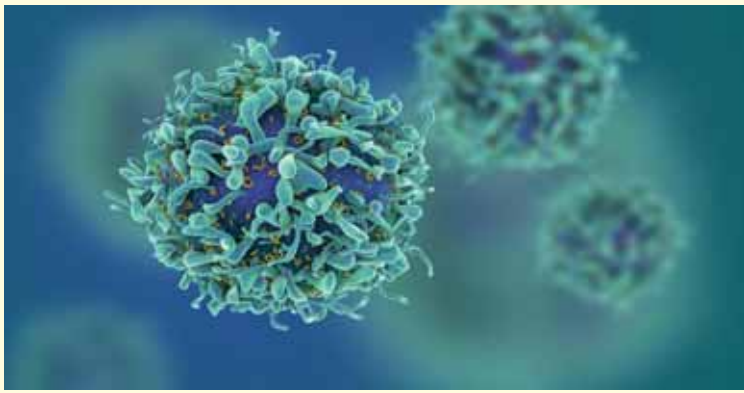
The analysis included data from The Health Improvement Network (THIN) (1986-2012), a large primary care database in the United Kingdom.

The investigators found that the risk for major depression was highest within one year of acne diagnosis – a 63% higher risk compared with individuals without acne – and decreased thereafter. The results indicate that it is critical that physicians monitor mood symptoms in patients with acne and initiate

prompt treatment for depression or seek consultation from a psychiatrist when needed. “This study highlights an important link between skin disease and mental illness. Given the risk of depression was highest in the period right after the first time a patient presented to a physician for acne concerns, it shows just how impactful our skin can be towards our overall mental health,” said lead author Dr Isabelle Vallerand, of the University of Calgary, in Canada.

“For these patients with acne, it is more than a skin blemish. It can impose significant mental health concerns and should be taken seriously.” The findings have been published in The British Journal of Dermatology.





There's hope for cancer patients

A new way to kill liver cancer cells and stop tumour growth found

Scientists have developed a two-way process to achieve the goal and starve the liver cancer. The researchers explained the process as first, they silenced a key cellular enzyme, and then they added a powerful drug.

(News Agencies) Scientists have found a new way to kill liver cancer cells and inhibit tumour growth. They have developed a two-way process to achieve the goal and starve the liver cancer. The researchers explained the process as first, they silenced a key cellular enzyme, and then they added a powerful drug.

According to researchers at the University of Delaware, this research could accelerate the development of new treatments for liver cancer, which is currently difficult to cure. Often, surgery is not an option for liver cancer, and the available drugs are only modestly effective. More than 82% of liver cancer patients die within five years of diagnosis, according to the National Insti-

tutes of Health. This project originated in labs at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where researchers grew liver cancer cells and manipulated their expression of an enzyme called hexokinase-2. Then, the cells were treated with metformin, a diabetes drug that decreases glucose production in the liver.

The research group led by Maciek R. Antoniewicz designed a set of experiments to measure how cancer cells respond to the loss of hexokinase-2, an enzyme that helps cells metabolize glucose, their food source.

"The complexities of mammalian metabolism require a systems-level analysis of the underlying networks and phenotypes, and this is what my lab specializes in," he

said. The UD cohort used mass spectrometry to analyze the cancer cells and then determined intracellular metabolic fluxes for cells with and without hexokinase-2. They suspected that cells deprived of hexokinase-2 would starve and die, but surprisingly, they found that targeting hexokinase-2 alone had only a marginal impact on stopping cancer cell growth. Another weapon, metformin, was needed to complete the job.

"The importance of our paper is that we show that targeting hexokinase-2 can indeed be a successful strategy for cancer therapy when you also target a second compensatory mechanism with the drug metformin," said Antoniewicz.



Time for a spa-ctacular you

These days, spas go beyond being just beauty-oriented to offer holistic therapies.

(News Agencies) A visit to a spa can be for different reasons — preparation for a special occasion or a family function, a break from that corporate rut, a way to get over heartbreak, or just a simple reminder to love oneself. It is one of the most pleasant ways to be relieved of pain from certain areas of the body, and for getting mental refreshment. We round up six spa treatments that have the potential to spruce you up this season.

CLARINS SPA, W GOA

The spa at Vagator offers several treatments spanning a wide range of time. From half an hour treatments to packages of up to four days, one can choose as per their need. The expert suggested The Art Of Touch, a 90-minute scalp-to-toe therapy, and Youth-

ful Lift a 60-minute therapy focusing on the face, neck and shoulders.

The Art Of Touch

Using a range of products depending on the type of skin, the masseuse works at relaxing the muscles with a combination of various techniques. The therapist works the knots and tension in the muscle, and in certain delicate regions such as face, massages them gently only to relax the tissues.

Post the treatment, the body felt lighter yet energised. The masseuse with her expert manoeuvring had pretty much eased out all the stiffness in the body. The blood circulation had palpably improved, and there was a feeling of refreshment as if the body was given an internal shower. The treatment is

concluded with hot towel compressions. For those with open pore problems, this step should be avoided because it seemed to aggravate the pores. In all, for the total rejuvenation this therapy gave, it was surprisingly light and didn't make one tired as compared to other whole body treatments.

Youthful Lift

During the procedure, multiple rounds of massages, mostly with light and easy strokes, are given to the face. The first round uses a scrub that deeply exfoliates the skin. Post this, there are a few rounds of massages with different products, which mainly amount to pampering the skin after the thorough scrub. The treatment is concluded by applying a face pack and hot compress.

The therapist advised not to

wash our face with any product until the next day, so that the products can penetrate well.

The USP of this treatment is that the results — reduction of fine lines and improvement in skin texture — are visible almost immediately. When enquired about the reason behind it, the spa manager explained that it is because of the properties of their base oil, which is hazelnut oil. It is light, and quickly absorbed into the skin, lending to it an instant glow.

HEAVENLY SPA, THE WESTIN MUMBAI GARDEN CITY

The spa, situated in Goregaon, offers natural therapies integrated with their modern spa concepts for a well-rounded wellness experience. From their signature massage treatments to holistic packages, one can customise treatments from an array of massages, scrubs, wraps and facials.

Foot Reflexology

After a soothing warm towel for the feet, which also increased the blood circulation, warm oil was applied in slow strokes by the therapist. The trained professional then began applying pressure on trigger points on feet, and the rhythmic motions proved to be relaxing. The pressure was applied to the feet using thumb, fingers and hand techniques, and it varied from hard to soft, and then hard again. It was done on reflex points from one end of the feet to the other. The massage of the fleshy ball of the foot and pulling of the toes was quite intense. The 30-minute massage treatment not only provides relief from stress and pain, but also increases blood circulation.

Quick Stress Reliever

In this traditional Ayurvedic potli (poultice) massage, the spa attendant asks you to choose one stone

from hope, love and gratitude. The emotion associated with the stone is something they ask you to concentrate on, as they start massaging your back and neck. The masseuse uses broad, firm strokes to massage the back, and alternates between using potlis — heated herbal pouches filled with oil — and hands. She uses them in different patterns to soothe the tension and take away the stress. The therapy ends with a 10-minute steam session to ensure that the goodness of the oil seeps into the body. True to its name, this express massage treatment lasting 30 minutes is apt for those who want to get quick relief from tension and knots, from the back and neck area.

JIVA SPA, TAJ

The spa at the Santacruz property focusses on holistic healing — it does not offer any kind of face treatments and only specialises in body massages, body wraps and Ayurvedic massages that stimulate blood flow and promise to soothe tense muscles. Our therapist suggested a 45-minute head massage and another 60-minute head-to-toe relaxing massage.

Champi

The session starts with a dry head massage in which the shoulders and neck are massaged firmly with varying strokes. Then, the masseuse starts dabbing warm, Ayurvedic oil, beginning from the forehead. A lot of oil is used in this process, so inform the masseuse if you prefer lesser oil to be used. The oil is left to seep into your scalp for about ten minutes, after which the masseuse uses different strokes to soothe the scalp.

Mercedes-Benz apologises in China for quoting Dalai Lama abroad

A spokeswoman for Mercedes' parent company, Daimler AG, said it acted at its own initiative.



(News Agencies) Mercedes-Benz has apologized in China for quoting the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader who is reviled by Beijing, in a social media post abroad in a reflection of foreign companies' heightened sensitivity to the Communist government's possible reaction to their activities worldwide. The quote appeared on Instagram, access to which is blocked by China's internet filters. Chinese web surfers copied it onto domestic social media. In a statement, Mercedes-Benz apologized Tuesday for "wrong information" that "hurt the feelings of Chinese people." A spokeswoman for Mercedes' parent company, Daimler AG, said it acted at its own initiative and had not heard from Chinese authorities. Last month, Beijing ordered Marriott, Zara and other companies to apologize for calling Taiwan and Hong Kong countries on websites or promotional material.

Using Facebook Messenger Bots to Boost Your Business

(News Agencies) Facebook Messenger is a free tool for all Facebook users, including businesses, that is accessible through both the website interface and a downloadable Messenger app available for all phone operating systems.

Its purpose is simply for communication, which is very important for any business with a profile.

Many users do some searching before committing to making a purchase and an easy way is to check a Facebook page or profile for further insights.

We've touched on this in other posts regarding providing great customer service and how users will use social media as their customer service channel but for many small businesses the usual answer is simply: that's great to hear but we simply don't have the time or manpower to monitor Facebook Messenger.

This becomes a problem when one of the metrics users can see is your typical response time to messages. In their minds, they are checking to see how responsive customer service is after making a purchase

just in case they have any questions or issues, and if they see the average wait time to a response being 3 days, they're not likely to buy.

This is what has necessitated Facebook Messenger Bots but it has expanded greatly since.

The Bots now are something you can create yourself for your business. Depending on what you do, this can be as simple as providing support or as complicated as completing a full sales or marketing funnel task your website is typically used for.

Companies who allow online orders through their website can configure a custom bot to handle orders directly through messenger, which saves them from simply pointing the user back towards their website. If your purpose is to share information through the platform you can create a bot that sends updates on your business to users through Messenger.

The idea is to take your user's journey beyond the task of searching and finding. Bots are not limited to Facebook, but it is the biggest platform for them. Having a



Messenger-driven Live Chat option on your website can make a big difference in your conversions and bounce rate.

Your users are more likely to stay when they see some level of interaction and engagement. When it goes well beyond simple canned responses and actually provides a service, you then have something real that can be used to give your business a big boost. Why direct them back to your website when the purpose of the website can be completed right in the service channel?

CCI slaps Rs 136 crore fine on Google for unfair business practices



(News Agencies) The Competition Commission today imposed a fine of Rs 136 crore on search engine major Google for unfair business practices in the Indian market for online search. Passing the order on complaints that were filed back in 2012, the regulator said the penalty is being imposed on Google for "infringing anti-trust conduct". Globally, this is one of the rare cases where Google has been penalised for unfair business ways. It was alleged that Google is indulging in abuse of dominant position in the market for online

search through practices leading to search bias and search manipulation, among others. The penalty amount of Rs 135.86 crore translates to 5 per cent of the company's average total revenue generated from India operations from its different business segments for the financial years 2013, 2014 and 2015, according to the CCI order. The Competition Commission of India (CCI) said it has given thoughtful consideration on the submissions made by Google on issue of penalty and found it appropriate to impose a fine.

SC allows Sahara to sell Aamby Valley in parts though court-appointed liquidator

Two companies Mahindra and Mahindra Ltd and Piramal Group had expressed interest in buying Aamby Valley.



(News Agencies) The Supreme Court on Wednesday allowed Sahara Group to sell its Aamby Valley township, spread over 6,700 acres in Pune district, in parts through a court-appointed liquidator. The official liquidator of the Bombay high court along with the court receiver was directed to submit a report assessing the sale-

able parcels of the project and their approximate value by end of March. Thereafter, the sale process will begin. The direction came after the court was informed by the official liquidator of the difficulties in selling the township as a whole. "This is a huge plot and there have been two failed instances at selling it as a whole as there were no

bidders. It's a suggestion that the court may consider allowing us to sell it in the form of parcels as it will make the process much easier," said counsel Darius J Khambata on behalf of the official liquidator. Khambata told the court that two companies — Mahindra and Mahindra Ltd and Piramal Group — had expressed interest in buying Aamby Valley, either as a whole or in parcels and are inspecting the assets. The apex court on 23 November had appointed a receiver to ensure that the Aamby Valley auction proceeds smoothly over allegations that a previous attempt to sell the property was obstructed. Chief Justice Dipak Misra also held that the process must be hurdle-free and warned Sahara chief Subrata Roy would be sent back to jail if it was obstructed again.

Trump tells global Davos crowd: 'America is open for business'

(News Agencies) DAVOS, Switzerland — President Trump made the case for his "America First" policy before an elite gathering of political and business leaders Friday, saying "America is open for business." In a closing speech at the World Economic Forum in this Alpine resort, Trump stressed that his administration aims to make the United States more competitive for business.

He also vowed that the U.S. is committed to free and open trade, but on terms it considers fair and reciprocal. "The world is witnessing the resurgence of a strong and prosperous America," he said. "There has never been a better time to hire, to build, to invest and to grow in the United States. America is open for business and we are competitive once again." Trump told the Davos

audience that "when the United States grows, so does the world." "American prosperity has created countless jobs around the globe and the drive for excellence, creativity and innovation in the United States has led to important discoveries that help people everywhere live more prosperous and healthier lives," he added. Underscoring his "America First" thinking on foreign policy, Trump said he was here "to represent the interests of the American people, and to affirm America's friendship and partnership in building a better world." "America first does not mean America alone," he emphasized. "Like all nations represented at this forum, America hopes for a future in which everyone can prosper, and every child can grow up free from violence, poverty and fear."

New York Fashion Week

Tom Ford debuts 'very sexy' men's underwear collection

Tom Ford is best known for his sharp suits, which start at \$5,000 off the rack. But on Tuesday, the designer unveiled an underpants collection at the New York Fashion Week Fall/Winter 2018. He described the designs as "very sexy" and "very real."

His models strode out on a violet-carpeted runway at the Park Avenue Armory to the strains of Sting and Lana Del Rey, his Tobacco-Vanille fragrance hanging thick in the air and distributed as party favors at the end. The 56-year-old, Texan-born, movie-making designer who told Women's Wear Daily that he designs "for the hypothetical six-foot-three version of my 27-year-old self" sent out topless models in a dazzling array of silk, metallic and animal print briefs paired with socks. Launching both the underwear and watches at his show, Ford described the former in his WWD interview as "very sexy" and "very real."

Revealing that he had become a vegan and would limit his use of fur, there were drain-pipe style pants, eyes shielded by science-goggle and Bono-style yellow sunglasses.

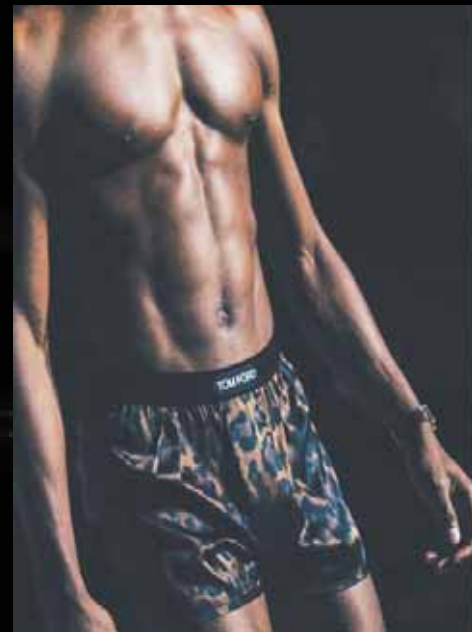
Sportswear was referenced in hoodies, oversized bags and sneaker-

style loafers. For evening wear, he offered metallic turtle necks, a sparkly blue snakeskin print jacket, or black and silver shimmering in the light.

There was pin stripe and tweed for the boardroom, and suits reimagined in the summery colours of pale yellow and delicate pink — a nod to European tradition given a very American, contemporary makeover. The show comes a decade after the designer, who shot to fame at Gucci, launched his eponymous men's label. Apart from a show to open his London store, he has previously done small men's presentations.

Now based in Los Angeles, but having previously lived in London, Ford is best known for his sharp suits, which start at \$5,000 off the rack.

"Living in Los Angeles is making my clothes, both men's and women's, more relevant," he told WWD. "Much of the rest of the world, they want luxurious pieces but they are dressing in a more casual



way." Men's Fashion Week closes Wednesday. Ford will unveil his women's fall/winter collection at the same Park Avenue Armory set Thursday.

(News Agencies) Tom Ford used his first fully-fledged men's runway show in New York on Tuesday to unveil a debut underpants collection, bathe a Manhattan landmark in violet and give his classic suiting a Los Angeles twist.

It was a fall/winter 2018 collection of quintessential Tom Ford tailoring and statement sunglasses, offering the international jet-set a blend of James Bond, ski chic, London mod and California breeze.

Show must go on: New York Fashion Week weathers



(News Agencies) Here is a look at the top trends expected to dominate when Fashion Week formally gets underway in New York on February 8, preceded by three days of men's shows.

New York Fashion Week kicks off the global fall/winter 2018 season fighting to stay relevant blighted by sexual harassment scandals, an industry in chaos and designers jumping ship.

More than 2,30,000 people flood the US financial capital to attend the style fest that

generates nearly \$900 million a year for the city. It is currently scheduled twice-yearly in February and September.

But as social media influencers wrestle power from fashion editors and buyers, more labels than ever are opting out this season, abandoning New York for Europe or tearing up the runway show altogether.

Here is a look at the top trends expected to dominate when Fashion Week formally gets underway on February 8, preceded by three days of men's shows. The sexual

harassment watershed engulfing the United States and rocking the fashion industry has seen the Council of Fashion Designers of America unveil new guidelines in an attempt to clamp down on misconduct.

"We have zero tolerance for unsafe environments and strongly encourage everyone in our industry to report abuse in the workplace," wrote CFDA chairman Diane von Furstenberg in a letter announcing the guidelines, which also raise awareness against eating disorders and advocate greater

diversity.

Misconduct accusations have seen celebrated photographers Terry Richardson, Mario Testino and Bruce Weber barred from collaborating with Vogue and Vanity Fair publisher Conde Nast. The magazine empire has issued a new "Code of Conduct" to include bans on alcohol on sets, on under-18 models without a chaperone, and for nudity or "sexually suggestive" poses to be agreed beforehand.

But the Model Alliance has demanded "meaningful and lasting change," saying "voluntary standards" without education, proper complaint mechanisms and independent enforcement "are not going to work."

Marchesa, the label of Harvey Weinstein's estranged wife Georgina Chapman, cancelled their Valentine's Day show, still reeling from the fallout of his downfall over multiple allegations ranging from sexual harassment to rape, in favour of "an updated format." Added to the schedule is a #MeToo fashion show — named for the movement against sexual

harassment — on February 9 to raise awareness.

"The only way to change things is to be united... and stand up and say, 'That is not OK, we are not going to accept this anymore,'" organiser Myriam Chalek told The Daily Beast. Alexander Wang, the New York king of cool whose urban chic is so adored by off-duty models, is making his swansong before this summer ditching the traditional February-September calendar in favour of June-December.

His departure follows the exit of Proenza Schouler and Rodarte for couture week in Paris on the same schedule, and Altuzarra, which moved to Paris Fashion Week. "Why do something that's not working?" Stephanie Horton, chief strategy officer at Alexander Wang said at a recent industry event in New York. "The business model needs to change because the consumer has changed." Steven Kolb, president and CEO of the CFDA, predicts that other designers could follow suit. "I think it'll be a period of chaos, maybe, but chaos always calms down at some point," he told the same event in New York.

The Cloverfield Paradox movie review

A bafflingly bad film that feels like a rejected Black Mirror episode

The Cloverfield Paradox movie review: Netflix's marketing for the movie was way more interesting than the film itself, which is a pockmark on the legacy of JJ Abrams, and an insult to its cast.

The Cloverfield Paradox

Director - Julius Onah

Cast - Gugu Mbatha-Raw, David Oyelowo, Chris O'Dowd, John Ortiz, Aksel Hennie, Daniel Bruhl, Zhang Ziyi, Elizabeth Debicki

Rating - 1/5

Since it's virtually impossible to discuss The Cloverfield Paradox without inadvertently revealing spoilers (and attracting the wrath of the internet), let's have some fun and imagine, for a moment — keeping with the theme of this movie — three alternate realities. There is a podcast hosted by the comedians Paul Scheer, Jason Mantzoukas and June Diane Raphael called How Did This Get Made? On the show, they talk about really bad movies — the worst of the worst; the sort that Amanda Waller would put in a hole and throw away the hole and then enlist to join the Suicide Squad. The conversations can sometimes go on for as long as two hours as the hosts offer rambling speculation about the chain of bad decisions that must have gone into producing those movies. I'd be willing to bet good money that The Cloverfield Paradox will be featured on a future episode.

So we might as well kick things off already. I've come up with three possible scenarios that could possibly explain how such a bafflingly bad movie was made.

Scenario 1:

After having completed

production on the film, Paramount Pictures had the decidedly late brainwave that they could capitalise on the increasingly popular Cloverfield brand and rework the movie as a new chapter in the series. Director Julius Onah was sidelined in favour of producer JJ Abrams, who was forced to reshoot the film — I could swear some portions were directed by him — and incorporate it into the Cloverfield Universe. Unhappy with the final movie, Paramount, having completely lost faith in the project, decided to launch it into space, from where it was rescued by Netflix.

Scenario 2:

Paramount Pictures began production on a movie without a finished script, and midway through production, hired a new writer to rework it as a Cloverfield installment. When the plan backfired, they completely lost faith in the project and launched the film into space, from where it was rescued by Netflix.

Scenario 3:

Paramount, Abrams and Onah always intended this movie to be a part of the Cloverfield Universe, and it was simply because of a series of bad breaks that it ended up not meeting the standards of the studio, who had by then completely lost faith in the project and launched it into space, from where it was rescued by Netflix. Regardless of which scenario actually happened,

there is one common thread: Paramount lost faith in this movie. They abandoned it in space. Whether or not Netflix did it a favour by rescuing it is another matter.

Since its surprise release on Monday morning, there have been several comments online suggesting that, were the audience to temper their expectations and treat The Cloverfield Paradox as "just another Netflix movie," then the chances of them enjoying it would significantly improve. There's so much wrong with this sentiment. The first, and most worrying observation would be that, in the eyes of the general moviegoer, a Netflix movie is somehow synonymous with mediocrity — the sort of movie that would never merit a trip to the theatre, so it's comparatively less disappointing if it turns out to be terrible.

That's hardly an image Netflix would want to foster. Only a couple of years ago, it was seen as the destination for prestige content, and as an empowering place of creative freedom, but that was before they unleashed an unstoppable string of Adam Sandler comedies and Bright (which I liked, but most people didn't). For The Cloverfield Paradox to turn out to be as plodding and poorly conceived as it did, is disappointing, to say the least. Especially since I have, over the last decade, developed



a strong fandom for this series. I watched the first movie four times in one week, back in 2008.

What made that movie special was that it employed a unique new perspective (literally) to a genre that had been done to death. It reduced the apocalypse to one, hilariously inept man's point of view. Even 2016's surprise sequel, 10 Cloverfield Lane, was a bold new take on a familiar set-up. The problem with this movie is that it has no perspective despite the connections it insists on shoehorning in. It's a generic Alien clone tacked onto a different franchise. An entire parallel Earthbound plot — most of the movie is set in outer space — gives off a very strong whiff of something that was added months after the movie was finished, in an attempt to tie it into the Cloverfield Universe. So much happens in this movie, and yet, we get nowhere. There is an underwater sequence that ends

with the water turning into ice (remember, this movie is set on a space station); a character has their hand chopped off and promptly makes a joke about it, while the severed hand spends the rest of the movie crawling about like Thing from The Addams Family. There is even a scene lifted directly from the chestbuster sequence from the first Alien movie. Only this time, perhaps keeping in line with the rest of The Cloverfield Paradox, instead of a murderous xenomorph, a can of worms erupts from the infected person's body. What a waste of a fantastic cast, and a top-of-the-line crew, particularly star Gugu Mbatha-Raw and composer Bear McCreary. You can really tell they put effort into this, but that anonymous internet person was right. It's just another Netflix movie. Let's hope Overlord, the purported fourth in the series, isn't abandoned in a similar fashion.

The girl Salman Khan found: 8 gorgeous photos, videos of Loveratri lead Warina Hussain



(News Agencies) Salman Khan sure has an interesting way of doing things. He very well knows how India is obsessed with his wedding and the 52-year-old superstar milked it for all it is worth as he introduced his new discovery, Warina Hussain. For one hour, his fans believed Bhai — as Salman is fondly called — is finally announcing his shaadi. Well, no such luck for the actor was presenting to the world the lead actress of Loveratri. The film stars Salman's brother-in-law Aayush Sharma as the hero. He shared a photo of Warina and wrote, "Nothing to worry na @aayusharma ki film #Loveratri ke



liye ladki mil gayi Warina, Toh dont worry na be happy na." Aayush, who is married to Salman's sister Arpita, also shared on social media, "Time to welcome an important member to

the #Loveratri family - Warina!" Warina's popularity on social media skyrocketed soon after the announcement. She now has over 33 lakh followers. Born to an Iraqi father and Afghan

mother, the Bollywood debutant has trained at the New York Film Academy, according to her Instagram profile. Here are some more gorgeous photos of this Bollywood debutant...

Guess co-founder denies Kate Upton's sexual harassment claims

Paul Marciano has dismissed the supermodel's sexual harassment allegations and pointed out that she "still has provided no facts, no details, no dates and no circumstances" to back her claims.



(News Agencies) Guess co-founder Paul Marciano has vehemently dismissed the sexual harassment allegations made against him by Hollywood actor and model Kate Upton.

"Five days ago, Kate Upton tweeted that I abused my position at Guess to 'sexually and emotionally harass women. Ms Upton provided no details. Just the hashtag '#MeToo.' She leveled this malicious and false accusations only hours before a gala event at our headquarters in Los Angeles unveiling a new Guess campaign," Page Six quoted Marciano as saying.

He said, "As of today, Ms. Upton still has provided no facts, no details, no dates and no circumstances to back anything she has alleged."

Marciano alleged that the actress was "working with others" for some time to defame him. "The accusation is false. I have never touched Kate Upton. I have never been alone with Kate Upton. I have never acted inappropriately towards her," he clarified.

Upton, in a #MeToo message, last week accused of sexually harassing women in the fashion industry.

Taking to both Twitter and Instagram, the 25-year-old wrote, "It's disappointing that such an iconic women's brand @Guess is still empowering Paul Marciano as their creative director #metoo."

She continued, "He shouldn't be allowed to use his power in the industry to sexually and emotionally harass women #metoo." The #MeToo



movement sprung up in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein scandal, which saw the disgraced Hollywood mogul accused of a catalogue of inappropriate behaviour with young actresses.

Seen this Deepika Padukone shirt? Can you guess which famous US singer wore it too?



(News Agencies) Padmaavat actor Deepika Padukone shimmered in a rainbow sequins shirt by the famed designer on the cover of Vogue India's February issue. The glitzy get-up was from Ashish's autumn/winter 2017 collection. But the Padmaavat actor wasn't the first celebrity to don this fun, colourful garment. Click through to know who else rocked the same sparkly striped shirt.

Designer label Ashish's vibrant outfits are a hit with glamorous women in Hollywood and Bollywood circles: Deepika

shimmered in a rainbow sequins shirt by the famed designer on the cover of Vogue India's February issue. The glitzy get-up was from Ashish's autumn/winter 2017 collection. But the Padmaavat actor wasn't the first celebrity to don this fun, colourful garment — the shirt had been seen before! Taylor was seen sporting the same sparkly rainbow-striped shirt with a matching rainbow dress, for her Reputation album launch all the way back in November, 2017, certifying that her

girl-next-door look was well and truly dead. The remarkable sequin numbers on the two stars — albeit channelling the same daring, festive colours — had slight differences: Deepika's wore her's over a Lolli Swim beachwear for a splash of sex appeal, while Taylor donned a lustrous rainbow-striped Ashish mini dress with her matching button-down. But then, for the ultimate jaw-dropping looks, both went with minimal or no-jewellery looks and perfectly styled wavy hair.

Priyanka Chopra

I'm a serial monogamist, was in a very committed relationship

(News Agencies) Priyanka Chopra is probably the most famous Indian face in Hollywood right now. She is signing films with established actors and her TV show Quantico is soon returning for its new season. Does this much work leave her with the time to date anyone? Well, she has answered some personal questions in an interview with Filmfare magazine.



"I'm a serial monogamist. I was in a very committed relationship. But since almost a year, I've been single. I've met a bunch of people. I've gone out with people. I let someone woo me but no... My mind hasn't exploded, not yet," responded Priyanka on being asked about her relationship status and whether she has met anyone interesting in the recent past.

However, she didn't take any names. Her career has reached new heights after her thriller show Quantico became a

major TV hit. She says she has dated someone while working in America, but it has not been taken to any meaningful conclusion. She said, "I've been single after a really, really long time. I get a lot of attention. But I don't know what to do with it. (Laughs) Of course, I like it. I'm a girl and I'm vain."

With a career spanning over 17 years, Priyanka has worked with major Bollywood filmmakers, but lately she has been focusing on her Hollywood career. She will soon be seen with Jim Parsons in A Kid Like Jake.

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