



## Republicans move to spend billions on Obamacare before they kill it

*Most concede they can't 'pull the rug out' from people until they replace it.*



STORY ON page 23



## Anything But Pacific

The Asia Pacific's future hinges on nuanced Chinese strategy and the unknown factors of a Trump presidency

(Agencies) December 7, 2016, saw the 75th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (December 8 in East Asia, thanks to the international dateline). The occasion was marked by visits of veterans to the site in Hawaii where World War II in Asia exploded into open conflict between the United

States and the Empire of Japan. The sombreness of the occasion was made deeper by the knowledge that this was almost certainly the last commemoration that would be marked by the presence of living figures who remembered the days of the Pacific War. Yet, while distance has robbed us of most of the

eyewitness accounts of that war, it has also enabled historians to come to some broader conclusions about its wider causes and meaning. One particular factor has come to the forefront of blame in recent years: the idea that mutual mistrust and misunderstandings helped drive two of the world's (Contd on page 21)

## Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

### Modi Slams 'Black Money Worshippers'



(Agencies) Bengaluru : At the 14th Pravasi Bharati Divas said to be the largest gathering of Indians living abroad -- at India's IT hub Bengaluru, Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently thanked the diaspora for supporting the government's move against black money. This year, the focus of the meet is on the role of youth in transforming society. Portugal Prime Minister Antonio Costa is the chief guest of the meet. The session is also being attended by Suriname Vice President Michael Ashwin Adhin, Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Vijay Goel and Minister of State for External Affairs V K Singh.

#### Here are the 10 big points from his speech:

In his address, delivered in English and Hindi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed the delegates, said, "corruption and black money have been corroding our system from within. India needed to take a stand and so we have."

PM Modi also said all holders of Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) cards should convert them to OCI (Overseas Indian Citizens) Cards.

(Contd on page 22)

### Plane-loads of NRIs to support Arvind Kejriwal



## Obama, Saying Goodbye, Warns of Threats to National Unity

(Agencies) Chicago — President Obama, delivering a farewell address in the city that launched his political career, declared on Tuesday his continued confidence in the American experiment. But he warned, in the wake of a toxic presidential election, that economic inequity, racism and closed-mindedness threatened to shred the nation's democratic fabric.

"We weaken those ties when we define some of us as more American



than others," Mr. Obama said, "when we write off the whole system as inevitably corrupt, and when we sit back (Contd on page 22)



# Town of North Hempstead Celebrates India Republic Day

(By a staff Reporter) Long Island- North Hempstead Town Supervisor Judi Bosworth and the Town Board joined with members of the India Association of Long Island (IALI) and the India American Forum (IAF) to celebrate India Republic Day on January 11 prior to the Town Board meeting at Town Hall in Manhasset. India Republic Day, celebrated on January 26, is the day that marks India's transition toward an independent republic. Aron Govil, CEO of Ducon Technologies, provided the keynote remark for the ceremony. Supervisor Bosworth recognized Govil and presented a proclamation and declared a special day of recognition in the Town for India Republic Day.



## PBD failed to address many pending issues, feel delegates



(Agencies) Even as the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas served as a platform for raising several issues,

a few delegates felt that the event did not address several long pending concerns.

While a few said the issues that concerned their everyday lives were not raised during any of the

sessions or offline meetings, the others said there were no specific solutions to issues discussed earlier.

A delegate, Khan from Saudi Arabia, said that they had sought solutions to improve the student exchange programme. "There was only a passing mention about this. We were not told in particular how our children would benefit from this."

Others from the association also pointed out that the fee disparity for NRI students was not addressed. Prior to the event, at a discussion, NRIs had also asked the ministry of human resource development to ensure that the involvement of agents in the education sector be minimised. "As a student, it was of interest for me. The other issues raised at the meeting were addressed. I wanted more clarity on what the government would do to ensure

students do not fall prey to middlemen," added a student from Mauritius, who did not wish to be named.

He added that representations have been given several times in the past to ensure colleges don't charge NRIs high fees. Yet, this was not assured. "We are Indians by origin. Why do our children have to face discrimination?" he questioned.

Delegates from the Gulf also said that the Indian community in Gulf countries had to face hurdles during last rites of Indians in these countries since they have to obtain several permissions. K K Usman, a member of a socio-cultural organisation associated with the Indian Embassy, felt that the event ignored the challenges that NRIs had faced due to demonetisation. "We thought they would give us some compensation," he said.

## H1B visa reform to increase IT firms' margin pressure: Report

(News Agencies) IT firms' margins will come under more pressure if the US government clears the H1B visa reform Bill -- 'Protect and Grow American Jobs Act', rating agency India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) said today. "...the employee cost of IT companies has increased over the past eight quarters and impacted margins negatively. The passage of the Bill would impact IT companies operations and might lead to further increase in the onshore efforts and subcontracting expenses," Ind-Ra today said in a statement. The key proposal in the Bill is to increase the salary of H1B visa holder to USD 100,000 (Rs 66 lakh) from USD 60,000 per annum and the cessation of an exemption of having a master's degree. The cash cushion and low debt levels that IT companies enjoy however will



mean the squeeze on margins will be credit neutral. The salary level that has been proposed is significantly higher than the average employee cost of Indian IT companies of under Rs 1 million (ranges between Rs 3 lakh to Rs 5 million).

Indian IT companies generate around 55-60 per cent of the revenue from the US. The onsite proportion of revenue exceeds the offshore portion and the subcontracting expenses as a percentage of revenue has increased by around 50-100 bps

over the last eight quarters for the top IT companies. "Further the removal of the exemption of possessing a master's degree to qualify for a H1B visa if implemented will reduce the talent pool qualifying for such visas and in turn result in either increased employee cost for hiring employees with higher qualification or subcontract work, both of which would increase the cost of operations and pressurise margins," Ind-Ra said. The US starts accepting the visa application under H1B typically from 1 April every year and issues around 65,000 visas to highly skilled professionals. A bulk of these visas are issued to technology companies belonging to various nationalities. Indian IT companies incur visa related costs in the first quarter of the financial year, the statement said.





# Indians Score Big with Queens Ambassador Awards



Contracts and since his retirement has been a community activist in Queens for the past several years. He serves or served as a President of several organizations including the Sikh American Friendship foundation, the Queens Civic Congress, the Saul Weprin Democratic Club, the Holocaust Center at the Queens borough Community College and on the Boards of Queens Borough President's General Assembly, Queens District Attorney's Advisory Council, Committee Chair of Community Board 8 and First Vice President of Queens Hospital Center's Advisory Board. His activity involves giving testimony at the NYC Council Hearings, addresses at

Churches and government agencies or institutions and fighting for the queens residents vis a vis the authorities especially on quality of life issues. He is a recipient of numerous accolades and awards for his work and contribution.

Ms. Malini Shah is a well-known community leader who is currently President of her diamond company, Difference Inc. In addition to running a successful jewelry business, Malini is the founder of Nriya Kala Kendra, Inc., a cultural organization dedicated to preserving and promoting the ancient and modern arts of India. Through classes, workshops, lectures, visiting artist

programs, Nriya Kala Kendra presents numerous educational programs all around New York City and abroad. She has spent more than 30 years teaching children in some of India's most prestigious schools, including the Modern School, one of India's most distinguished educational institutions. Sat on the Advisory Board of Queens Museum, Queens. She also serves as cultural ambassador and a community icon, and has traveled extensively all over the world for festivals sponsored by Indian Tourism Development, and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. At present she serves and volunteers as a Community and Cultural Liaison for Council Member Paul Vallone.

(News Agencies) A borough wide search by the Times Ledger Newspapers identified five members of the Indian Community who merited the Queens Ambassadors Award "Honoring immigrants who make Queens great" which will be bestowed on January 26, 2017 at the Gala

Dinner and Awards Ceremony to be held at LaGuardia Plaza Hotel in Queens. They are Harbachan Singh, Malini Shah, Dr. Uma Mysorekar, Dr. Dheeraj Kamalam and Jagir Singh Bains. Harbachan Singh is a former Chairman of the United Nations Headquarters Committee on

## Celebration of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, 2017

(Agencies) The Consulate General of India, New York in association with AIA (Association of Indian Americans) celebrated Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2017 (PBD 2017) at its premises on Saturday 8, January 2017. A large number of people including Ms. Letitia James, Public Advocate for New York and prominent leaders of the Indian American Community attended the event. Ms Suhma Kaushik, poet recited a poem from 'Radhika' by Dr. Om Prakash Gaur, Pravasi, her father. Welcoming the participants, Consul General Ambassador (Mrs) Riva Ganguly Das mentioned about the highlights of PBD and said Indians residing in US have increased in numbers to about 3.8 million and have been contributing richly to the USA, representing the best of Indian culture, ethos and values. A short film on

PBD as well as the speech of Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi on PBD Conference, Bengaluru was shown to the audience. In her remarks, Public Advocate Ms. Letitia James spoke of the enormous contribution of the Indian American community to US. There was a lively interactive session at which young people participated actively. Several new suggestions to increase interaction between the community and the Consulate were also made. A large number of members of media were also present. Since the Government of India has launched many new initiatives to engage the diaspora, we are seeing a reversal of trend. Recent years have seen a reversal of trend wherein many have returned to India because of the vast strides in enhancement of opportunities in India.

## Nikki Haley's Confirmation Hearing

### For US Envoy To UN Next Week

(Agencies) Washington : Indian-American South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley would appear before a Congressional panel for her confirmation hearing for the post of US Ambassador to the UN on January 18, an official has said.

If confirmed, Ms Haley, 44, the daughter of Indian immigrants, would be the first-ever Indian-American to serve on a Cabinet rank position in any presidential administration in the US.

Senator Bob Corker, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said in a statement that the nomination hearing to consider Ms Haley to be US Ambassador to the United Nations will be held on January 18.

Ms Haley, who will replace Samantha Power at the UN if confirmed, has already created history by becoming the first woman Indian-American Governor of a US State.

After Bobby Jindal of Louisiana, she is only the second ever Indian-American to be elected as the Governor of a State. Meanwhile, Ms Haley delivered her last State of South Carolina address before State legislators yesterday.

"South Carolina will always be with me. As I move into this new capacity, it is the lessons I learned from this state and its people, starting all the way back when I was a young Indian girl in small, rural



Bamberg who spent her time playing tennis and dreaming big, that I will take with me," she said.

Ms Haley described her departure from the State as a bitter sweet moment.

"It is a bittersweet thing, taking on this new challenge, moving on from this state that I so love, called to serve this nation I hold so dear.

"When the bitter gets a little too strong for the sweet, I try to think of the children's author, AA Milne, whose loveable character Winnie-the-Pooh so put it like this. How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard. And goodbye this is, for now," Ms Haley added. Born as Nimrata "Nikki" Randhawa, Ms Haley is the first minority and woman governor of South Carolina, a deeply conservative state with a long history of racial strife.

## Portuguese PM Gets Pravasi Bharatiya Award, NRIs From US Win At Least 6



(Agencies) Bengaluru : As per the list, six awards were given to NRIs from the US, the highest in the list, while two persons conferred the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman awards by President Pranab Mukherjee in Bengaluru today.

The first award was received by Portugal Prime Minister Antonio Luis Santos Da Costa for his contribution in the field of public service. Among the NRIs from the US, Hari Babu Bindal was

honoured for his contribution in the field of environment engineering, Nisha Desai Biswal for public affairs, Sampat Kumar Shidramapa Shivanagi for community leadership, while Mahesh Mehta, Ramesh Shah and Bharat Haridas Barai were awarded for their contribution in the field of community service. Neena Gill and Priti Patel from the UK were honoured for their contribution in the field of public service. In the list of NRIs from the UAE, Vasudev Shamdass Shroff and one organisation Indian Social and Cultural Centre were awarded. In the field of business, Rajasekharan Pillai Valavoor Kizhakkathi from Bahrain, Mukund Bhikhubhai from Canada and Susheel Kumar Saraff from Thailand were honoured.



# Clinton allies exact revenge on Trump

## Campaign aides flood the airwaves to pummel the president-elect.

(News Agencies) Donald Trump blasts Hillary Clinton. Clinton's aides launch a counterattack. Friday's headlines could have easily been ripped from the 2016 presidential election archives. A week before Trump will be sworn in as the nation's 45th president, the president-elect breathed life into a revival of the ugliest campaign in modern history, a polarizing slog Americans thought was behind them.

"What are Hillary Clinton's people complaining about with respect to the F.B.I. Based on the information they had she should never have been allowed to run - guilty as hell," Trump wrote in a pair of tweets Friday morning. "They were VERY nice to her. She lost because she campaigned in the wrong states - no enthusiasm!"

Those tweets followed a wave of former Clinton aides who took to network television screens Thursday after a Justice Department watchdog announced that it

would conduct a broad review of the FBI's handling of its investigation into Clinton's private email server during the presidential campaign. In the flashback to their campaign roles, the Clinton allies largely addressed the imminent Justice Department inspector general review. But former Clinton press secretary Brian Fallon poked the bear Friday morning, questioning the legitimacy of Trump's surprise Election Day victory over Clinton. "I think those tweets are just the latest indication that Donald Trump is someone who's very insecure in his victory, and I understand why. Every day there are new developments — new shoes dropping, so to speak — that call into question the legitimacy of his win," he told CNN. Fallon said Trump's transition team has been forced to confront the reality that Russia meddled in the presidential election by leaking hacked emails from the Democratic National Committee and Clinton campaign chairman John

Podesta's personal account. He called FBI Director James Comey's eleventh-hour letter to Congress a "sufficiently questionable" move that warranted an independent review. "I think Donald Trump is just trying to cling to whatever legitimacy still is in effect here, but I think the only things that will get to the bottom of these two issues are independent investigations," he added. Trump's transition team has long maintained that the allegations of the Kremlin's meddling in the U.S. election is a politicized effort from Democrats seeking to delegitimize Trump's victory. After months of rejecting the assessment from the U.S. intelligence community that Russia did indeed launch cyberattacks — with the aim of helping Trump get elected — the president-elect finally conceded Wednesday, "As far as hacking, I think it was Russia." Despite that concession — and a call Wednesday night from Di-

rector of National Intelligence James Clapper condemning the leak of a privately funded intelligence dossier on Trump's ties to Russia and assuring the president-elect that no member of the intelligence community leaked the 35-page file of unverified personal and salacious claims against the president-elect — Trump insisted via Twitter that the documents were likely leaked "by 'intelligence' even knowing there is no proof, and never will be." In a torrent of TV appearances Friday, former Clinton aides fanned out across the airwaves to counterprogram Trump, slamming his use of Twitter as his preferred medium to share an unfiltered burst of whatever he's thinking. They applauded the pending review of what they contend as Comey's unprecedented decision to alert Congress to the discovery of emails related to Clinton's server 11 days before the election.

# How much protein do you REALLY need?



(Agencies) Andrew Taylor has eaten only potatoes for a whole year. Well, almost.

He made his diet more nutritious by including sweet potatoes, and adding nut or soya milk to mashed potatoes. He also avoided vitamin B12 deficiency by taking supplements.

His cardiovascular health appears to have improved over the year, largely due to massive weight loss (50kg). He has cured his anxiety and depression, sleeps better and says he is fitter and healthier than he has ever been in his adult life.

However, at the beginning of the year-long challenge, there was much debate among dietitians and nutritionists about whether he would get enough protein from his potato diet.

In the UK, healthy adults are advised to eat 0.75g of protein per

kilogram of body weight each day.

However, this 'reference nutrient intake' is set at a high level to meet the needs of just about everyone in the population.

Most people need less than this, and the average requirement is about 0.6g per kilogram of body weight (that is, 60g for Andrew's current weight of about 100kg). Andrew ate about 3.5 to 4kg of potatoes per day, and together with the soya and nut milks used to mash the potato, it looks as though he managed to meet his protein requirements.

Although combating global warming may not have been the primary reason for his challenge, Andrew has done his bit for planetary health. Agriculture's greenhouse gas emissions are on the rise, with the largest source being methane produced by livestock. The agricultural sector is

the world's second largest emitter (after the energy sector) and the biggest thing that we can do to reduce these agricultural emissions is to eat less meat. Becoming vegetarian or vegan would not be an acceptable or achievable option for many people, but even aiming for a plant-based diet, and limiting meat consumption, would make a substantial difference. Scientific models have suggested that if average diets in the UK conformed to WHO healthy diet guidelines, it would reduce greenhouse emissions associated with food by 17 percent.

### Average day's diet for a man (2500kcal)

Meal	Food	Protein content (g)
Breakfast	Large bowl of porridge made with milk	14.7
	Banana	1.2
	Slice toast and butter	3.7
Snack	Cereal bar	1.8
	Apple	0.6
Lunch	Chicken pasta salad (100g chicken breast with green salad, tomatoes and 150g cooked pasta)	30.2 (chicken) 9.9 (pasta) 1.7(salad and tomatoes)
	Greek yoghurt	8.6
	Muffin	2.5
Snack	Hot chocolate	9.2
	Steak	29.1
Evening meal	Frozen peas	5.5
	Potatoes	3.1
	Mushrooms	0.6
	Salted peanuts	12.3
Snacks	Pint of lager	1.5

## Texas teacher, 24, who admitted to having sex repeatedly with her 13-year-old student



(Agencies) A Texas teacher who admitted to having sex repeatedly with her 13-year-old student and got pregnant with his child has been sentenced to 10 years in

prison. Alexandria Vera pleaded guilty to aggravated sexual assault of a child and received the sentence Friday, KPRC reported. The former Aldine

teacher, who has a six-year-old daughter, had admitted to having a sexual relationship with one of her eight grade students. Vera claimed the boy's parents accepted the relationship. Prosecutors said she had sex with him at least twice between September 30, 2015 and January 20, 2016. The former teacher got pregnant with the victim's child in January. She had an abortion when investigators started looking into the case, court records state. The former teacher faced a maximum sentence of 30 years. She will be eligible for parole in five. Authorities originally charged her with continuous sexual abuse of a child, but changed it to a lesser charge of aggravated sexual assault of a child when she pleaded guilty.



# 'Mastermind' behind Kim Kardashian Paris gem raid and a 70-year-old woman are among six new suspects charged by French police



(News Agencies) The alleged mastermind of the Kim Kardashian Paris robbery has been charged, according to a French prosecutor.

Those indicted, who include a 70-year-old woman, face prison sentences for last October's well-organised heist if found guilty.

A total of 10 have now been charged including five accused of a direct role in the robbery, during which Kardashian was bound and gagged, then robbed at gunpoint of jewellery worth almost £9 million.

Yesterday, authorities have filed the first charges against four suspects in the armed jewelry heist, and said more charges were expected to follow.

Kardashian West's sister, Khloe Kardashian, welcomed the step forward in the French probe as a

'kind of closure' and denounced the robbery as 'a disgusting act'.

The robbers made off with the reality TV star's 20-carat Lorraine Schwartz engagement ring worth £3.5million and a case of jewellery with a value of £5.24million.

The heist on October 3 was France's biggest jewellery theft involving a private citizen in more than two decades. Five suspects were identified by their surname initials as Aomar A., 60; Pierre B., 72; Francois D., 54; Harminy A. 29; and Christiane G., the 70-year-old woman. A sixth, who was named in full, was Didier Dubreucq, 61 and a convicted drug runner nicknamed 'Blue Eyes'. The prosecutor's office said yesterday that six more people could also be charged today.

Among those arrested



previously was Gary Madar, 40, brother of Ms Kardashian's limousine driver, Michael Madar, who has been released without charge. Gary Madar and an accomplice called Florus H, 44, are alleged to have informed the robbers of Ms Kardashian's schedule while she was in the French capital for Paris Fashion Week. The fourth man charged is Marceau B, 64, who allegedly travelled to Antwerp, Europe's diamond capital, to dispose of the jewels. He

has been indicted for concealment of stolen goods in an organised gang, and criminal association.

Marceau B. is also a career criminal, with more than 10 convictions behind him, including one in 1998 for possession and transport of counterfeit money, and one for aggravated theft. He was released from prison at the end of 2011 and charged six months later in a forgery case, but was finally acquitted last summer.

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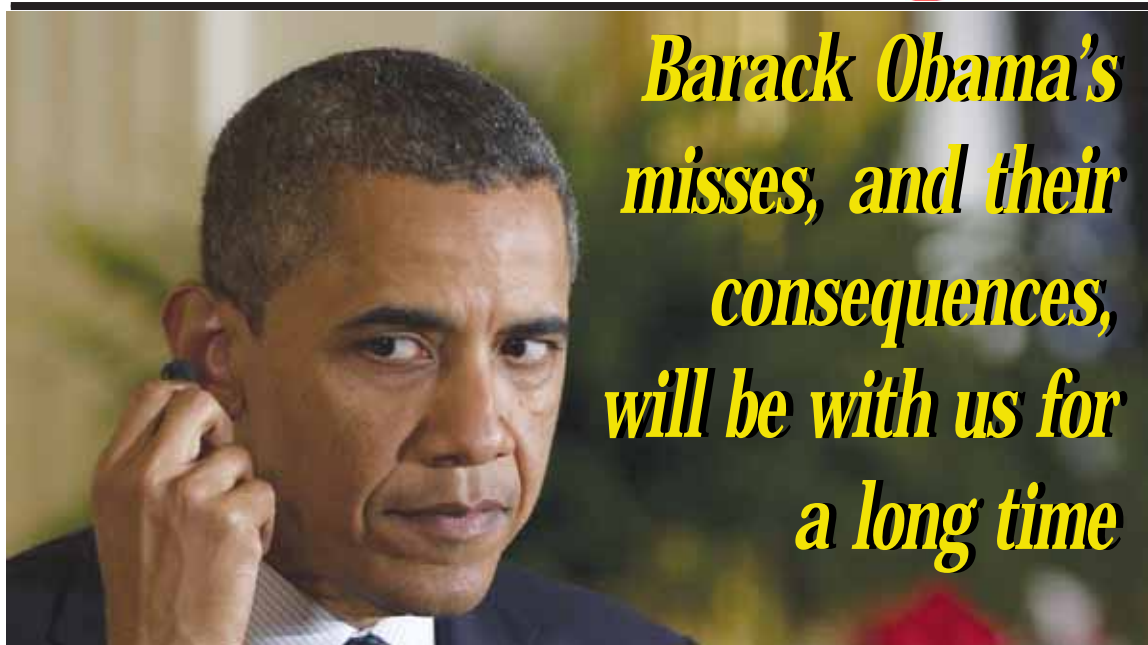
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## Barack Obama's misses, and their consequences, will be with us for a long time

As he enters his final week in the White House, it must give Barack Obama great satisfaction that so many Americans wish they could extend his lease on the property by four years more. The President has himself said, in a moment of rare braggadocio, that if the rules didn't proscribe a third term, he would have won last November's election. His approval ratings are extraordinarily high for any departing President, despite the extreme political polarisation and socio-economic divisiveness that characterised his term. Even before he has formally left, America is already missing its 44th President.

Much of this anticipatory nostalgia is down to the identity and character of the 45th President. The nearer Donald Trump's inauguration approaches, the more appealing Obama seems to get. I'm reminded of something an Iraqi sheikh once told me, in a different context: "When you're looking out to the desert from an oasis, it doesn't matter that the trees above you have no fruit, and the pond behind you is muddy... the oasis still feels like paradise."

There's a certain symmetry to Obama's presidency ending with favorable comparisons to the one to come, since it had begun with favourable comparisons to the one just past. The heady optimism that attended his inauguration, on January 20, 2009, was informed in great part by a sense of relief that George W Bush was finally gone. I arrived in Washington the very next day, to take up an assignment as the national security correspondent for Time Magazine, and practically everyone I met in the first few weeks was glad to be rid of Bush. If Trump had been elected that year, many of my interlocutors would have been looking back

on the Bush years in the way that sheikh might view a threadbare oasis.

Obama is, in this sense, lucky to have followed one of the most incompetent of all American Presidents, and to be followed by the most incomprehensible of them. This will colour, in mostly rosy hues, our view of his presidency for years to come. If Trump's turn at the wheel is as disastrous as his critics fear, it may be decades before the Obama years receive unaffected examination.

When dispassionate history gets around to training its long lens on the Obama presidency, the picture will be more red than rosy. This will especially be true of his record in foreign affairs, which is stained in the blood of hundreds of thousands of

innocents, and blackened by the betrayal of America's allies and ideals. Future generations may allow that some of his sins were of omission rather than commission — whereas Bush's were the other way around — but even so they will not, I suspect, let him too far off the hook.

Looking back, they will hold Obama to account for the ghastly tragedy that is Syria: His myriad excuses for not getting more involved — chief among them that the United States was gun-shy after the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq — will not stand the test of time. Leaders are meant to take unpopular decisions, and then persuade their people of their necessity. It will be noted that he never even tried. Scholars will conjure

up counterfactuals: How different might things have been if Obama had either stood aside from the beginning and allowed Bashar al-Assad to mow down his people; or, having allowed the pro-democracy uprising to believe America had their back, given them political or military cover (or both) to fight back against their oppressor.

Where Obama did try, in Libya, history will note that he did the barest minimum — providing some air support for the brave revolutionaries fighting the tyrant Muammar Gaddafi — but then quickly distanced himself from the aftermath, leaving the country in tatters. When things got really difficult on the ground, the President who had cheered on the uprising was nowhere to be seen.

In both Syria and Libya, historians will conclude, Obama's inaction helped open up space for the so-called Islamic State, and other terrorist groups, to operate. It also contributed to a refugee crisis that, in addition to the humanitarian catastrophe, caused deep disruption in European politics, society and economics. Then there's the matter of Yemen, often lost among today's headlines, where another tragedy is playing out. Scholars will note that Obama did nothing to stay the hand of America's Arab allies, mainly Saudi Arabia, as they tore into the poverty-stricken country. Indeed, the US continued to sell

the Saudis the arms it used for the purpose, until a very late pang of conscience. In Yemen, too, Obama's decision to look the other way greatly strengthened Al Qaeda's local franchise, and gave IS fresh recruits.

On Ukraine, Obama will likely be faulted for deserting an ally — one that had voluntarily destroyed its nuclear arsenal in exchange for promises of American protection — at its time of greatest need, allowing Russia to march unchallenged into the Crimea. By caving so easily to Moscow's bullying, Obama will also be seen as having emboldened Vladimir Putin to flex his muscles elsewhere, most notably in Syria.

Even the few foreign affairs successes Obama now claims will be found historically flawed. He will be remembered as the man who gave the order to kill Osama bin Laden, but did absolutely nothing to punish Pakistan for harbouring America's greatest enemy; as the President who, in his haste to make a nuclear deal with Iran, enabled the Shia theocracy in Tehran to ratchet up Islam's sectarian war; and as the leader who removed the shackles from the Castro regime without pressing it to do the same for the Cuban people.

We will miss Obama for a while. But his misses, and their consequences, will be with us for a long, long time.

## Demonetisation: Why Arun Jaitley's reading of economic activity is a bit baffling

Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has yet again questioned the demonetisation critics, outright dismissing concerns of an economic slowdown in the aftermath of the note ban resulted cash crunch.

The FM's optimism gives one hopes of an economic rebound after the 8 November move by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to scrap Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes, to kill black money and fake currency, hit multiple layers of Asia's third largest economy.

But, for an observer, Jaitley's reading of the economy is a bit baffling mainly for two reasons.

One, there isn't actually an increase in the monthly tax collection figures pre and post demonetisation and two, even if one argues that tax collection numbers have improved and hence things are looking up in the economy, this reading is at odds with a slew of other key macroeconomic numbers that should corroborate any such claim. Let's look at the tax figures Jaitley spoke about first.

This is what the FM said: The government's direct tax collection increased by 12.01 percent at R 5.53 lakh



crore in April-December of 2016 compared with the year-ago period, while indirect tax collections soared by 25 percent to Rs 6.3 lakh crore. In December 2016, indirect tax collections grew 14.2 percent on a year-on-year basis and 12.8 percent over November 2016, the FM said. Jaitley used these numbers to support his argument that demonetisation hasn't done any major harm to the economy that is projected to grow 7.1 percent (by RBI and government estimates) in the current fiscal. The numbers Now, take a closer look. These numbers need to be seen on a monthly basis to get a more accurate comparison of pre and post demonetisation periods. According to the government's own data, growth in net

indirect tax collection (with additional revenue measures) slowed to 14.2 percent in December from 23.1 percent in November. Similarly, the excise collection growth fell to 31.6 percent in December from 33.7 percent in November. Growth in direct tax collection slowed to 12.01 percent in April-December, compared to 15.2 percent growth posted in April-November. The point is indirect and direct collections have actually slowed in the post demonetisation period. This shouldn't be the case in a normal scenario since tax collections tend to improve during festival season. If economic activity is picking up, the collections should have been higher.

But the bigger point here is that even if there is a rise in tax collections, this may not indicate an uptick in economy since some part of it can be seasonal and incidental, although directionally a positive trend. To understand what is happening on the ground, one need to look at multiple macroeconomic indicators, which do not support Jaitley's optimistic views so far. Key indicators show a deceleration in November core sector growth numbers to 4.9 percent as (Contd on page 23)



# The Obama Paradox *Spare a thought for the small pravasi*

*Our first black president has an unyielding faith in the goodness of America. It got him elected. And it will cost him his legacy.*



The myth of Barack Obama usually begins with his speech to the 2004 Democratic National Convention, and for good reason—it was the speech that jump-started his political career, putting the then-state senator on the fast track to national office. But it wasn't the speech that made him president. That speech was delivered at a moment of crisis. His former pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright, was in the middle of a media firestorm over a sermon he had given in 2003 in the wake of the Iraq invasion. "No, no, no. Not God bless America," thunders Wright in the now-infamous video. "God Damn America!"

Had this just been the case of a controversial preacher, Obama might have survived by ignoring it—treating it as a distraction from "the issues." But Wright was more than controversial; he was black. And he was speaking in a black religious and political tradition that condemns America for its treatment of black and brown people, for the genocide of natives and the enslavement of Africans, for internment and displacement. In Wright's eyes, America was sinful, and until it atoned for those sins, God would deny His blessings. Not God Bless America. God Damn America!

For Obama, who built his political appeal on his distance from this rhetoric—from the tenor and tone of traditional black politics—Wright's sermon was a disaster in the making. To operate in the mainstream, to attain influence and power, black public figures have to navigate a narrow strait of acceptable behavior. They cannot indulge their anger or give way to their passions. And for Obama, who sought an office all but reserved for white men, he had to prove that he wasn't an Al Sharpton or a Jesse Jackson, that he held no resentment or frustration with the country. And so on March 18, 2008, Obama delivered an address in Philadelphia now known as his "A More Perfect Union" speech. In it, he repudiated Wright's anger without dismissing its sources, and along the way he demonstrated the qualities that have defined him as president: a sense of balance, a willingness to look to the better angels of his opponents, a belief that there is always common ground.

Now, on the eve of his farewell address, 10 days before the inauguration of Donald Trump, the most celebrated speech of Obama's career hits the ears a little differently, as does the sermon that necessitated it. What the Jeremiah Wright of "God Damn America" lacked in admiration for the country, he made up for in clarity about its nature and its sins. He refused to look away from the dark corners of American history, or treat them as mere "zags" on the road to progress. He was clear-eyed about racism as a motive force in American life. He knew we cannot escape our history. Had Obama absorbed those lessons, he would have been better prepared for the backlash that will be the undoing of his legacy. Had Obama not been so quick to explain away Wright's pessimism, he would have seen the dangers that lay ahead. But then he likely wouldn't have been Barack Obama, president of the United States. This is the great irony of the moment: The optimism that helped Obama reach this office—the same faith in our ever-perfecting union—is wholly inadequate in the face of the revanchist rage that gave us President Trump. "The profound mistake of Reverend Wright's sermons is not that he spoke about racism in our society," Obama said in Philadelphia.

The prime minister, ever the skilled orator, threw in a hookline to the thousands at a Pravasi Bharatiya Divas event in Bangalore saying, "To me, FDI means First Develop India through Foreign Direct Investment, the norms of which have been fully liberalised for non-resident Indian and persons of Indian origin." His aim was to enthruse the



diaspora to engage in the government's flagship programmes like Digital India, Make in India, Start-up India, Swacch Bharat Abhiyan and Namami Gange which, of course, could push all round development.

But the NRI is also canny about where he puts his money. Despite all our best efforts, the ease of doing business in India is still daunting. Anyone investing here would want basics like safety for employees, a good quality of life and certainly less red tape.

The other aspect of the pravasi story is that of the huge remittances which flow in from the diaspora. And it is here that the government has consistently failed to highlight the pravasis who have unfailingly sent money home, keeping parts of the economy afloat over the years. While it is laudable that the government tries to attract big ticket investment from NRIs, it should also recognise the contribution of the small pravasi, mainly from the Gulf who engage in myriad, often menial, jobs and send home a whopping \$35.9 billion dollars in remittances, the figure having slid slightly thanks to the drop in oil prices.

Though we now have a very proactive external affairs minister in Sushma Swaraj, many Indians working in West Asia do so in conditions of extreme hardship, often with no access to their travel documents that are in the custody of their employers. Many have no job security and can be dismissed with little notice. Yet, in places like Kerala, often described as a remittance economy, their flow of money keeps many households going. Thanks to the global slowdown and dip in oil prices, many of them have had to return home with no safety net. The pravasi divas could also be an opportunity for the government to look into their problems and concerns and consider perhaps re-skilling those who have lost their jobs abroad.

The idea of creating a national data repository is a positive one as it will enable prospective employers to bypass middleman and reach out to people whose skills they are seeking. Remittances make up 3.7% of GDP. The government must act as a facilitator for those wishing to seek jobs elsewhere as well as provide a conducive atmosphere to those who wish to return. Maybe next time around, the government could spare a little more thought for the small pravasi also.



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# Seven Questions About Health Reform

On Tuesday, Donald J. Trump said he wanted Congress to repeal the Affordable Care Act right away and replace it with a new plan "very shortly thereafter." But before they abandon all the work that has gone into the health care law since 2010, President-elect Trump and Republicans in Congress owe Americans a detailed explanation of how they plan to replace it. They should not repeal the law until they have submitted their replacement proposal for analysis by nonpartisan authorities like the Congressional Budget Office and the Tax Policy Center to determine how it will affect health insurance coverage, state and federal finances and individual tax burdens.

Vague promises are not enough when we are considering enormous changes in this country's \$3 trillion medical economy. Here are seven important questions that Congress must answer about its replacement plan before repealing the Affordable Care Act:

1. How many millions of Americans will lose coverage? The A.C.A. expanded Medicaid coverage to around 12 million people in 31 states and the District of Columbia, and provided

financial assistance for moderate-income Americans to buy insurance. These measures have reduced the percentage of Americans who are uninsured to the lowest levels in history. Proposals by Tom Price, Mr. Trump's choice to run Health and Human Services, and by the House speaker, Paul D. Ryan, would repeal the expansion of Medicaid and replace the A.C.A.'s income-based subsidies with less generous tax credits. Another plan from the House Republican Study Committee would offer deductions. We particularly need to know how this would affect low-income Americans, to whom tax deductions are nearly worthless, and who would generally not be able to afford coverage under these plans.

2. Will people over 55 pay higher health premiums for the same coverage? Under the health care law, premiums for older people cannot be more than three times as much as premiums for younger people. But the Ryan plan would let insurers charge older people five times as much. This change, combined with smaller tax credits or deductions that would not compensate for the increased cost, would significantly

increase health care costs for many older Americans.

3. Will the new plan let insurers charge women higher premiums than men while offering them less coverage? Before the A.C.A. banned gender-based premiums, insurers in many states charged women more than men of the same age — some as much as 50 percent more. The A.C.A. also required all insurers to cover preventive health services without co-payments; for women, this includes birth control, Pap smears, mammograms and a host of other crucial services. Maternity care is fully covered as well. Republican replacement plans offer no such protection. And many Republicans want to defund Planned Parenthood, too, which would deprive women not just of coverage but also of care.

4. What other services are likely to be cut? Before the A.C.A., about a third of individual insurance market enrollees lacked coverage for the treatment of addiction, and nearly 20 percent lacked mental health coverage. One recent Republican proposal would require coverage only for hospital, physician and emergency care services. Will insurers be allowed to exclude

any other services that they choose not to cover?

5. Will the new plan let insurers reinstate annual or lifetime limits on coverage? If so, how would the government ensure that individuals with life-altering illnesses and injuries received care without falling into financial ruin? Before the A.C.A., more than 50 percent of workplace insurance plans had lifetime limits, often in the range of \$1 million to \$2 million. That sounds like a lot — unless you are a 42-year-old man with leukemia. And "mini-med" policies often imposed annual limits of a few thousand dollars.

6. What will happen to the more than 130 million Americans with pre-existing conditions? Among the most important — and popular — provisions of the A.C.A. are its requirements that insurers cover and not charge higher premiums to people who have pre-existing conditions like cancer.

Some replacement plans propose segregating these people in high-risk pools. Before the A.C.A., two-thirds of states had such pools, which offered health plans with high premiums and deductibles and annual and lifetime caps. The pools never received enough support from the states to respond to the needs of high-cost individuals, and still covered only a tiny fraction

of people with pre-existing conditions.

Other plans would protect individuals with pre-existing conditions from discrimination only if they maintained insurance coverage without any breaks. But this is not easy because of job loss and transient hardships. An estimated 44 million Americans experienced a gap in coverage of at least one month in 2013 or 2014.

7. Finally, how much more will those with costly illnesses or injuries have to pay in out-of-pocket costs? Critics of the A.C.A. often argue that the law has made health care unaffordable. But many Americans would pay much more without it. The A.C.A. capped out-of-pocket spending at \$7,150 for individuals and \$14,300 for families for 2017. Republican proposals appear to offer no protection from high deductibles and other cost-sharing.

This is a short list. One might ask many other important questions about changes to Medicare, Medicaid and insurance bought through employers. Before Congress leaps off the precipice of repeal, Americans have the right to ask, "Where will we land?"

## Amit Shah Moves To Divide Yadavs In UP, Nitish-Lalu In Bihar

Amit Bhai, as he's referred to by most members of the BJP, is single-handedly responsible for two of the most important political divisions taking place in India: the one splitting the seams in Uttar Pradesh, and the other brewing in Patna between Lalu Yadav and ally and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. While both have the trappings of a saas-bahu saga, each flashpoint has been carefully maneuvered by Shah, who is cleverly weaving his Gandhinagar brand of magic in the North Indian states. From being a local Gujarati leader, Shah has transformed into a political pundit, weaving alignments (and webs of deceit, per his critics), identifying the vulnerabilities and ambitions of leaders, and then exploiting them with intricacy and craft.

First, Uttar Pradesh: When the Yadav family feud went public about six months ago, many political commentators called it a noora kushti (fixed fight) between patriarch Mulayam Singh and his son Akhilesh Yadav to create

sympathy for Akhilesh as a counter to anti-incumbency. However, those in the know will vouch that this was the culmination of a bitter family fight which started as early as 2014. Mulayam's second wife, Sadhna Gupta, wanted her son and Akhilesh's younger (step) brother Prateek Yadav, who has major stakes in the real estate and fitness industry, to contest from Azamgarh. Insiders in the party who spoke to me said that it was Amar Singh who had Sadhna's ears and suggested this to as a move to counter Akhilesh's growing influence in the party.

It was Ramgopal Yadav who intervened and finally Netaji, as he's popularly known, had to contest from both Mainpuri and Azamgarh to quell the sparks of division in his family. Ramgopal later announced that the decision to field Mulayam from Azamgarh had been taken on the demand of party workers and leaders from Poorvanchal. This, however, could not contain the feud and Amar Singh, according to party insiders,

asked Sadhna and Shivpal Yadav to get Ramgopal sacked from the party if they were serious about creating a power centre parallel to Akhilesh in the Samajwadi Party.

Shah, who led the BJP to a massive victory in Uttar Pradesh in the 2014 general election, had sensed this simmering feud and it is alleged that he used Amar Singh ably to fuel the fire that now has the party virtually split. In an overnight meeting that allegedly took place in South Delhi sometime in September last year and was facilitated by Amar Singh, the Shah-Mulayam communications began with discussions of many packages for Netaji including that of being made the next President after Pranab Mukherjee.

Simultaneously, Akhilesh Yadav was spinning another set of mathematics. In the 2014 Lok Sabha election, the Congress gained 7.5 percent of the total vote share, while the SP managed a decent 22 percent. A Congress-SP alliance together could yield more than 30 percent if the parties were

to aggressively fight against BJP, especially in the western districts which were most likely to be polarized along religious lines.

According to the schedule announced by the Election Commission, the western districts will see the first phase of polling and an aggressive BJP has already begun its campaign with the likes of Sakshi Maharaj on the loose making anti-Muslim remarks; the party strategy will use demonetisation and surgical strikes rhetoric generously. But Shah has learnt from the Bihar election, where the mahagathbandhan between Nitish Kumar, Lalu Yadav and the Congress defeated his party. So he has calculated that the SP-Congress alliance is a cogent threat in Uttar Pradesh, and a sure-shot way of creating a weak opposition to the BJP is in breaking the Samajwadi Party. But the Chanakya has not restricted himself to a gameplan for Uttar Pradesh. The increasing hostility between

Lalu Yadav and Nitish Kumar has given the BJP chief a chance to make a strong play in Bihar. Between October 2016 and now, Shah, who has been visiting Patna often, has allegedly been among the strongest reasons for Nitish Kumar's support to Modi on the notes ban. Nitish, who despite being the Chief Minister of Bihar has to virtually have all decisions voted by Lalu, who won many more seats than him, is tired of having a supra Chief Minister. No surprise then that just around the time the Yadav family split started making headlines, Amit babu made his presence felt in Patna politics, when, at a public meeting in November, he lauded Nitish Kumar saying "I publicly commend Nitish Kumar for the support he has given to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's fight against black money and corruption...He first supported demonetisation. He yesterday made it clear that JD(U) is not supporting the Bharat Bandh call given by some parties. We also acknowledge his support to the GST Bill."



# Tie-up with Samajwadi Party may be Congress's only route back to power in UP



On September 27, 1989, the then Union home minister Buta Singh flew into Lucknow when the sun had not yet risen. He immediately drove to the official bungalow of chief minister ND Tiwari.

Soon, a delegation of saffron clad saints associated with Rama Janmabhoomi Nyas led by Ashok Singhal was ushered in. The press waited outside, not knowing what was transpiring inside. After over two hours, a visibly angry chief minister walked out of the bungalow, followed by a beaming Ashok Singhal. None spoke to the media. But soon the suspense

was over. Buta Singh announced the Centre's conditional permission to the Nyas to lay shilanyas at the contentious Ram Janmabhoomi/Babri Mosque complex. On November 10, 1989, the VHP-BJP laid the foundation stone of the temple amid pomp and show at a plot, away from the disputed site, while the Congress leadership preferred silence instead of propagating the accord that Singhal and others had signed with the government. The agreement had bound the saints to a high court order that had directed the parties to maintain status quo, not change the nature

of the property and ensure communal harmony.

It was poll time. The then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi decided to launch his party's campaign from Faizabad and spoke about 'Ram Rajya'. From there started the long chapter of Congress decline in North India, from which it has not yet recovered. While the VHP movement to liberate the Rama Janmabhoomi picked up momentum, the Congress started losing support of Muslims in the northern belt as they held the party leadership squarely responsible for unlocking the shrine gates in 1984 and shilanyas in 1989. The final nail in the coffin was when the mosque was demolished under the Congress government led by Narasimha Rao. The Muslim vote was lost. Congress' social coalition, and with it, political power was lost. Why has the Congress been unable to regain power in UP?

The first reason is the rise of regional parties — the BSP

and the SP — that pursued caste and communal politics. While the SP pandered to Muslim whims, the BSP wooed Dalits and marginalised castes. The Congress leadership, in its bid to maintain caste and communal balance, could not speak their aggressive language.

Second, after the death of Rajiv Gandhi, the party literally became rudderless. Sonia Gandhi remained elusive and indecisive on joining politics, while PV Narasimha Rao and Sita Ram Kesari ran the show. The people of the state could not connect to them and there was no state leadership that could fill in the vacuum. By the time Sonia entered the scene in 1997, politics had become competitive, the Congress cadres had moved to greener pastures and the elections had turned four-cornered.

Formulas were evolved to reconstruct the traditional vote bank of Muslims, Dalits and Brahmins. Muslims voted for the winning horse against the BJP (Congress was a sinking ship),

Dalits for Mayawati and Kanshi Ram while Brahmins preferred to remain on the right side of the power. In the process, a generation born in early 1990s did not see a Congress rule in the state. It also failed to find poll partners, barring 1995 when it had tied up with the BSP. Gandhi scion Rahul Gandhi also preferred an independent poll trek as he did not find either the SP or the BSP trustworthy.

After 26 years, the Congress is open to alliance with either of the regional forces in UP.

Once again, while Mayawati is against pre-poll tie-ups, the Yadav family is divided over seat sharing with the Congress. Mulayam has grown in anti-Congress boots, but his son Akhilesh is more pragmatic.

It is generally believed that the SP and the Congress together will be a formidable force that Muslims will immediately adopt. Agra-based KS Rama says, 'The base vote of Congress is scattered. They need to rebuild the party brick by brick. Coalition with SP will be useful.' That may well be the Congress' only route back to

# Murthal gang-rape' to 'Bengaluru molestation': Media vigilantism to the fore



Being a vigilante rather than being just vigilant can be disastrous. The past few days dominated by the news of reported 'mass molestation' of women in Bengaluru's MG Road on New Year's Eve proved how damaging it is for journalists.

Having screamed 'mass molestation,' we couldn't produce the evidence. None came forward to lodge a police complaint and consequently no FIR was lodged. No less than 70 CCTV

cameras — private and government — covered the stretch but scrutiny of the footage threw up no proof.

Bengaluru survived a scare and its reputation was saved from being irrevocably tarred. The same cannot, however, be said of media's credibility which has taken another severe hit.

Remember Murthal, the Haryana town where dozens of women were reported to have been waylaid by mobs during the peak of last year's

Jat quota agitation and then sexually assaulted?

As with Bengaluru, Murthal dominated the headlines for days. It all started with a small report in a local newspaper that quickly snowballed into a major issue of national shame and we all jumped in seeking immediate punitive action. Almost a year later, no evidence of the sex assaults have been found and the media is in the dock, with the police serving notices to journalists to corroborate what

they had reported then.

Bengaluru is Murthal 2. A newspaper claimed mass molestation and our entire tribe got instantly carried away. Hash tags such as Bengalurushame and Bengalurumolestation trended as politicians and activists contributed to the din by trading charges.

There was no denying that Bengaluru's downtown witnessed unruly scenes that night. As photographs and video grabs show, there was undoubtedly a melee, a great deal of pushing and jostling, and almost certainly a big brawl with a few distraught women caught in the middle.

It was also in the realm of possibility that some men in the crowd would have sought to take advantage of the chaos. Ask any women and they will tell you such despicable beasts are everywhere: from buses and trains to all public places such as even Delhi's iconic India Gate. This trait isn't specific to Bengaluru.

The city is as safe or

unsafe as any other Indian city, though it also has the distressing record of only one conviction for every 100 sexual assault cases.

But the indignation that India experienced across drawing rooms and television studios this week was primarily because of the reported mass molestation. Video footage of a woman being molested in another Bengaluru neighbourhood fuelled the outrage further.

In the end, the angry debates haven't made our public places any safer. If at all, the mindless sensationalism has reduced a serious issue confronting women such as my teenage daughter into a spectacle.

Manufacturing news and then orchestrating outrage could be good for TRPs and circulation. But they do nothing to address the situation on the ground. On the contrary, crying wolf far too often erodes the trust in media persons, considered the sentinels of society.



# Demonetisation Impact: World Bank Cuts India Growth Forecast For FY17 To 7%

**Infrastructure spending should improve the business climate and attract investment in the near-term, World Bank said.**

(News Agencies) The World Bank today downgraded India's growth estimate for 2016-17 due to demonetisation but said that the country will post a "still robust" growth of 7 per cent. In its first report after demonetisation of Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000 denomination currency notes in November, the multilateral lender also said the notes ban move could "continue to disrupt business and household economic activities". It had earlier estimated India's GDP or gross domestic product growth at 7.6 per cent.

"In India, the immediate withdrawal of a large volume of

currency in circulation and subsequent replacement with new notes announced by the government in November contributed to slowing growth in 2016," the World Bank said in its latest report.

Unexpected demonetisation weighed on growth in the third quarter (October to December) of 2016-17, it said.

The World Bank noted that as cash accounts for more than 80 per cent of the number of transactions in India, in the short-term, demonetisation "could continue to disrupt business and household economic activities, weighing on

growth".

The World Bank said, "Indian growth is estimated to have decelerated to a still robust 7 per cent (in fiscal 2017 ending on March 31, 2017), with continued tailwinds from low oil prices and solid agricultural output partly offset by challenges associated with the withdrawal of a large volume of currency in circulation and subsequent replacement with new notes."

Even if India maintains a 7 per cent growth rate for 2016-17, the country will still maintain the distinction of being the fastest growing major economy in the world, bypassing China.



The Middle Kingdom is projected to grow at 6.5 per cent in 2016.

The World Bank also asserted that India would regain growth momentum in the subsequent years, with 7.6 and 7.8 per cent expansion, adding that "various reform initiatives are expected to unlock domestic supply bottlenecks and raise productivity". Infrastructure spending should improve the business climate and attract

investment in the near-term, the World Bank said. "The 'Make in India' campaign may support India's manufacturing sector, backed by domestic demand and further regulatory reforms," it said. The World Bank also noted that the benefit of 'demonetisation' in the medium term may be liquidity expansion in the banking system, which may help in lowering lending rates and lifting economic activity.

## The nation has gone past Rahul Gandhi, and the media also needs to move on



publicity.

For the media at large, this national indifference has been a bit of a wake up call. The first couple of times in 2015, the trick worked pretty well. The usual pigeons in the TV talk show panels fetched up and were raked over the coals by shrill anchors over the deliberate disappearance and there was heated debate and a great deal of prevarication and blatant lying. For a few days, it topped the new charts. The print media wrote editorials, gave scenarios of deep profundity and built up

this mystique. Whether we liked it or not, we were given the feeling that Rahul Gandhi is still a viable force in the political firmament.

The media tried it again this time and it broke a wing, refused to fly. There were no takers. Rahul Gandhi may have returned today and to his dismay, when asking how he was missed, may have been told: 'Oh, did you go somewhere? We thought we just hadn't spotted you in the corridor.' It probably is not so much blame as it is conditioning that prompts media to continue this dead

as dodo affair with the former first family. The old habit doesn't die hard, it just stays on life support and it is also the only Opposition game in town to create a check and balance to the BJP's stranglehold over the Centre. Consequently, by default, Rahul keeps being pushed back into the limelight by the media while the rest of the country doesn't give a toss any more. Perhaps there will be someone else who will rival Modi like Virat has done Dhoni in the realm of political cricket but for now, the captain of Congress has only the critical media to propel him forward.

(Agencies) Rahul Gandhi got back from his 'mystery' sojourn abroad today. It must be very discomfiting to disappear and do so after creating a froth of wrath about the country going down the tube save for his hand on the brakes and then return to find the country still in one piece and not in a state of collapse.

Not just there and carrying along to the best of its ability, but that the country did not notice Rahul Gandhi had even gone somewhere. And if it did notice, it did not really care whether he was in situ or gallivanting around the world.

Only media seems to retain a certain fascination.

Remember when he vanished last year and the media went on the town and Gandhi got dollops of publicity and the space and time surrendered to his adventure doubled?

This time, the media tried to

create the same sort of excitement about his leaving so soon after the announcement of five crucial elections. And what was he thinking? Not just that, here was the great Opposition leader's opportunity to put Modi into a corner over the fallout of the demonetisation disarray and he was leaving the scene, exit stage left chased by a bear.

It had the same effect on India as trying to open a padlock with a wet noodle.

So, is it the media's fascination with the Gandhis that endures, whether it is in the form of hostility, mockery, mild affection or Pavlovian response to the past?

That while India has gone past the Gandhi dynasty and moved on, the media continues to perpetuate its presence as a viable political force. Some of it sticks and if there are enough cameras and microphones around, there is a surge of

## People living near BSF's J&K camp say officers sell rations to civilians at half the market rate

(News Agencies) Srinagar: Civilians living near paramilitary forces' camps, particularly those of the Border Security Force (BSF), say officers sell fuel and food provisions meant for the personnel to outsiders at half the market rate.

The "disclosure" made by jawan Tej Bahadur Yadav+ of the BSF's 29th Battalion in videos on social media supplements accusations of shady dealings by paramilitary officers, particularly those posted to border areas.

Shopkeepers near the Humhama BSF headquarters near Srinagar airport are beneficiaries of petrol and diesel, and even food stores from men of rank, according to a jawan and some civilians. "They sell food items like dal and vegetables to civilians outside the camp at cheaper rates and leave us bereft of the facilities. They even deny us our daily-use items and sell the same to their agents outside the camps," a BSF jawan said on the condition of anonymity.

A civil contractor added, "We get petrol from BSF officers in charge of provisions at Humhama camp at half the market rate... Other items, like rice and spices, are also available much cheaper." A furniture dealer who requested anonymity

said the "purchasing officers, while placing orders for elegant furniture for their offices, take a commission that is more than what we earn". The dealer added, "There is no e-tendering in the BSF. The officer will purchase furniture and take a commission and even compromise on the quality of the items." The story is the same when it comes to some CRPF officers. CRPF IG Ravideep Singh Sahi, who was posted to Srinagar as IG administration a month ago, said he would look into pilfering from stores for profit, if any took place at all. "The jawan is of paramount importance for the force and there should no compromise on the quality of his life when he is on duty," IG Ravideep Sahi said, adding that the CRPF had a proper mechanism for all purchases and that one could not go beyond those rules. A CRPF jawan on law and order duty in Srinagar, however, rejected the notion that the officers treated them badly. "We get quality food on time, and after duty hours we are provided proper accommodation at the concerned police stations."

The BSF has ordered an inquiry into Yadav's allegations, with the report due Wednesday.



## Tobacco sends \$1 trillion up in smoke



(Agencies) New Delhi: Tobacco-control policies such as higher taxes and price increase can generate significant government revenues for health and development work, states a new report by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the US' National Cancer Institute. Such measures can also reduce tobacco use and burden of killer diseases like cancer and heart ailments.

According to the report, the global annual excise revenues from cigarettes could increase by 47% if all countries raised excise tax by about \$0.80 (approx. Rs 55, as on Wednesday) per pack. Additionally, the tax increase would raise cigarette retail prices on average by 42%, leading to a 9% decline in smoking rates and up to 66 million fewer adult smokers, the report says.

In 2013-2014, global tobacco excise taxes generated nearly \$269 billion in government revenues. Of this, less than \$1 billion was invested in tobacco control. In India, the government has taken several measures in the past few years to control tobacco consumption. Apart from increased taxes, the government has also managed, with intervention from the judiciary, to implement a pictorial warning on 85% of a tobacco product packet's surface area despite strong resistance from the tobacco industry. Estimates show around 35% of adults consume tobacco in India, while over 5,500 youths start use every day. The report has pegged the global socio-economic burden of tobacco consumption at over \$1 trillion annually in healthcare expenditures and lost productivity. Currently, around 6 million people die annually as a result of tobacco use, most in developing countries.

(News Agencies) New Delhi : The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has told a parliamentary panel that it recommended the scrapping of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes on November 8 after a prod from the Centre a day before. The response is part of a 7-page note the central bank has sent to Parliament's standing committee on finance.

Stating that the government conveyed its advice on November 7, the RBI told the panel: "The central board of the RBI met on November 8, 2016. The board noted that a summary measure in the form of withdrawal of legal tender character of these... notes to contain the menace of counterfeit notes is proposed by the government."

It was observed that such a



## Notes scrapped on government's prod, RBI tells House panel

proposal could not have come at a more opportune time than coinciding with the introduction of MG (New) series of notes, the RBI said in its reply to the panel headed by Congress's Veerappa Moily. The response led some to say that it was at odds with the Centre's version that the recommendation to outlaw the notes had come from the RBI.

However, official sources denied that the RBI's response contradicts statements from the government — for instance, the one from coal minister Piyush Goyal in the Rajya Sabha during the debate on demonetisation. "The response reflects only the formal part of the demonetisation drill was followed. The fact is that the exercise got under way months ago and had covered some ground by May-June when consultations were held with ex-

RBI governor Raghuram Rajan." There were several rounds of discussions on the different aspects of the massive task. What happened on November 7, with the government writing to the RBI and the latter acting on the advice on November 8 before PM Modi announced the dramatic decision in his televised address to the nation, was the formal finale of the six month-long preparation which had RBI fully involved," said a government functionary.

Providing the background of the demonetisation exercise and the preparations which went into it, the RBI has told the panel: "It occurred to government of India and the RBI that the introduction of new series of notes could provide a very rare and profound opportunity to tackle all the three problems of counterfeiting, terrorist financing and black money by new notes".

demonetising the bank notes in high denomination of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 or by withdrawing the legal tender status of bank notes. Though no firm decision was taken initially, whether to demonetise or not, preparations still went on for introduction of new series of notes, as that was needed in any case."

TOI had in its edition on November 9 exclusively reported that the preparation for the withdrawal of notes of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 had begun six months before it was announced. The RBI has told the parliamentary panel that it had "on May 27, 2016 recommended to the government that new series of bank notes with new design, including notes in the Rs 2000 denomination, be introduced. Government gave its final approval on June 7, 2016 and accordingly presses were advised in June 2016 to initiate production of

## Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav set to kick off joint SP-Congress campaign

(Agencies) Lucknow : The Congress-Samajwadi Party alliance may not have been formally announced yet, but the two parties appeared on Tuesday to be racing ahead with their plans to kickstart a joint election campaign led by Gandhi siblings Rahul and Priyanka, along with Akhilesh and Dimple Yadav, later this week. Confirming the development, sources here told TOI that the ongoing Samajwadi family feud+ has delayed the announcement of the alliance because Akhilesh insisted on clarity on whether he retains control of the party and its poll symbol — the bicycle. The Election Commission, in front of which a petition submitted by both sides is pending, is expected to hear them out on January 13. A ruling favourable to Akhilesh could lead to the launch of the alliance the same day, the sources said. Congress general secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad urged "secular forces" to close ranks on Tuesday, a remark seen as ending the ambiguity around the Congress-SP alliance. Congress's chief ministerial face in UP, Sheila Dikshit, even suggested that she would step aside to accommodate the youth+ — Akhilesh and Rahul — if they take centrestage in the country's biggest state. All preparations reinforce a keenness on both sides for the tie-up, which began ever since Akhilesh took on the SP patriarch.







(News Agencies) Come February and Delhi will get its first pedestrian zone at Connaught Place. As a three-month trial, Delhi's 84-year-old central retail hub will ban vehicles to make more room for walkers in its inner and middle circles. If successful, the measure will become permanent.

For a city asphyxiating with nearly 10 million vehicles, any move to clear its blocked

arteries could be a life-saver. Connaught Place, which has at least 500,000 vehicles passing through it, out of which 150,000 make a stop daily, is a good place to start. For one, it has Delhi's biggest interchange at Rajiv Chowk where all the major Metro lines converge. The city's busiest bus stations are also within walking distance.

Though in a huge majority, pedestrians have never been a

priority as far as Delhi's infrastructure goes. British journalist Sam Miller, who explored some of the capital's less celebrated destinations in his book *Delhi: Adventures in a Megacity*, found it was not an easy city to walk in. A study by Centre for Science and Environment in Delhi corroborated his observation.

It found that footpaths were available in only 55% of the total

## Vehicle-free Connaught Place *A much-needed angiography for Delhi*

road length surveyed. Only 10-15% of the total stretch had footpaths built according to the norms on height and width. None of the stretches had a continuous footpath. While making Connaught Place car-free, the authorities should clear up the walking spaces. Local shopkeepers are worried that post-pedestrianisation, empty parking lots will be taken over by hawkers. Large tracts of public spaces in Delhi, including at Connaught Place and its arterials, are already under encroachment.

While shoring up pedestrian infrastructure will not be prohibitive, Delhi's real challenge is to meet the demands of capital-intensive public transport. As any Delhi commuter will tell you, mobility is not the problem in the city. Accessibility is. Most people rely

on private vehicles for their daily commute — for work, shopping and leisure — because public transport remains patchy and last-mile connectivity is missing.

Delhi's collapsing bus system cannot sustain the passenger load that any restriction on private vehicles will shift to it. With just 4,121 buses, the fleet size today is at a six-year low. Auto drivers still overcharge. For any anti-car measure to succeed, the government has to fix these basics first.

Celebrating one year in office, the AAP government had, among other things, promised an "angiography of Delhi's arteries". If they, along with the Centre, are willing to walk the distance, the Connaught Place experiment could indeed be the first step towards unclogging Delhi.

## How family feud ended anti-incumbency for UP CM Akhilesh Yadav



(Agencies) If there is one thing I'm good at, it's at getting around. So, on a warm autumn afternoon last year, chief minister Akhilesh Yadav and I were flying over Uttar Pradesh's grassy farm lands, cruising from Lucknow to his family village of Saifai in his Hawker 900XP jet.

It was a time of relative calm in India's most populous state — dramatically different from the goings on in the region and within the Samajwadi Party (SP) over the last few weeks. Though there were rumblings of disaffection between Akhilesh and his powerful uncle Shivpal Yadav, the battle lines within the Yadav family had not yet been drawn. How strongly the party patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav would veer towards Shivpal, and how emphatically the party's foot soldiers would support Akhilesh in the family feud, were certainly not known.

Back then, the chief minister was interested in showing off his various development projects

from the air — the Lucknow-Agra expressway, the international cricket stadium, the new state highways linking 44 district headquarters, and the Lucknow Metro. As he fervently displayed his work during his first term, it was clear that the chief minister was deeply concerned about what he considered his gravest challenge in the 2017 assembly elections: anti-incumbency.

Given the recent political history of UP, this was a logical assessment. Over the last three elections, the state oscillated between the SP and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), led by Mayawati, with the predictability of a swinging pendulum. If the SP emerged as the largest party with 143 seats in 2002, the BSP bounced back with 206 seats in 2007 and the SP roared to power with 224 out of 403 Vidhan Sabha seats in 2012. This trend goes back, with some small riders, to 1989, with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

also in the mix. The days when the Congress could win back-to-back terms between 1980 and 1989, and rule the state for all but two years between 1950 and 1977, are now a distant dream.

There has also been a pattern with which the electorate has reacted to sitting chief ministers over the last two decades. Re-election bids by BSP regimes have been rejected on the grounds that corruption spikes every time the party is in

power, and the SP's attempts to retain power have been shot down on the grounds that the law-and-order situation deteriorates whenever the party is at the helm.

Now that the BJP is again a strong contender after sweeping 71 out of 80 seats in the state in the Lok Sabha elections, and has been riding the wave created by the November 8 demonetisation decision by Prime Minister

Narendra Modi, the incumbent Akhilesh has not one, but two strong opponents to worry about.

But the Yadav family feud, either by design or a twist of fate, could help Akhilesh overcome his biggest hurdle. Standing up to his father and his uncles, pulling the rug out from under their feet, taking over the Samajwadi Party, has given him the opportunity to become the first UP chief minister in decades to go to the polls without having to worry about anti-incumbency.

## *Congress seeks but Sidhu in hiding, Jan 13 to be new joining date*

(Agencies) Cricketer-turned-politician Navjot Singh Sidhu is playing hard to get.

The 53-year-old, who quit the BJP in September and kept the Aam Aadmi Party hanging for weeks, was expected to join the Congress on Tuesday but was nowhere to be found.

Congress sources said Sidhu had indicated he would join on January 9 but the plan was changed. Him dumping the BJP for Congress was to be a photo-op but Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi was away on vacation.

Gandhi was expected back on January 10, so the event was deferred to Tuesday. Gandhi returned to Delhi, Sidhu, however, was untraceable.

While he remained incommunicado, the Congress named Gurjeet Singh Aujla, a young party leader, for the Amritsar Lok Sabha byelection. The bypoll will be held with state assembly election on February 4.

Sidhu, elected thrice from Amritsar on BJP

ticket, was thought to be in the contention for the Lok Sabha again, but his no-show settled the matter in favour of Aujla. Soon after Gandhi's arrival, Congress leaders tried to contact Sidhu but couldn't reach him, sources said. In the evening, his camp indicated that the former Rajya Sabha member would now join the Congress on the auspicious day of Lohri, January 13.

Sidhu, who was in demand as a "star vote-catcher" after he quit the Rajya Sabha in July, has vacillated



in making his next move. He finally walked out of the BJP in September after months of acrimony.

But even before he quit the party, he was talking to AAP and later the Congress. AAP got a rude shock when Sidhu announced his political outfit, Awaaz-e-Punjab, with former hockey captain Pargat Singh and two others. That was in again in September.



# Demonetisation: 200 shell companies under IT scanner, dept getting details of others



(Agencies) The Income Tax department has detected more than 200 shell companies operating in Delhi, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Punjab besides Uttar Pradesh that have been used to convert illegal money into "legal" in the last two months, sources

involved in money laundering, too floated his own shell company to convert part of his illegal cash into white money, the source added. Tandon was earlier arrested by the enforcement directorate.

The department is also fleshing out names and business details of the newly floated small firms. The department is also closely monitoring the accounts and cash flow of all the "new firms" that have been floated in the last couple of months to ensure that they are not being used convert black money.

"Investigations are underway and we will ensure that these cases are resolved at the earliest..we have come across a large number of shell companies that have been used

to layer the transactions that are suspicious," the source told Hindustan Times.

Earlier, an HT investigation revealed that out of 10.26-lakh entities with the Registrar of Companies (RoC), 133,256 were just 'drop box' companies in Kolkata and Delhi alone. There were many such shell companies.

While the Income Tax department has already sought details of all suspicious transactions from both public and private sector banks besides the accounts have received Rs 2 lakh and above, it is looking into the accounts of all the defunct companies that have suddenly reported surge in business deals.

"Dormant companies,

investment companies and pass-through investment companies who may not be having any fixed revenue streams may have been used to make cash deposits apart from alleged over invoicing by companies engaged in jewelry business," Manoj Kumar, legal expert and managing partner, Hammurabi and Solomon, said. "The data sought by the income tax department from banks should help in this drive to detect money laundering during demonetisation." The source indicated that the IT department will undertake further investigations to examine the issue. "There are many more such companies that have been opened in the recent past and we are examining their accounts," the source said.

## Delhi: Two held for printing fake new notes using finest paper, best ink



(Agencies) Delhi Police have arrested two persons — a mobile technician and a computer expert — for allegedly printing fake currency notes using high quality printers, design software and scanners and then pushing them into the market.

The police have recovered Rs 6 lakh in fake new notes from the suspects. In the last 20 days, the men reportedly spent Rs 45,000 of the fake currency.

The men — Ashish and Krishan — reportedly spent a month to get a replica of the new Rs 500 and Rs 2,000 rupee notes. They looked for the finest paper in the market, the best ink and purchased the latest scanner and printer for the purpose.

"They kept the stacks of printed notes at home and then started spending them one by one. They mostly used them at weekly markets to buy household goods, shoes and clothes and to buy groceries. They even paid their debts and lent some money on interest as well," a police source said.

Sources said that a year ago, the duo also printed fake Rs 100 rupee notes in a similar manner but never got caught.

They spent over six hours every day mixing various inks together to get the exact colour of the notes and another six hours to get the design right.

"While Krishan is an expert in computer software, Ashish is very good with hardware. Ashish used to fetch all the raw material, including the ink and paper from different areas, and give it to Krishan who is a master at corel designing," DCP (west), Surrender Kumar said.

## From the mint to organised racket? 'Home delivery' of new notes under I-T lens



(News Agencies) Income tax and intelligence officials have launched an investigation to see if an organised racket "virtually home delivered" new banknotes from government presses or the central bank to people within days of Prime Minister Narendra Modi scrapping high-value bills.

The probe was ordered after income tax officials held a man last month from a south Delhi market with Rs 20 lakh in new 2000-rupee bills that were packed and bore the seals of two government currency presses in Maharashtra and West Bengal.

The man, identified as Krishna Kumar, was probably a courier who was waiting at a Greater Kailash-I M Block market on December 15 to deliver the money when tax officials arrived. They had been tipped off by the intelligence bureau, government sources involved in the investigation told Hindustan Times.

Two senior officials of income tax and intelligence bureau told Hindustan Times that this was the first instance of cash bearing seals of government printing presses finding its way to the public. "We need to ascertain where the leak came from. If the printing press or the RBI chest is compromised those loopholes need to be plugged. We are waiting for the RBI to share more information with us," one of the officials said, using the abbreviation

for the central bank.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) didn't respond to HT's request for comments. But HT accessed the RBI's response to intelligence bureau on the recovered cash: "these mini packs were printed at Salboni and Nasik presses." The interrogation of Kumar

didn't yield much since the currency had changed hands before reaching him. The man has been charged with potential tax evasion. He has been allowed to go for now because officials want to finish the investigation into how cash was "virtually home delivered" from mints.

## 'Bar dance not art, it promotes obscenity'



(Agencies) Holding that dance performances in bars are not an art form that needs to be promoted and protected, the Maharashtra government told the Supreme Court that such dances are "vulgar and derogatory", which need to be regulated to protect the honour and dignity of bar girls.

Justifying its decision to bring in a new law to put various restrictions on dance bar owners, the state told SC that in many cases, dance bars were being used to run prostitution rackets and it was duty-bound to curb such activities. "The dances in question are not classical forms of dance. The girls...are not trained artistes. There is no art in their dance. Such dances

have very limited entertainment value. In such a situation, the possibility of dances becoming obscene to attract customers is inherent," the government said in its affidavit filed in SC. "In the absence of art being preponderating element such performances tend to become...obscene, therefore it is duty of the state to regulate such performances to prevent obscenity in public places and to protect the dignity of girls who are recruited for such dance performances."

The state framed Maharashtra Prohibition of Obscene Dance in Hotels, Restaurants and Bar Rooms and Protection of Dignity of Women Act 2016, putting stringent condition on bar owners to run their business such as liquor would not be served in the area where bar girls performed, bar owners have to install CCTV cameras and run their business only between 6.30 pm and 11.30 pm. The law has been challenged in SC by the Indian Hotel and Restaurant Association which contended that the curbs were imposed to prevent them from carrying on business. It said the new rules violated earlier SC judgment which held that it was a fundamental right of owners and bar girls to run bars.



# Sealed after caste clashes, Tamil Nadu temple to open doors to



(A g e n c i e s ) residents of a dalit colony in TIRUVANNAMALAI: In a neighbouring Nammandi in pathbreaking move, Tiruvannamalai district have Hariharapakkam villagers and decided to bury the hatchet and

open the doors of the centuries-old village temple to all, irrespective of caste, community and religion. The temple was sealed two months ago after tension between vanniyaars and dalits escalated in the region over entry into the shrine.

Village elders decided to convene a special grama sabha meeting on Wednesday to pass a resolution that the Arulmigu Thulukanathamman temple will be open to all. "We are going to say that people from any caste or community can enter the temple for worship. We are going to pass the resolution to this effect tomorrow (Wednesday)," village elder Babu told TOI.

Babu was among a group of

elders, who met Cheyyar subcollector T Prabhu Shankar on Tuesday and urged to take steps to open the temple. "They have also given a written consent that they will not create any problem or oppose entry of anyone if it is opened," said an official, citing the villagers' written agreement. The lifting of the ban on the entry of dalits into the temple will make history and set a precedent in TN where there are several shrines, which restrict entry of dalits. The ban is as old as the temple itself, said Babu. The presiding deity of the temple is Thulukanathamman, an incarnation of Durga. The temple was sealed on November 25, 2016, to clamp down on

communal tension brewing between dalits and vanniyaars. Vanniyaars had banned the entry of dalits to the temple. "Now, the villagers themselves have come forward to find an amicable solution to the issue," said a revenue official, seeking anonymity. The villagers, initially, opposed the officials' effort to take dalits into the temple. In an about-turn, they have now come forward to extend the olive branch and end communal tension.

They took the decision after a group of youths from the vanniyaar community broke open the seal and entered the temple on Sunday. It resulted in the arrest of a few of them.

## India announces USD 100 million Line of Credit to Kenya

(Agencies) India announces USD 100 million Line Credit Kenya New Delhi: India on Wednesday announced a USD 100 million Line of Credit to Kenya for agricultural mechanisation after talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta during which they also decided to deepen economic cooperation, identifying expansion of bilateral trade as a "priority".

Asserting that challenges in the maritime domain are a shared concern, Modi said the two sides will also explore opportunities in blue economy.

"We are focussed on quick operationalisation of our defence cooperation. Some of the specific areas of priority would be hydrography, communication networks, anti-piracy, capacity building, exchanges and defence medical cooperation.

"We are also partnering to

strengthen our security cooperation and capacities. In this context, we have directed the Joint Working Group to meet early. It would focus on cyber security, counter terrorism, combating drugs, narcotics, human trafficking and money laundering," the Prime Minister said at a joint press event with Kenyatta. Noting that they reviewed the full range of bilateral relationship, Modi said the two sides will encourage industry and business in both countries to take lead in exploiting opportunities in healthcare, tourism, information technology, agriculture, blue economy and energy. "The Joint Business Council meeting tomorrow will work to build commercial engagement through specific projects in these areas. To boost trade, we are also cooperating on trade facilitation measures, including standardisation



and related areas," he said. Recalling his visit to Kenya last year, the Prime Minister said the two countries had identified deepening of economic cooperation as one of the key focus areas and in this context, "expansion of bilateral trade, greater flow of capital between two economies and stronger developmental partnership are a priority".

## Modi, other leaders pay tribute to Swami Vivekananda

(News Agencies) New Delhi: Various political leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Rajnath Singh, on Thursday paid tributes to Swami Vivekananda on his 154th birth anniversary. "We offer salutations to the great Swami Vivekananda and remember his powerful thoughts and ideals that continue shaping the minds of generations," the Prime Minister said in an official message here. The Home Minister, in a message on Twitter, said that Swami Vivekananda made Indians realise their "true potential". "I bow to Swami Vivekananda on his Jayanti today. He made the people of India realise their strength and true potential," Singh said. Congress Vice President Rahul Gandhi also tweeted saying he was remembering him on the occasion of his birth anniversary. "Remembering Swami Vivekananda today. His message to live fearlessly, with courage and strength of purpose will continue to inspire and guide us," Rahul Gandhi said.



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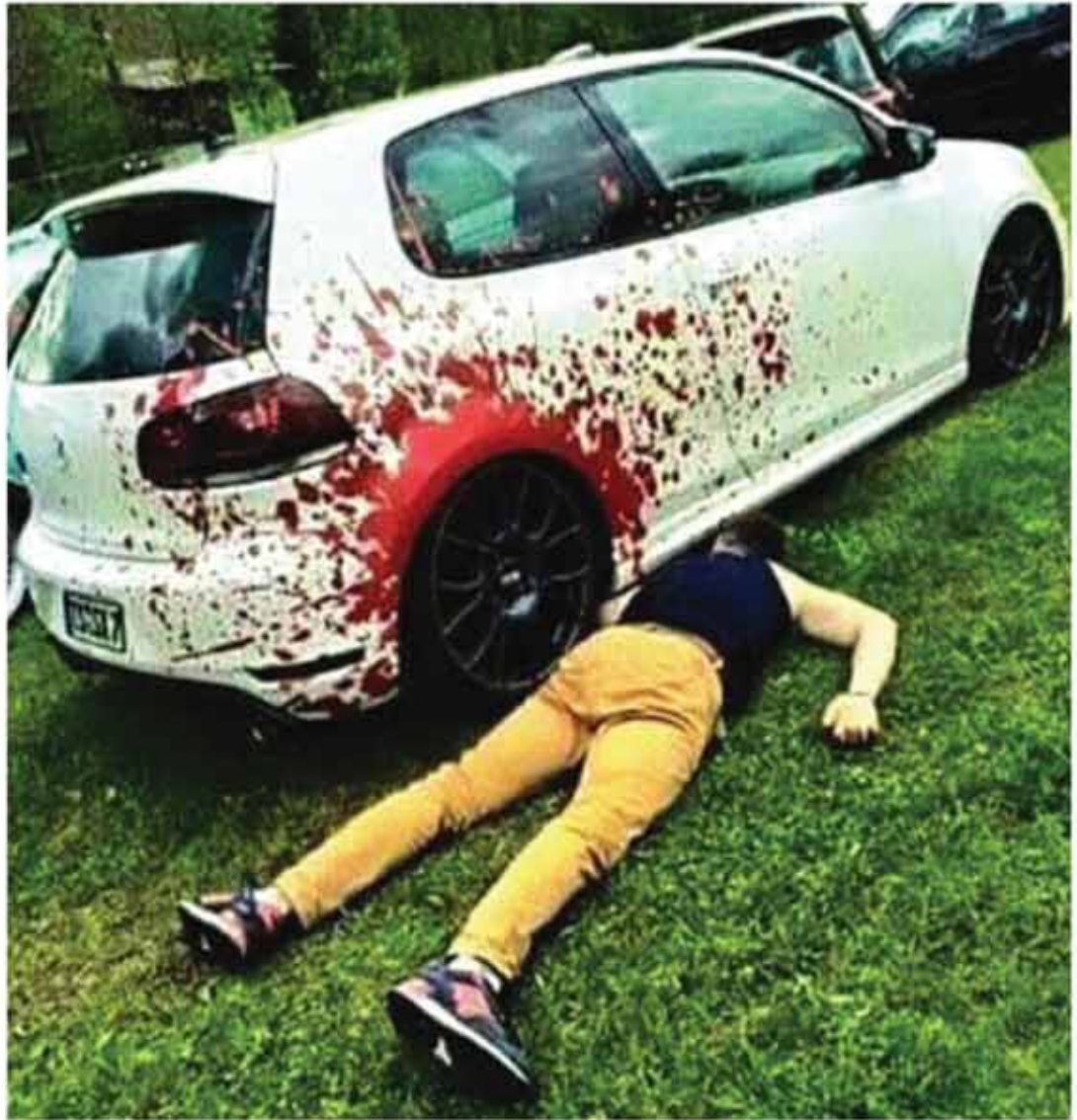
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# DEAD ALIVE



A DISTRESSING video of a hysterical toddler pulling the body of a lifeless woman (right) has gone viral as part of a grim online craze for posting pictures by people faking their own deaths.

The 20-second clip posted under the #DeadPose trend is the most shared addition to the macabre rage which is gripping social media in South Africa and has prompted a storm of outrage and morbid curiosity.

Karabo Mnisi, the teenage mastermind behind the campaign — which he insists is 'no different from the ice bucket challenge' — dismissed the backlash as 'missing the point'.

The mother of the distraught two-year-old, who posted a 20-second clip of her child's distress as she attempts to rouse her inert aunt on the floor, also remained defiant in the face of calls for her to be prosecuted and lose custody of the girl.

Early examples were rather tame, Mnisi told MailOnline, with bodies twisted into awkward positions, free of any gore. More recent additions are increasingly graphic.

"We are now only in phase two of these



posts. The first phase showed no cuts, wounds or bloody, but now phase two includes people who are covered in blood, who have been violently killed," he said.

Off-cuts apparently from a butcher's shop feature in some of the latest, more graphic postings which include reconstructions of the aftermath of frenzied crimes of passion and cold-blooded murder. Violence against women is a common theme, which has troubled a number of critics.

— Daily Mail

The high school student from Pretoria, who started the trend, insisted he would not halt the craze until he had achieved his aim to become South Africa's most influential Felebe — Facebook celebrity — with 40,000 followers, and warned the graphic content would only get worse until then. But some social media sites have imposed a zero-tolerance policy for the craze on their online contacts taking up the #DeadPose challenge and threatened to block or unfriend them if they join in.





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# Trump Tells Congress to Repeal and Replace Health Care Law 'Very Quickly'



(News Agencies) President-elect Donald J. Trump demanded on Tuesday that Congress immediately repeal the Affordable Care Act and pass another health law quickly. His remarks put Republicans in the nearly impossible position of having only weeks to replace a health law that took nearly two years to pass.

"We have to get to business," Mr. Trump told The New York Times in a telephone interview. "Obamacare has been a catastrophic event."

Mr. Trump appeared to be unclear both about the timing of already scheduled votes in Congress and about the difficulty of his demand — a repeal vote "probably some time next week" and a replacement "very quickly or simultaneously, very shortly

thereafter." But he was clear on one point: Plans by congressional Republicans to repeal the health law now, then take years to create and implement a replacement law are unacceptable to the incoming president.

Republican leaders have made the repeal of President Obama's signature domestic achievement a top priority. They hope that the Senate will vote on Thursday and the House will vote on Friday to approve parliamentary language created to protect repeal legislation from a filibuster in the Senate.

The House speaker, Paul D. Ryan of Wisconsin, who consults often with Mr. Trump, set out a similar timetable on Tuesday, saying that a bill to repeal the health care law would include some legislation to replace aspects of it, though Republicans have yet to agree on the details of their alternative.

"It is our goal to bring it all together concurrently," Mr. Ryan said.

But those ambitions will be difficult to achieve and will almost certainly require Democratic cooperation. Until now, Republicans could vote to repeal Mr. Obama's health law with no fear that they would have to live with the political

consequences of scuttling a law that provides health care for 20 million Americans and protects millions more from discrimination for pre-existing medical conditions, ends lifetime caps on insurance coverage and allows children to remain on their parents' insurance policies until age 26.

With complete control of Washington, what comes next in health policy will belong to the Republican Party. For several days, congressional Republicans of diverse political views — moderates and conservatives alike — have been saying they are nervous about repealing the law without any clear path forward. Five Senate Republicans have pressed to delay the deadline for committees to produce repeal legislation until March, and several House Republicans are also demanding that the pace slow down.

"In an ideal situation, we would repeal and replace Obamacare simultaneously, but we need to make sure that we have at least a detailed framework that tells the American people what direction we're headed," said one of those five Republicans, Senator Susan Collins of Maine.

## Sudanese diplomat free after arrest for grinding on woman in NYC subway



(Agencies) A diplomat from Sudan was caught grinding on a woman in a Manhattan subway, but cops had to cut him loose because of his diplomatic immunity, police sources said. Mohammad Abdalla Ali was busted after he rubbed against a woman from behind as she was riding a northbound No. 4 train as it left Grand Central at 2 p.m. Monday, sources said.

Cops charged him with sexual abuse and forcible touching, but released him after he proved he was a diplomat, sources said. The NYPD has contacted the State Department, and it will be up to officials there to lodge an official protest. "There's not much you can do. He has diplomatic immunity," a police source said.

# England is special because it is multi-cultural yet British



(Agencies) For over 30 years I've made a point of celebrating the new year in London. When asked why I do this I've replied, tongue-in-cheek, because I believe it's important to start the year in a civilised country! Initially I meant that as a joke but over time I've come to realise it's uncannily close to the truth. Today I have no doubt of that and I want to share with you why I've come to this conclusion. There are many qualities you could admire about Britain. If you're a tourist the list would include the theatre, museums, Madame Tussauds and shopping. If you live there you would be aware of the great respect the Brits have for your privacy, their humour, the unrivalled television entertainment and, of course,

the English countryside. And if you're a student there's little to beat Cambridge, Oxford, the LSE, the Inns of Court and the British Library. However, there's something beyond all of this. It's far more important but also less obvious. Yet if you observe carefully you can spot it and once you have it's difficult not to recognise its uniqueness and value. Britain is a truly multi-cultural society. Of course, the vast majority are white but whether in Parliament or on TV, on screen or on the stage, in newspapers or in sport you see, read, admire and relate to Brits of all colours, creeds and communities. Just consider a few of the facts. The House of Commons has 41 MPs who are of Asian or African

origin. The House of Lords has 45 such peers. The Archbishop of York is black-British, three of Theresa May's ministers are Asian-British, the former editor of The Independent has Indian parents and the country's top sculptor is a product of the Doon School. I don't believe the United States, France, Germany or Japan can claim to be as well integrated or to have shattered so many glass ceilings. I'm not overlooking President Barack Obama but the change contemplated by the British monarchy is far greater. Prince Charles is going to dispense with the centuries-old designation of the British monarch as Defender

of the Faith. He wants to be Defender of Faiths. Now don't misunderstand me. Not for a moment do I claim there aren't instances of racism or xenophobia. Or there is no inequality or injustice. Of course there is. But that's true of every country, including India. We all have our downside. But the upside of Britain cannot be denied because of this. Nor will I hide the fact some Brits are not happy with the concept of multi-culturalism. A small but vocal minority resents it and yearns for the days of Rule Britannia. However, don't let that mislead you. This is a shrinking number. Slowly, steadily, at times

painfully and on occasion contradictorily, Britain is becoming multi-cultural and that can only be because the majority wants it to happen. Today Britain is a small island with a glorious history, an uncertain present and, possibly, a doubtful future. The sun has long set on its empire and now the shadows of Brexit are darkening its shores. But this island's gifts to the world continue. Democracy and the English language are two well-known old ones. I can now identify a third: How to strive to be multi-cultural without losing the unique Britishness that makes this country special.

## Cubans to be treated like other migrants: Obama

(News Agencies) President Barack Obama has said that Cuban migrants will be treated the same way the US treats migrants from other countries, ending a longstanding practice that allowed undocumented Cuban migrants to remain and become permanent residents of the US. The Cuban government on Thursday said the signing of an accord here ending the US "wet foot/dry foot" immigration policy was "positive" and "an important step ahead" in the bilateral relations, EFE news reported. "By taking this step, we are treating Cuban migrants the same way we treat migrants from other countries. The Cuban government has agreed to accept the return of Cuban nationals

who have been ordered removed, just as it has been accepting the return of migrants interdicted at sea," the outgoing President said. Adopted in 1995, the policy allowed the Cubans to obtain the permanent residence a year after entering US territory even by illegal means. It was always considered by Cuba as an encouragement to illegal migration and human trafficking. A statement from the Cuban government said this arrangement was aimed at "ensuring a regular, safe and ordered migration", Xinhua news agency reported. Cuba is committed to take back its citizens defected by the US when they try to enter or stay irregularly in that country, violating its laws.



## Fox News settled in the 'high six figures' with anchor accusing Bill O'Reilly of sexual harassment: report

(Agencies) After getting hit with a slew of sexual harassment claims last year, Fox News quietly settled for hundreds of thousands of dollars after a host accused Bill O'Reilly of frequently making inappropriate phone calls and once trying to forcefully kiss her, a recent report claims.

Juliet Huddy, who used to be a regular on "The O'Reilly Factor," claimed in a formal lawsuit threat obtained by LawNewz that she was booted

from the primetime show "in retaliation for rebuffing Mr. O'Reilly's advances" — despite having "one of the highest rated segments." Huddy, 47, said in the suit notice that she was thereafter transferred to Fox 5 New York, where she was given a 4:30 a.m. anchoring spot, which she considered less desirable. Huddy sent the six-page notice in early September and received a settlement in "the high six figures" within a matter of days, according to in-house

sources. She then abruptly resigned from the network, claiming in a departure letter that it was time "to move on and shake things up." The settlement came right around the same time that ex-anchor Gretchen Carlson settled a lawsuit against the network for a whopping \$20 million after accusing ex-CEO Roger Ailes of sexual harassment, prompting more than 20 other women to come forward and make similar accusations. Huddy's September

letter contains lurid details about how O'Reilly allegedly tried to kiss her when she visited his Long Island home. It also claims that there was some sort of incident at a New York City hotel after she went to "return a room key," in addition to O'Reilly frequently making sexually charged comments while on the phone with her. The letter also mentions newly appointed Fox News co-President Jack Abernethy, who Huddy claims made inappropriate comments



and "constantly" asked her to come by his office. Both O'Reilly and Abernethy denied the allegations from the start and neither of the two ended up contributing any personal funds to Huddy's settlement, according to sources.

## Backpage.com removes adult personals after critical U.S. Senate report alleges prostitution cover up



(News Agencies) Backpage.com shuttered its adult listings hours after a scathing U.S. Senate report accused the classifieds website of covering up illegal sex activity through filters. The controversial site concealed its practice of deleting words, phrases and images alluding to sex trafficking and underage sex from listings as early as 2006,

according to findings released by Sens. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) and Rob Portman (R-Ohio) on Monday.

The report depicted Backpage.com as "the leading online marketplace for commercial sex" and slammed any defense suggesting otherwise as "fiction." "Those practices served to sanitize the

content of innumerable advertisements for illegal transactions," according to the report, citing internal documents obtained by the Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. The report alleges Backpage President Carl Ferrer knew his company tasked employees to delete words such as "Lolita," "rape," "Amber Alert," "fresh" and "school girl" from listings. A spokesman for Backpage.com attacked the Senate's investigation as "unconstitutional government censorship" and mourned the racy personals as a loss for law enforcement to prevent

trafficking of minors.

"This act of censorship will not reduce the problem of human trafficking, and those who suggest otherwise are deluding themselves and their constituencies," according to the Backpage.com statement. "Instead, it undermines efforts by Backpage.com to cooperate with law enforcement and provide information to identify, arrest and prosecute those who engage in human trafficking." The findings prompted the scrutinized website to nix its adult section in the United States, replacing listings for escorts, body rubs, strippers, strip club

and fetish with "censored" in red print. The page urges users to "protect internet free speech" by reaching out to advocacy groups, donating to groups that rescue children from prostitution and complaining on social media. Despite no longer having a public role with the website, the report accuses former Backpage founders Michael Lacey and James Larkin of concealing their continual ownership through "a complex chain of domestic and international shell companies." Lacey and Larkin are expected to testify before a Senate hearing Tuesday.

## Kim Kardashian's limo driver in Paris among 17 suspects arrested for burglary

(Agencies) The limo driver who ferried Kim Kardashian home the night of her terrifying Paris heist was among 17 suspects arrested Monday for the high-profile crime, according to

French media.

The 27-year-old chauffeur was nabbed along with 16 other suspects in the first big bust for the Oct. 3 armed robbery, French newspaper Le Monde

said Monday.

Kardashian was held at gunpoint by masked men who stole millions in jewelry — including a \$4 million ring — from the ritzy No Address Hotel in Paris.

From the beginning, the well-organized robbery raised suspicions of a possible inside job — and French police appear to believe the driver may have fed details of the reality star's comings and goings to his partners-in-crime, according to reports.

French attorney Jean Veil said his client Kardashian, 36, is "very happy" and "very reassured" by the arrests. Most of the 17 rounded up are well-known to French police, local media said. Many have rap sheets for forgery, armed robberies,



counterfeit charges and drug trafficking. Five of the alleged robbers disguised themselves as police officers, Le Monde reported.

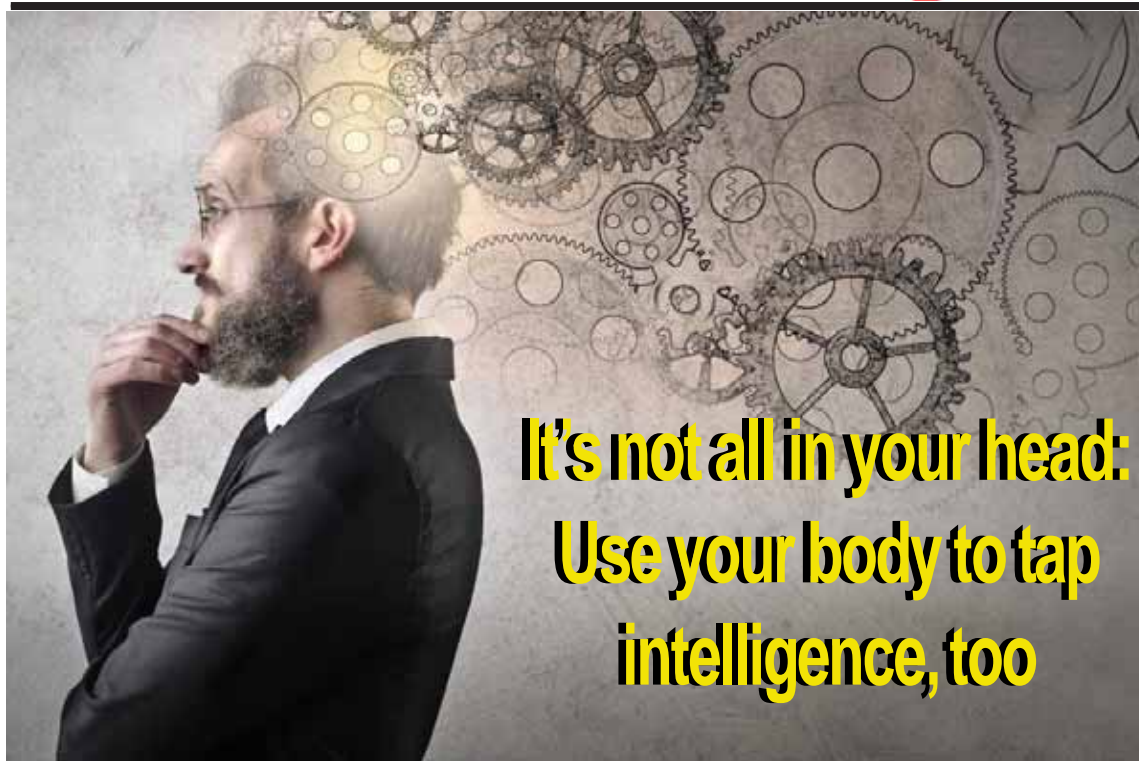
They were arrested along with the others in several locations in and around Paris, including the densely populated suburb of Vincennes, as well as Le Raincy. Some were also nabbed in other large cities. Three of them are women, French media said, and several are above age 55. The

oldest suspect is a 72-year-old man known to police as "Pierre B," multiple French media outlets said. He was arrested when police stormed into his villa in the small town of Plascassier, about 20 miles outside the city of Nice, Le Monde reported.

The early-morning raids were the culmination of three months' investigation into the Kardashian West robbery that made headlines around the world.







## It's not all in your head: Use your body to tap intelligence, too

As we move deeper into the 21st century, new products, new technologies, unexpected opportunities and unforeseen challenges lie ahead.

As a leader, you are going to have to tap into your potential and intelligence to meet those challenges.

Intelligence can be described as a mental ability for reasoning, the ability to learn, understand things and solve problems. Intelligence also includes cognitive functions such as perception, attention, memory,

language and planning, which means it can be reliably measured by standard tests such as for educational achievement, job performance and health.

But the intelligence going on within you is so much more than this.

As you read this, perhaps you're eating breakfast. With your senses you can see it, taste it, hear the crunch or crackle of whatever you're eating...and then it passes into your body and you forget about that

mouthful as you take another bite.

While you may forget about each mouthful, within you so much intelligence is required to orchestrate cells, digestive juices and organs to function in a way that your body absorbs the nutrients it requires from your breakfast and discards what is not needed.

An enormous amount of intelligence is at work within you to run you and your body.

First there is the brain — a remarkable organ that is built of

nerve cells, or neurons, to be precise. About 100 billion of them are constantly wiring and firing together in your head so each experience you have becomes embedded in the network of brain cells that produce the experience.

What this means is that each time you repeat a particular thought or action, you strengthen the connection between a set of brain cells or neurons. However, your brain is not the only source of intelligence available to you.

It is now acknowledged that the human heart actually possesses a "heart-brain" composed of about 40,000 neurons that can sense, feel, learn and remember. The heart-brain actually sends messages to the head-brain about how the body feels.

Research studies have shown that each human heart emits an electromagnetic field — the largest generated by any part of the human body — which extends up to several feet away from the body in a 360-degree radius. Indeed, the heart is said to be 100,000 times stronger electrically, and 5,000 times stronger magnetically, than the brain. That means your heart literally communicates with the hearts of others in your

immediate vicinity!

When you feel good, others feel good, and conversely, when you're upset it affects those around you too.

Energetic interactions possibly contribute to the "magnetic" attractions or repulsions that occur between people, and in turn also affect both business and social relationships.

Have you ever had a gut feeling about a particular person or situation? Well, it turns out that the gut is much more than a digestive system. Research has identified that the gut also has an intelligence of its own — the gut brain is constantly communicating with you.

Remember a time when your gut was telling you that it had eaten enough food, yet consciously you overruled the message and continued to eat?

A great example of utilizing all of this intelligence comes from Masaru Ibuka, co-founder of Sony. When interviewed, he said he liked to "swallow a deal" before he signed it.

First he would review all the information using the brain in his head, and then he'd get his assistant to prepare a tea ceremony. If the tea felt good in his gut he would go ahead and sign, and if it did not then the deal would not get signed.

Next time you have an important decision consider embracing all the intelligence available to you. Utilize your brain to consider what you or others think about the situation; the intelligence emanating from your heart encourages you to feel what is important to you, the impact on you and others; while your gut gets you aligned with who you are and what action is required. Your brain, heart and gut are all made up of different types of cells and even a single cell takes decisions to deal with unforeseen difficulties. In fact, your cells hold the blueprint for your emotional, mental and spiritual state. Your cells remember all of who you are and have been right up to the present day. As you change, grow and evolve in any area of your life, your cells are continuously updating your personal information. Now all of this is happening in one body — in you! Imagine the magnitude of all this potential when you multiply it by the number of people around you or in your organization, and you'll begin to appreciate the potential intelligence available to you.

## Kim Kardashian could get back her \$4M engagement ring following the arrest of Paris robbery suspects

The reality TV star could get back her \$4 million, 20-karat Lorraine Schwartz emerald cut diamond engagement ring after 17 suspects were arrested on Monday in connection with the Paris robbery, Us Weekly reported. Two of the suspects, a pair of brothers in their 50s, likely disposed of the ring and could help authorities retrieve it, Paris police sources told Us.

"They are involved in the diamond trade, and are thought to have handled the stolen jewelry," the insider told the celeb magazine. "The jewelry has not yet been found, but these brothers could lead us to it over the coming days," the same sourced continued to Us Weekly. The reality TV star could get back her \$4 million, 20-karat Lorraine Schwartz emerald cut diamond engagement ring after 17 suspects were arrested on Monday in connection with



the Paris robbery, Us Weekly reported.

Two of the suspects, a pair of brothers in their 50s, likely disposed of the ring and could help authorities retrieve it, Paris police sources told Us.

Kim Kardashian shows off her engagement ring in a photo with husband Kanye West back in August 2016. "They are involved in

the diamond trade, and are thought to have handled the stolen jewelry," the insider told the celeb magazine. Kim Kardashian's limo driver in Paris among 17 suspects arrested

"The jewelry has not yet been found, but these brothers could lead us to it over the coming days," the same sourced continued to Us Weekly. Kim Kardashian

shares a photo of her jewelry to Instagram with the caption, "Here's a bedtime selfie from my book Selfish. It must really be a show off my ring selfie bc I still have all of my make up on! #SELFISH"

All the times Kim Kardashian flaunted her jewelry on social media

Kardashian's limo driver in Paris is also among the 17 suspects who were arrested on Monday, adding to the suspicious that the well-organized October robbery was an inside job. French attorney Jean Veil, who is representing the 35-year-old "Selfish" author, said she is "very happy" and "very reassured" by the arrests. "These arrests are a nice surprise because we might be able to find the jewels," Veil told L'Express. Kardashian was tied up, gagged and robbed at gunpoint in her Paris hotel room on Oct. 3 while visiting the city for its fashion week.



# Anything But Pacific

great powers into open conflict in 1941. Make no mistake, the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 and Tokyo's increasing desire to close off trade in Asia to any actors other than Japan were the key factors in forcing confrontation. However, examination of the diplomatic cables that show American and Japanese assessments of each other show that neither side really understood the other's concerns on issues varying from maritime defence to free trade in the region. Eventually, those misunderstandings helped provoke a brutal war.

Historians may look back at the past few weeks and wonder whether a similar set of mutual misunderstandings could trigger a serious regional conflict between the US and China. The likelihood of such a confrontation is still, mercifully, far lower than was the case in the 1940s. But both the US and China run the risk of exacerbating the one factor that, above all, could create a crisis in East Asia that would spill over to the rest of the region and the world: unpredictability. Both are sending out mixed signals that make it unclear how regional partners should engage with them to create a zone of mutual trust and prosperity.

## BATTLE OF DIU (1509)

This naval battle fought in the Arabian Sea and won by the Portuguese against a combined fleet of the Gujarat Sultan, Mamluk Burji of Egypt, Zamorin of Calicut and supported by the Ottomans, the Venice Republic and the Ragusa Republic was crucial for taking over the Indian Ocean trade route from the Arabs and the Venetian control.

Until recently, it was China that appeared to have the more serious case to answer. Between 2012 and 2015, China's regional diplomacy was marked by assertive and often belligerent-sounding rhetoric, sometimes matched by actions. For several years, China raised the temperature with Japan over the islands in the East China Sea known to the Chinese as the Diaoyu

and the Japanese as the Senkaku. Menacing

encounters between warships and fighter aircraft on both sides led many to worry that a local incident might quickly explode into regional conflict. A sort of cold peace between Chinese president Xi Jinping and Japanese premier Shinzo Abe was agreed when the two shook hands at the APEC summit in November 2014. However, the past two years have been marked by increasing Chinese activity in the South China Sea. Despite Chinese assurances that they do not intend to militarise disputed reefs and islands in an area vital to international shipping, there are increasing signs of a build-up in those areas that gives neighbours such as Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam seeming reasons for concern.

However, the past few weeks have seen two major developments that have the potential to change the dynamic in the region. One is a growing sophistication in Chinese strategic diplomacy in the region. The other, of course, is the election of Donald J. Trump as the next president of the United States.

Pearl Harbor led to a devastating war in the Pacific that ended with Japan's defeat and the establishment of an order in the region that proved much more lasting than many would have expected in 1945. Over the years, stability in the Asia Pacific region became dependent on three factors: the establishment of regional actors, notably ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), who created networks that helped stabilise the region; stronger bilateral security and trade relationships; and underpinning it all, the assurance of the US that it would support its allies. There were major changes in this structure during the years of the Cold War and after, most notably, the reintegration of China after 1971, but these broad pillars were at the heart of the region's relative peace and stability.

China has come to realise that

its growing military power gives it the capacity to intervene in the region, but not the assurance of genuine regional leadership that it so craves. For this, the Belt and Road Initiative, often nicknamed OBOR (One Belt, One Road) that is at the heart of Xi Jinping's regional strategy, has become increasingly important. Essentially, it is a proposition that states that cooperation with China's aims will be rewarded with generous contributions to infrastructural development. Rather than stressing China's military capacity to force other actors into doing its will, OBOR provides China with the possibility (not yet realised) of rivalling America's unmatched 'soft power' in the region.

Even before November 2016, there were some signs that China's OBOR strategy was working. Pakistan has welcomed Chinese investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, one of the more advanced parts of a proposed network that is supposed to create a trade zone that stretches from western Europe to Southeast Asia. President Duterte of the Philippines has combined INSULTS towards the US (referring to Obama as a 'son of a whore') with a growing willingness to accommodate Chinese demands—for instance, soft-peddalling the fact that the Philippines had brought a successful case against China at the Hague Tribunal over rights in the South China Sea.

However, Trump's election has forced all regional actors to reassess their positions, a situation that may continue for many years to come. During the election campaign, Trump's most notable statements about the region seemed to suggest a sharp withdrawal of American commitment in Asia. He implied that Japan and South Korea might have to obtain their own nuclear weapons rather than relying on the US security umbrella. His unexpected election seemed to raise a few cautious smiles in Beijing. Hillary Clinton was widely regarded as a 'hawk' on China issues, and Chinese policymakers welcomed the idea of a president who seemed to know little and care less about the Asia Pacific. Those smiles will have been

wiped away in the past few weeks. Donald Trump's actions since his election with regard to China seem to imply confrontation, not withdrawal. His decision to take a phone call from Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-wen was portrayed as a commitment to an American ally which has shown a commendable commitment to liberal democracy. Yet, Trump's follow-on comments implied that he was questioning the long-held 'One China' policy not through some commitment to liberalism (which was hardly a key part of his domestic electoral platform), but as leverage for better trade deals. The 'One China' policy has been maintained by all US governments since 1979; it is an awkward formula that acknowledges certain commitments to Taiwan while making it clear that only one state is recognised as the official voice of China. It is messy and inconsistent in various ways, but it has also helped to maintain the peace between two potentially hostile powers in the region. Trump's actions have caused confusion in Beijing, as well as much of Asia. How can Trump's rhetoric of withdrawal from the region, expressed during the campaign, be reconciled with a sudden and seemingly hawkish take on China? Who, in practice, is making Trump's China policy? An incident in mid-December over a US information-gathering drone captured by the Chinese seemed to sum up Beijing's dilemma. The action appeared to be another attempt to assert an increasingly confident Chinese presence in the region. However, Trump reacted fast, and uncompromisingly, referring to it as an 'unprecedented' event on Twitter (later changed to 'unprecedented'). The Chinese reacted in turn, accusing the US of 'hyped' the incident and indicating that they would return the drone. It is possible that Beijing is testing the edges of what the new president will tolerate, and finding—to its surprise—that he might be serious about confronting China. If this is true, it adds another level of volatility to an already nervous region.

Beijing—like the rest of the world—is also unsure what the significance might be of Trump's appointment of a Russia-friendly foreign policy establishment in Washington. Moscow and Beijing get on fine these days, but it is an alliance of convenience, not

deep friendship. (It was not until 1989 that the hostile Cold War relationship between the two was finally healed.) If the US and Russia, unprecedentedly, became much warmer towards one another, then Vladimir Putin might turn a blind eye to greater American confrontation toward Beijing's actions in Asia. This scenario might have seemed unlikely just a few months ago; but unlikely foreign policy scenarios are clearly going to be a feature of 2017 in general.

Yet, in another area, Trump's actions suggest possibilities for Beijing to exploit. The president-elect has made it clear that he will veto the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the free trade deal brokered by the US, and signed off in a series of painful political manoeuvres by allies such as Japan, but which excluded China. If the TPP is dead, this gives a new potency to the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), a rival free trade grouping championed by China. The ironic, but real, possibility is there that China could position itself as a status-quo power promoting greater economic integration in Asia, while the US becomes an actor known for unpredictable about-turns on everything from security to trade.

Trump has not even been inaugurated, yet his choices are already making the weather in Asia. However, it is worth noting another transition of power coming up, in autumn 2017. Xi Jinping will mark the halfway point of his ten years in power, and there will be a major change of personnel at the highest levels of Chinese Communist Party. Xi will want to make sure that his time in office is marked by the firm establishment of Beijing, not Washington, as the powerbroking centre in the politics of Asia. So far, the uncertain direction of the US president-elect's policy on the region has given Beijing plenty of openings, as well as a wider feeling of uncertainty that, left unchecked, may allow truly cold winds to blow across the Pacific Ocean and the seas connected to it. If America fails to give direction in East Asia, we can be sure that China will not allow the gap to last for long.



# Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Modi Slams 'Black Money Worshipers'

"We have extended the deadline for conversions from December 31, 2016, to June 30, 2017, without any penalty," he added.

Addressing the delegates, Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa said, "Portugal is an open country, we will receive you with open arms if you consider it as your location for investment, education and living".

The convention started with the 'Youth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas', which was

inaugurated as part of this year's meet to connect with the new generation growing up across the world.

It had plenary sessions on problems faced by Indian students abroad, problems faced by NRI students in India, and startups and innovation which have a social impact in India.

Speaking at the event, Minister of State for External Affairs V K Singh said the common thread that binds the Indian diaspora together is the enduring connect

with a country whose history dates back to five millennia, whose contemporary reality takes them on an incredible journey and whose future offers them endless possibilities.

Recalling that the 2015 Youth PBD was about 3Cs, connect, celebrate and contribute, he said it will be "4Ts" this year - "Talent, Technology, Training and Teamwork," he said.

Mr Goel called on the youth to give suggestions on creating infrastructure to

channelise their force. He also assured of all possible assistance from his Ministry for those willing to take up social projects in any part of the country.

About 300-400 overseas Indian youth are participating in the Youth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, including nearly 150 PIOs who are visiting India for the Know India programme.

The convention, which started with the youth event on Saturday, will continue till Monday.

# Obama, Saying Goodbye, Warns of Threats to National Unity

and blame the leaders we elect without examining our own role in electing them." Speaking to a rapturous crowd that recalled the excitement of his path-breaking campaign in 2008, Mr. Obama said he believed even the deepest ideological divides could be bridged. His words were nevertheless etched with frustration — a blunt coda to a remarkable day that laid bare many of the racial crosscurrents in the country.

On Capitol Hill, Senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama presented himself as a moderate in his confirmation hearing for attorney general, while his critics denounced him as a racist. In Charleston, S.C., Dylann S. Roof, the white supremacist who shot nine black churchgoers, was sentenced to death.

And here, in the cavernous convention hall where Mr. Obama celebrated his re-election in 2012, the nation's first black president — still popular, still optimistic — bade America goodbye 10 days before turning over his office to President-elect Donald J. Trump, who ran what his critics labeled a racist campaign.

Mr. Obama pledged again to support his successor. But his speech was a thinly veiled rebuke of several of the positions Mr. Trump staked out during the campaign, from climate change and barring Muslims from entering the country to repealing his landmark health care law.

"If every economic issue is framed as a struggle between a hardworking white middle class and undeserving minorities," Mr. Obama said, "then workers of all shades will be left fighting for scraps while the wealthy withdraw further into their private enclave."

"If we decline to invest in the children of immigrants, just because they don't look like us, we diminish the prospects of our own children — because those brown kids will represent a larger share

of America's work force," he added.

In giving a farewell address, Mr. Obama invoked a privilege of presidents going back to George Washington. He staked his claim as the leader who steered the nation through the storms of the Great Recession to a growing economy and job market. He claimed credit for reducing the rate of uninsured Americans to record lows, while keeping a cap on health care costs.

In a pointed reference to Republicans determined to repeal the health care bill that was one of the signature accomplishments of his presidency, Mr. Obama said, "If anyone can put together a plan that is demonstrably better than the improvements we've made to our health care system — that covers as many people at less cost — I will publicly support it."

There were also nostalgic

moments, as well. He recalled the 2008 campaign that started him on his improbable journey to the White House. He thanked the army of volunteers and staff members who swept him into the Oval Office, ending with the iconic chant, "Yes, we can." And reflecting on all they had accomplished, he added, "Yes, we did." "It has been the honor of my life to serve you," Mr. Obama said. "I won't stop; in fact, I will be right there with you, as a citizen, for all my remaining days." He drew some of the most thunderous applause of the night when he paid tribute to his wife, Michelle — "my best friend" — and Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. — "a brother." As the crowd of 18,000 clapped and stamped their feet, Mr. Obama dabbed his eyes.

Afterward, Mrs. Obama and her elder daughter, Malia, appeared onstage with the president, along

with Mr. Biden and his wife, Jill. The Obamas' younger daughter, Sasha, stayed in Washington because she has an exam in school on Wednesday morning, the White House said.

But Mr. Obama clearly wanted to use his last major turn on the national stage to send a message. Americans, he said, should not take their democracy for granted. Lamenting the perennially low voter turnout rates, Mr. Obama urged people to become involved. "If you're tired of arguing with strangers on the internet," he said, "try to talk with one in real life."

"America is not a fragile thing," the president said. "But the gains of our long journey to freedom are not assured."

The White House had meticulously planned this event, from the location to the tone and cadence of the speech, which clearly reached for the oratorical heights of his best-remembered addresses.

# Plane-loads of NRIs to support Arvind Kejriwal

(Agencies) Cashing in the four weeks of vacation - and two years of savings - Rajveer Singh Mann caught a flight from California to his hometown of Ludhiana and got straight to work. Normally, the 32-year-old's day job is working with a bio-tech firm. But his sabbatical finds him going door-to-door with NRIs like himself to build support for the Aam Aadmi Party or AAP in Punjab, which votes in less than a month. "We see the fruits of good governance abroad and fail to believe that we can't have the same here in India," said Mr Mann to NDTV. In 2014, AAP surprised itself by winning four parliamentary seats, a windfall for the political rookie. It followed up by steadfastly deploying party boss and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal

to campaign across the state, asking that the traditional contenders, the Congress and the Akali-BJP combine (currently in power), be retired to give AAP a shot at forming the government.

The party claims that 2,500 NRIs from Punjab have returned to pound the pavement for votes, determined to help AAP take charge of their home state. Like Harry Dhaliwal, who has surrendered a family vacation to Cuba to hold public meetings in Ludhiana. "37 years ago, I had to leave my country because the values I learned here and applied... the system never gave me returns... but when I applied the same values in Canada, from a farm labourer I ended up being a judge," he said.

"1 in every 5 Punjabis is overseas.

A lack of opportunities, jobs and quality life drives people away. We do whatever little we can for our village, but that's not enough," says Karam Singh Sidhu, 45, who works in Calgary in Canada. AAP gets over 20 per cent of its funding from NRIs, and developed a "Chalo Punjab" campaign urging NRIs to contribute not just money but their time. Those who can't be on the ground are helping by making phone calls, cold-calling a list of voters furnished to them by the party. Last week, Mr Kejriwal said that his party was short of resources to fight the election. In response, on Wednesday, a plane full of NRIs from Canada will land in Chandigarh to give him the support he sought.



# Demonetisation: Why Arun Jaitley's reading of economic activity is a bit baffling

compared with 6.6 percent increase in October and 5.01 percent in September, decline in PMI to 49.6 in December as against 52.3 in November—the slowest recorded growth in the manufacturing sector seen in this year—and the fall in bank credit. The RBI data on bank credit shows that growth in non-food credit growth in December has slowed to the slowest in at least 19 years.

That apart, most two-wheeler makers have reported a drop in the sales post the demonetisation. These numbers tell that there is a slow-down in growth at least in the short-term.

## Employment figures

Also, it is highly critical to look at unemployment figures and performance of small firms to see how these indicators have reacted to the post demonetisation

pain. Jobs in the informal sector are hit hard on account of cash squeeze. According to a study by All India Manufacturers' Organisation (AIMO), In the first 34 days since demonetisation, micro-small scale industries suffered 35 percent jobs losses and a 50 percent dip in revenue.

The organization, which claims membership of over three lakh micro, small scale, and medium and large scale companies operating in manufacturing and export segments, said (read here), nearly all industrial activities came to a standstill post note ban, with the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs).

Another study by rating agency Crisil showed small firms have seen a 41 percent rise in non-cash transactions but projects the overall, growth estimates

for FY 2017, which was expected at 15-20 percent before demonetisation, to fall to 6-8 percent. "Those affected the most are from the traditional sectors with high reliance on cash transactions such as textiles, agricultural products, steel, consumer durables, construction and automobiles. Unorganised players (less than 10 employees) are expected to struggle more than their organised counterparts, with 37 percent of them likely to report negative revenue growth in the second half compared with a quarter of organized players," Crisil said.

Post demonetisation, job demand under National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) has shown a sharp spike that typically happens only in drought conditions when farmers opt to the assured job guarantee scheme to

earn some money. The number of people opting to the assured 100 days income has more than doubled to 83.60 lakh from 38.52 lakh earlier. The rise in NREGA numbers shows that more number of people are losing factory jobs, including those skilled laborers. People getting minimum wages is good, but the trend of skilled laborers moving from factory jobs to non-skilled jobs should be worrying for an aspiring economy.

One hope that Jaitley's optimism on economy proves to be correct going ahead. Till the time the numbers tally, the government's claim that economy has escaped unhurt from demonetisation blues will be seen with an element of skepticism. But, at this stage, his reading of the economy is quite baffling.

# Republicans move to spend billions on Obamacare before they kill it

On their way to killing Obamacare, Republicans are leaning toward funding up to \$9 billion in health care subsidies this year to keep the program afloat — even though they sued the Obama administration to stop those exact payments.

The move is the most significant sign yet that the GOP is serious about propping up Obamacare temporarily to provide a smooth transition to a yet-to-be disclosed Republican replacement.

The irony is deep: Republicans have never voluntarily funded an Obamacare program. This particular subsidy, which covers out-of-pocket health care costs for low-income participants, has been a GOP target since 2014 when House Republicans went to court to argue the White House funded it unconstitutionally. Republicans were exultant last May when the Federal District Court for the District of Columbia ruled in their favor, even though the payments were allowed to continue pending an appeal.

Now, though, several Republican sources say they will have no choice but to appropriate the money. With President-elect Donald Trump and top lawmakers vowing a smooth transition to a new plan, they can't blow up Obamacare until they enact a replacement.

Energy and Commerce Chairman Greg Walden (R-Ore.) wants to see the program funded "one way or another," he told POLITICO. "If you don't, the plans have the ability to cancel midyear, and we said we wouldn't pull the rug out from under people — and we shouldn't."

The court case centers on cost-sharing subsidies that help certain low income people with out-of-pocket medical costs, such as doctors' co-pays — not the separate premium subsidies that are helping millions of people, including some middle-class families, purchase insurance through Obamacare.

If Republicans were to stop the

payments, they would risk owning the very sudden and likely collapse of the Obamacare exchange markets. That's because insurers would still be on the hook for the payments under the law, and would likely flee the markets almost immediately to avoid paying out billions.

Cutting off the money mid-year, "would be disastrous" for the state's insurance market and those covered by it, Utah Gov. Gary Herbert wrote House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) on Friday, urging Congress to fund the subsidies until year's end.

"As we work to re-craft healthcare in our country, we must be careful not to increase the rate of uninsured, particularly for our most vulnerable citizens," Herbert wrote.

If Republicans do support the program, however, some fear they would be blamed for "bailing out" insurance companies. One idea that has been floated to counter that narrative is to give the funding directly to consumers rather than to insurance companies.

"What they say is, we're only doing this because they can't change the law quickly enough," said Tom Miller, a health care policy expert at the American Enterprise Institute.

Several Republican sources stressed that no final decisions have been made, but they will have to come soon: The court allowed the subsidies to continue while the Obama administration appealed the decision. The Trump administration must inform the Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit by Feb. 21 whether it will continue that appeal. If it should stand down, the payments could end almost immediately and Congress would have to be prepared to make a decision.

Republican conversations

around how to deal with the fallout of the House v. Burwell lawsuit include how the subsidy program would be funded — whether in an appropriations bill or in one of the Obamacare repeal and replacement bills — and whether the entirety of the \$9 billion program would be replaced.

"While we build replacements, we want the 11 million Americans who now buy insurance on the exchanges to be able to continue to buy private insurance," Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) said on the Senate floor. "Among the actions that will help are to... approve the temporary continuation of cost-sharing subsidies for deductibles and co-pays."

Not everyone is on board with the argument that Republicans should continue the subsidy through an appropriation.

Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.), chairman of the House Labor and Health and Human Services appropriations subcommittee, said the GOP isn't responsible for funding the mistakes Democrats made while writing Obamacare.

"You can't [fund the program] unless you're going to increase the allocation to the committee," he told POLITICO, referring to the overall limits on health spending his committee must work with. If the House has to fund the program, other health care programs would have to be cut to pay for it.

"I don't know that we're particularly obligated to pay for the mistakes that the Obama administration made that violated the law," he said.

But even Cole said he wants to see a smooth transition and doesn't want to see benefits dropped suddenly.

Insurance companies have a huge stake in the program. The cost-sharing payments are made to insurers, who must use them to defray consumers' out-of-pocket costs. The companies added

language to their contracts for 2017 that allows them to leave the market if the payments are ended, although they have not said that they would definitely drop coverage immediately.

Besides its strategy on Obamacare, the House has long-term constitutional concerns in the case.

For the first time, a federal district court said the legislature could sue the White House over appropriations disputes. The House wants to ensure that ruling stands, according to senior Republican aides. They're likely to lose on that point if the Trump administration moves ahead with the Obama administration's appeal, according to court-watchers.

"The D.C. Circuit [Court of Appeals] consists of a majority of judges appointed by Democratic presidents," said Nicholas Bagley, a University of Michigan Law School professor who argues the House doesn't have the right to sue. "I think this is not a long-term winner for them."

That means the House has a strong incentive to encourage the Trump administration to drop the appeal, even if that means a future White House could be sued by the House of Representatives.

"We're working through the mechanics on it because we also want to preserve the court victory," Walden said. "Regardless of who is in power, if you get to the point where a president can spend whatever he or she wants without any check and balance from the Congress, you don't have these branches anymore."

The first decision will come from the new Trump administration Justice Department. While several Republican sources expect Trump's DOJ to drop the appeal, the president-elect's transition team has not tipped its hand. A Trump spokesman declined to comment on the case because it involves the current White House.

"Upon taking office, the Trump administration will evaluate this case and all related aspects of the Affordable Care Act," the spokesman said.





# A Revenge Plot So Intricate, the Prosecutors Were Pawns

Soon after Seemona Sumasar started dating Jerry Ramrattan, she had an inkling that something might be wrong.

He said he was a police detective, but never seemed to go to work. He seemed obsessed with "C.S.I.," "Law & Order" and other television police dramas.

About a year after he moved into her house in Queens, their relationship soured. One day, he cornered her, taped her mouth and raped her, she said. Mr. Ramrattan was arrested.

But he soon took his revenge, the authorities said. Drawing on his knowledge of police procedure, gleaned from his time as an informer for law enforcement, he accomplished what prosecutors in New York called one of the most elaborate framing plots that they had ever seen.

Unfortunately, as I've been told by an attorney interested in people falsely accused of various behaviors and dragged through even a portion...  
sturho July 30, 2011

I wonder what other cons this criminal has pulled off. Better check all of your accounts. I get conned by crooked companies about once a.. Gary Williams July 28, 2011

This incident has so many different points of reference, correlations and analogies with societies own dysfunctional relationship to it's...

One night, Ms. Sumasar was pulled over by the police. Before she could speak, detectives slapped handcuffs on her. "You know you did it," she said one later shouted at her. "Just admit it." Ms. Sumasar, a former Morgan Stanley analyst who was running a restaurant, said she had no idea what that meant. Yet suddenly, she was being treated like a brazen criminal. She was charged with carrying out a series of armed robberies, based on what the

police said was a wealth of evidence, including credible witness statements and proof that her car was the getaway vehicle.

In her first extensive interview about her ordeal, she recalled sitting in jail, consumed by one thought: "Jerry is behind this."

But when she insisted to the

And so even as Mr. Ramrattan remained free on bail in the rape case, Ms. Sumasar, who had no prior criminal record, was facing up to 25 years in prison.

Despondent, Ms. Sumasar passed her days behind bars scouring the indictments against her for clues that could help prove her innocence, even



authorities that he had set her up, they belittled her claims.

Now, though, they concede that Ms. Sumasar was right — an astonishing turn of events that has transformed her case into one of the most bizarre in the city's recent history.

They released her from jail last December after seven months, acknowledging that the entire case against her had been concocted by Mr. Ramrattan, officials said.

"We prosecute tens of thousands of cases each year, but in the collective memory, no one has ever seen anything like this before," said Richard A. Brown, the Queens district attorney.

"Few people have the capacity to pull off a master plot of this magnitude to exact revenge," Mr. Brown said.

Mr. Ramrattan framed Ms. Sumasar because she would not drop the rape charge, prosecutors said.

as a law enforcement officer, prosecutors say, but he often presented himself as a private investigator.

Mr. Ramrattan, who is being held at Rikers Island, appeared this month in a Queens court, where a judge refused a request for bail and set his trial date on the rape and conspiracy charges for Oct. 3. He has pleaded not guilty to both. He and his supporters are now voicing their own theory of the case: Ms. Sumasar framed him.

"My son is innocent, he was set up," said Shirley Ramrattan, Mr. Ramrattan's mother.

Mr. Ramrattan's lawyer, Frank Kelly, said, "Everything about Ms. Sumasar and her associates will come out."

Some legal experts say Ms. Sumasar's story shows how the American justice system can be easily manipulated, with the principle of innocent until proven guilty turned on its head.

Prosecutors countered that the web of false evidence presented by Mr. Ramrattan was so detailed they had little reason to doubt it.

But Anthony Grandinette, Ms. Sumasar's former lawyer, said law enforcement was negligent.

"Why would a tiny woman with no criminal record, who worked 10 years on Wall Street, randomly hold up people at gunpoint at night dressed as a policewoman?" Mr. Grandinette asked.

Ms. Sumasar, the daughter of an Indian taxi company owner from the South American nation of Guyana, was the embodiment of immigrant success. When Mr. Ramrattan, dressed in a suit and tie, first entered her restaurant in 2006 and introduced himself as a police detective, Ms. Sumasar, a single mother, recalled being impressed. The two began dating, and Mr. Ramrattan eventually moved into Ms. Sumasar's house. At first, he seemed attentive, but she grew suspicious of him. He lied constantly, she said.

"I said to Jerry, 'You tell so many lies, I think you actually believe what you are saying,'" Ms. Sumasar said.

Throughout 2008, she said she begged him to leave but he refused. After Ms. Sumasar said she was attacked, on March 8, 2009, she pressed rape charges against Mr.

Ramrattan, who was arrested and released on bail. Soon after, Mr. Ramrattan sent friends to intimidate her, prosecutors said. They said that when she would not back down, he vowed to put her away.

The key to his scheme, prosecutors said, was to spread fake clues over time, fooling police into believing that all the evidence pointed to Ms. Sumasar.

They said he coached the supposed victims, driving them past Ms. Sumasar's house so that they could describe her Jeep Grand Cherokee and showing them her photo so they could pick her out of a police lineup.

The setup began in September 2009, prosecutors said. An illegal immigrant from Trinidad told the police that he had been handcuffed and robbed of \$700 by an Indian woman who was disguised as a police officer and had a gun, according to court documents.

Prosecutors said Mr. Ramrattan had persuaded the immigrant to lie, telling him that he could receive a special visa for victims of violent crimes.

Six months later, another man said he had been robbed in Nassau County by two police impersonators and described the main aggressor as an Indian woman about Ms. Sumasar's height. The man said he had managed to take down the first three letters of the Jeep Grand Cherokee's New York license plate — A.J.D.

All the while, Ms. Sumasar had a strong alibi, including cell phone records showing that calls were made from her phone at a casino in Connecticut on the day of the robbery.

But Sheryl Anania, executive assistant district attorney in Nassau County, said Ms. Sumasar's business was foundering, so she appeared to have a motive.

The final fake crime was conjured in May 2010, officials said, when an acquaintance of Mr. Ramrattan said she had been held up by a couple posing as police officers. She said they were driving a Grand Cherokee, but she gave a full Florida license plate number.

She said she heard the pair call each other by name — "Seem" and "Elvis." Elvis was the nickname of another former boyfriend of Ms. Sumasar, who owned the Jeep.

When the police looked into the Florida plate number, they found that the day after the purported March robbery, the title and the plate for the Cherokee had been transferred from Elvis to Ms. Sumasar's sister in Florida.





# The 1987 TV Miniseries That Predicted a Russian Takeover of America

***Long since forgotten, 'Amerika' was a commercial and artistic flop. Watching it today makes for uncomfortable viewing.***

If the election of an American president abetted by Russian interference seems stranger than fiction, you're almost right. Exactly 30 years ago, in the midst of the Cold War, ABC aired a seven-night, 14-and-a-half-hour miniseries depicting life 10 years after the Soviet Union manipulates the presidential election as meek and deflated Americans shrug. "Amerika," was heavily criticized at the time for peddling the histrionic premise of a bloodless coup. And while much of the production remains implausible, its core message is more relevant today than ever: They did it because we let them.

In the alternate universe of "Amerika," (available only in VHS, though it can be found on YouTube) a puppet government was installed in 1988, after a sham election in which both major party candidates were Soviet stooges. By 1997, the 50 states had been replaced by 12 "administrative areas." Communication systems had been taken out – no Internet or cell phones in this version of 1997 – cutting Americans off from each other. The mighty U.S. military is no more; the areas are patrolled by Soviet-controlled "United Nations Special Service Units." Dissidents, if not simply exiled to desolate parts of the country, are brainwashed at the "People's Acceptance Hospital." Older Americans grumble about food shortages and a lost way of life, but are resigned to their fate. Kids are taught their "ancestors" were "bullies" who only killed Indians, exploited workers and dumped those who couldn't work into "slums" to die. (Lincoln is still revered, but his image now gets paired with Lenin.)

Hope for a restoration of democracy is personified in Devin Milford, played by Kris Kristofferson. Milford, clearly styled on then-first term Senator John Kerry, is a Vietnam vet-turned antiwar activist-turned

Massachusetts congressman. He was the last gasp for freedom, running as an independent in the 1988 presidential election before being sent to an American gulag. "Amerika" begins with his release after a six-year imprisonment. He's not free. He's confined to 25-mile area in his hometown of what was called Nebraska, but is now part of the "Central Administrative Area." The Russians try to pressure him to help stifle nascent protests, but he is too stubborn and becomes the symbol of the resistance.

Milford's refusal to bend is contrasted by his childhood friend Peter Bradford (Robert Urich). Bradford begins as a county administrator disgusted by his Russian overlords. But as he tries to do as much good as he can within the system, he gradually becomes closer to the regime. He eventually agrees to help formally dissolve the United States by turning the administrative areas into rump countries – the final phase of the Soviet's grand plan, expedited by a false-flag massacre of the entire U.S. Congress, blamed on American terrorists. Bradford is tapped to become president of the new country, "Heartland."

Hovering over them is the Andrei Denisov (Sam Neill), a KGB agent effectively running the Central Administrative Area (not to be confused with the real-life Andrey Denisov, who is Russia's current ambassador to China). Cynical manipulation comes as easy to Denisov as breathing – he casually takes credit for a "controlled provocation," stirring up "young people" to "resist in ways that make them feel good, not those that actually accomplish anything." But he holds a soft spot for America. At key moments, he lectures Milford and Bradford – with a trace of sadness – on why their fellow Americans surrendered the Cold War.

How was it that the Soviets were able to waltz into America? The specifics of the coup are never spelled out, but various explanations are given as to why Americans were too demoralized to resist. Milford, in archival footage from his doomed presidential campaign, blames the scars from Vietnam, which "struck the core of our perception of ourselves as a people."

Some point to economics. One man cites the decline of American manufacturing: "They wanted a country which didn't have a productive capacity. I guess we were [already] well on our way to giving it up." Marion Andrews (Wendy Hughes), Milford's conniving ex-wife who betrayed him in 1988, rationalizes that Americans chose to welcome the communists because they were tired of chronic inequities: "Many of us took the opportunity to create an America we believe in. There were millions of people who never participated in the so-called 'American Dream.'"

Milford has a different explanation. In a separate scene, he tells his sister soon after his return home that Americans were too scared and selfish to support his campaign and stand up for democracy: "I lost faith in everybody. Nobody wanted to risk anything for anybody else. Everybody afraid they were going to lose what they had. They knew it was bad. They were just afraid it'd get worse."

Bradford, angrily defending his decision to be the face of secession from America to his horrified wife, echoes Milford: "For most people, being an American never meant that much anyway ... Damn, I am so tired of this 'I'm an American' bull! Where was all that patriotism when it counted? Where was that willingness to sacrifice? Nobody wanted to join the damn Army to defend the country unless they got paid

well. Nobody wanted to give any time to public service unless they could make a career out of it."

But Denisov sums it up most succinctly, "You lost your country before we even got here."

The mini-series is all but totally forgotten today, largely because it was an overhyped ratings bust. In the run up to its premiere, it had attracted massive controversy, especially among the left, which presumed it was going to be seven nights of right-wing war-mongering propaganda. (Mother Jones magazine published a six-article attack spread ahead of its airing.) Not only did the Soviet Union complain, but so did the United Nations, which threatened legal action over the use of its name and logo. (In fact, "Amerika" treats the U.N. like an essential institution; Milford laments America "abandon[ed] the principle of a United Nations," letting Russia, "usurp its name and debase its function." Denisov further explains that America's disinterest in the U.N. and international affairs was what turned the world against it.)

Mother Jones' Todd Gitlin hoped that "CBS and NBC will rise to the occasion with some ingenious counterprogramming." NBC came through. While "Amerika" won the ratings battle on its opening night, attracting 22 million households, "The Facts Of Life Down Under" was close behind with 19 million. Lacking a gangbusters premiere installment, ratings for "Amerika" steadily declined over the week.

Beyond artistic merits, "Amerika" suffered from poor timing. Production began a few years earlier, when President Ronald Reagan declared the Soviet Union an "evil empire" and joked on a hot mic that he signed legislation to "outlaw

Russia" so "we begin bombing in five minutes." (Many presumed ABC greenlighted "Amerika" to pacify conservatives livid over "The Day After," its 1983 depiction of nuclear holocaust, though the network denied it.) But by February 1987, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had acknowledged the USSR's economic troubles, begun his glasnost reforms and reached out to Reagan. "'Amerika' became an anachronism before it ever saw the light of day," crowed The Nation's Andrew Kopkind in his critical review.

Watching "Amerika" through the lens of 2016 is a wholly different experience.

It's still a slog. This is not a pulpy "Red Dawn" or a grippingly tense "Manchurian Candidate." The pace is slow, the lectures often leaden and the editing nonexistent. Seven hours could have easily been lopped off, if not for the desire to have a momentous, week-long television event. The New York Times TV critic warned, "getting through the enormous glut of stereotypes and preachifying dialogue ... will tax even the most willing suspenders of disbelief." The Washington Post was more charitable, deeming it "worth enduring" because of its "daring grimness."

And there are plenty of outdated references. The 20th century Cold War with the Russians was an existential battle against communism. The question posed by "Amerika" was whether Americans were capable of giving up on democracy, but also on capitalism. In turn, "Amerika" is at its most incredulous when depicting Americans accepting the thin gruel of communism. An early scene shows Bradford at the local diner, wistfully ordering "Aunt Jemima pancakes, real maple syrup and tiny pork link sausages."



# Warming of Indian Ocean behind groundwater decline in India

(Agencies) Changes in precipitation, which are linked to the warming of the Indian Ocean, is the main reason for recent decline in groundwater storage in India, a new study led by researchers of IIT Gandhinagar has warned. Agriculture in India relies heavily on groundwater for irrigation, particularly in the dry northern regions where precipitation is scarce.

Groundwater withdrawals in the country have increased over tenfold since the 1950's, from 10-20 cubic kilometres per year in 1950, to 240-260 cubic kilometres per year in 2009. Satellite measurements have shown major declines in groundwater storage in some parts of the country, particularly in northern India.

"Groundwater plays a vital

role in food and water security in India. Sustainable use of groundwater resources for irrigation is the key for future food grain production," said study leader Vimal Mishra from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Gandhinagar.

"With a fast-growing population, managing groundwater sustainably is going to become even more important," said Mishra. "The linkage between monsoon rainfall and groundwater can suggest ways to enhance groundwater recharge in India and especially in the regions where rainfall has been declining, such as the Indo-Gangetic Plain," Mishra added.

Groundwater acts like a bank for water storage, receiving deposits from surface water and precipitation and withdrawals as

people pump out water for drinking, industry and irrigating fields. If withdrawals add up to more than the deposits, eventually the accounts could run dry, which could have disastrous consequences.

"This study adds another dimension to the existing water management framework. We need to consider not just the withdrawals, but also the deposits in the system," said Yoshihide Wada, deputy director of the Water program at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in Austria. The issue of groundwater depletion has been a topic of much discussion in India, but most planning has focused on pumping or the demand side, rather than the deposit side. By looking at water levels in wells around the country,



the researchers could track groundwater replenishment following the monsoons. They found that in fact, variability in the monsoons is the key factor driving the changing groundwater storage levels across the country, even as withdrawals increase. In addition, the researchers found that the monsoon precipitation is correlated with Indian Ocean

temperature, a finding which could potentially help to improve precipitation forecasts and aid in water resource planning. "Weather is uncertain by nature and the impacts of climate change are extremely difficult to predict at a regional level," said Wada. The study was published in the journal *Nature Geoscience*.

# Counterpoise Beyond Trump's Asia Rhetoric

*With a brawnier navy, the new US President will take a more forceful approach to America's 'balancing' mission in Eurasia*



(Agencies) What will become of the Asia "pivot"—the Obama administration's "rebalance to Asia"—in Donald Trump's America? One guy's guess: less will change than you might think. The logic behind the pivot is timeless and compelling—even for a president-elect who flouts convention with glee. Asia will remain central to US foreign policy and strategy even as—perhaps—Europe reclaims its former stature within that space.

Now, the terminology—pivot, rebalance—may change. Incoming presidential administrations famously distance themselves from their predecessors—especially when those predecessors come from a rival party. The pivot is an Obama administration artefact, and thus might appear destined for the political refuse heap.

But although Secretary of

State Hillary Clinton coined the term in a Foreign Policy essay back in 2011, the concept of a military and diplomatic swing from the Atlantic theatre to maritime Asia long antedates the Obama administration. Indeed, it represents a bipartisan venture stretching back to the George W. Bush years, if not to the Cold War's aftermath a quarter-century ago.

Moreover, the pivot's underlying logic—a logic holding that America should balance against domineering countries or alliances in Eurasia—dates back over a century.

In short, the pivot is a strategic concept grounded in longstanding US foreign policy traditions. And it commands across-the-spectrum appeal. President-elect Trump is a foreign-policy rulebreaker—witness his recent phone

conversation with Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen, which cast doubt on Washington's "One-China policy". Nevertheless, oddsmakers versed in US history might wager that the pivot will survive the impending changeover of power at the White House.

Why? Let's investigate the history, geography and maritime strategy impelling the pivot to Asia. The pivot's prehistory dates back at least a century, to the fin de siècle age when the US began its ascent to world power. Those were the days when geopolitical thinkers like Theodore Roosevelt and Alfred Thayer Mahan started pondering the purposes to which the US should put its waxing diplomatic, economic and military power.

Their ideas had a saltwater flavour, which makes sense: the US Navy constituted the long arm of US foreign policy until military aviation made its debut in the 1910s. (And even after, as the scope for integration increased and naval aviation came into its own.)

Roosevelt, Mahan and kindred naval proponents beseeched Americans to concentrate their attention and energies on what Yale scholar Nicholas Spykman, writing during World War II, would dub the "rimlands" of Western Europe and East Asia. Rimlands were coastal zones from which

an enemy could project armed force across the oceans into the Americas—and to which Americans needed access to export the wares churned out by domestic industry.

Navalists, consequently, entertained both defensive and offensive aims for an outward-reaching US foreign policy. In the realm of military defence, they wanted to prevent hostile powers from dominating either of the rimlands.

If, say, Germany were to conquer Western Europe, including the British Isles, it would gain control of the Royal Navy—the world's strongest fleet. Berlin would usurp enough martial strength from its neighbours to project power across the Atlantic Ocean. And a similar cataclysm could come about in the Far East. Japanese

conquests, for example, would pose a threat to the Philippine Islands, the Asian archipelago wrested from Spain in 1898. An Asia-straddling Japan might even menace North America.

The rise of hostile powers wouldn't do, insisted geopolitical scribes. It behooved the US leadership to help European and Asian powers "balance" against—and, ideally, forestall—burgeoning challenges. By throwing US diplomatic, economic and military resources onto the scales, Washington would help weaker powers in Europe and the Far East stare down overbearing neighbours potentially hostile to the US. Balancing might deter war. Or if it did break out, US military might could help prevent an antagonist from overrunning the rimlands.





# Good news dieters!



(Agencies) It's that time of year when many of us are counting calories and making sure we don't eat more than we really need to. But some foods are guaranteed to make you feel free from any guilt as you'll burn more calories by chewing and digesting them than you'll consume.

While most people know celery is one of these super-healthy zero calorie foods, some others on the list may surprise you - including strawberries and swede.

From apricots to asparagus, and garlic to grapefruit, these very healthy snacks are what are known as 'zero-calorie foods', according to experts.

And when eaten in moderation, they will not contribute to your daily calorie total, it's said.

## 1. APPLES

Calorie content: 47 kcals per 100g  
As the old saying goes, an apple a day keeps the doctor away - and there may be some truth to it. Apples are packed full of important vitamins such as C, and A and can promote heart health.

## 2. APRICOTS

Calorie content: 12 kcals per apricot

Eating apricots is said to help reduce the risk of strokes, and heart attacks. They're also full of vitamin C, potassium and dietary fibre, which all promote good heart health.

## 3. ASPARAGUS

Calorie content: 6 kcals per spear

As well as being packed with antioxidants, it contains lots of essential vitamins such as A, C, E and K along with plenty of fibre.

## 4. BEETROOT

Calorie content: 36 kcals per 100g

Beetroot is a good source of iron and folate as well as containing plenty of antioxidants. It's also

been said to lower blood pressure, boost exercise performance and prevent dementia.

## 5. BROCCOLI

Calorie content: 33 kcals per 100g

Broccoli is a great source of



vitamins K and C, and also has lots of potassium and fibre. It also contains plenty of the powerful antioxidant Vitamin C which is said to help cuts heal quicker and fight off diseases such as cancers.

## 6. CAULIFLOWER

Calorie content: 3 kcals per floret  
One serving of cauliflower is said to contain 77 per cent of an adult's daily recommended allowance for vitamin C. The vegetable is also a great source of other important vitamins.

## 7. CELERY

Calorie content: 2 kcals per stick  
It's mainly water which is why you'll burn more calories than consume them when you eat this vegetable.

## 8. CRANBERRIES

Calorie content: 15 kcals per 100g

These red fruits are another great source of vitamin C, as well as fibre, manganese, and plenty of antioxidants.

## 9. WATERCRESS

Calorie content: 4 kcals per quarter of a bunch

Watercress is thought to have medicinal properties and contains particularly high levels of vitamin K - important for bone

## The 23 foods that contain NO calories because you burn more than you consume as you eat



## 18. LETTUCE

Calorie content: 14 kcals per 100g

Made up of mostly water, a lettuce leaf won't contribute to your daily calorie intake.

## 19. ONION

Calorie content: 7 kcals in one slice

Every recipe book will contain more than a few recipes containing this staple ingredient, but in moderation, you'll burn



put on by up to a fifth.

## 14. GREEN BEANS

Calorie content: 24 kcals per 100g

Eating green beans will help you get a flat stomach, according to some nutritionists. It's packed full of essential vitamins and vitamins, as well as some protein too.

## 15. KALE

Calorie content: 33 kcals per 100g

There are dozens of claims about the cancer-beating properties of kale, and while some nutritionists say eating broccoli and brussels sprouts is actually better for you, the vegetable still contains plenty of essential vitamins.

## 16. LEEKS

Calorie content: 22 kcals per 100g  
Leeks are an excellent source of vitamin K as well as manganese, vitamin B6, copper, iron, and vitamin C.

## 17. LEMONS

Calorie content: 3 kcals per slice  
When life gives you lemons... just eat them. A slice contains just three calories, meaning you'll burn more or the same number - making it a zero calorie food in moderation.

more calories by eating that than you consume.

## 20. RASPBERRIES

Calorie content: 1 kcal per raspberry

Raspberries contain very high levels of vitamin C, and it's said that eating them could help to boost fertility.

## 21. STRAWBERRIES

Calorie content: 3 kcals per fruit  
Strawberries contain more vitamin C than the equivalent amount of oranges and have been said to aid digestion.

## 22. SWEDE

Calorie content: 24 kcals per 100g

Swedes are low in calories, making them an ideal food for slimmers. They supply a reasonable amount of vitamin C - about 20 per cent of the RDA in an 85g cooked portion - as well as some beta-carotene for a healthy immune system.

## 23. WATERMELON

Calorie content: 16 kcals in a quarter of a slice

It's said this fruit could help hydrate you just as much as a glass of water can, and it's also reported to prevent heart attacks and weight gain because it halts the build-up of bad cholesterol.



# Delicate's and Neutral's - The Flaunted trends of The Golden Globes

(Agencies) We, watched, the 74th Golden Globe awards, this past weekend. This star studded event showcases the best designer creation's on the planet. Meryl Streep, was awed by many, not only for her elegance, style, dress but her powerful words. She, very wisely, used her allotted time, to address the current political scenario, and we could not have agreed more with her. Her powerful words "There was one performance this year that stunned me"..... perchance, most of the living beings, pole to pole !!!

Now, from political fire we move to the trends on "Fire" this season .

1) Delicate's, Delicate's and Delicate's : Fine spun , dainty fabrics, sheers a major fashion goal for winter dressing on formal events. Make your winter attire as dainty as you can with chiffon's, laces, organza. The style tip we recommend is to go for thicker lining material like jacquard's and taffeta . Most English dresses have taffeta lining . How can we forget the woven silk taffeta from Princess Di's wedding gown.

2) Yellow : One of our most favored, colors be it any season. Even the slightest dash of this color brighten's up the whole attire. We love this color from banana to

the bright canary yellow or tuscan sun.

3) Pink Power : There is only one color which can make everything look pretty, perfect and most desired for . Go for pink .... Be it a dress or the make up trend you wear. Pink is synonyms with beauty and desire.

4) Grey's : This is the most sorted out color this season for all the formal attires. Add bling and you are the silver lining every one is looking at .Color block with maroon and you set the stage on fire.

5) Metallic's : One trend, which never goes out of sight, season after season . Call it the metallic's, The studded bling's or

the Glitters. It just the same. Add, that touch of extra glamour with sheen.

6) Neutral's and White's : What a big endorsement for whites this award season. All looked super perfect and was a bit of gloomy winters seen any where. Dare to wear White's in Winters. That's the call for the fashion season. Holly Wood royalty showed the real "Trump" style in a class of their own . We loved Hugh Laurie say this "he was accepting his award on behalf of "psychotic billionaires everywhere"

THE LAWN MUSE  
MOHALI , INDIA





Mumbai rocked on January 12 when Hollywood star Vin Diesel and Bollywood star Deepika Padukone came together for the press conference, fan event, and red carpet premiere for the action-packed thriller **xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE** which releases across North American theaters next week on January 20.



## Feel bad when films don't work, says Shraddha Kapoor



New Delhi: Actress Shraddha Kapoor says she gets affected when her film doesn't do as well as expected.

Shraddha's last film "Rock On 2" couldn't get the expected footfalls as it released soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the move to demonetise Rs 500 and Rs 1000 notes to curb black money in India.

Asked how she was affected due to the failure of "Rock On 2", Shraddha told the media here on Wednesday: "When any of your films doesn't work properly, of course you feel bad... But the good thing is that I got busy immediately, so it helps you to shift your mindset."

The 29-year-old actress hopes that her new film "OK Jaanu" does well. "I hope that all films are successful. I hope people go and watch this film," she added. Directed by Shaad Ali, "OK Jaanu", which is a Hindi remake of Mani Ratnam's "O Kadhal Kanmani", will release on Friday. The film also stars Aditya Roy Kapoor.



Bollywood superstar Deepika Padukone is all ready to make her explosive debut in Hollywood starring with Vin Diesel in the high-octane action thriller **xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE** which releases in North American theaters next week on January 20. Team members Vin Diesel, Deepika Padukone, and director D.J. Caruso were given a warm welcome at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport ahead of the India premiere for the film.



## Ok Jaanu

Oscar winner A.R. Rahman delivers new music in the new year for a new kind of love story with **OK JAANU** which releases across North America this Friday, January

13. Shraddha Kapoor and Aditya Roy Kapur star in this much anticipated romantic comedy which finds award-winning producers Karan Johar and Mani Ratnam coming together for something truly special. Adi is a young game designer from Lucknow who dreams of emigrating to



the US and living the American dream. At a chance encounter during his friend's wedding, he meets Tara. She is a recent architecture school graduate working in an architecture firm. She dreams of going to Paris to pursue higher education. The cheerful banter soon gives way to



a conversation where both Adi and Tara realize that they strongly feel that marriage isn't for them and move in together until the time they go their separate ways when career comes calling. With only 10 days left and parting imminent, Adi & Tara are forced to confront some matters of the heart.



## What worked for me in Bollywood works in Hollywood too: Priyanka Chopra

(Agencies) She broke the monotony of Indian actors playing blink-and-you'll-miss appearances in Hollywood by grabbing the lead role in American show Quantico. With a lot of appreciation — and awards — for her role, actress Priyanka Chopra says what worked for her in Bollywood also works for her in Hollywood. "I think the same thing that worked in Hindi films worked for me internationally. I am not afraid of being myself," Priyanka told IANS over the phone from Los Angeles a day before her red-carpet appearance at the Golden Globes. "I think entertainment industry is full of too many wonderful, beautiful people and you can't (just) be someone else. You have to stand out. You have to find your own uniqueness and that has to work for you. So those who want to be an actress, whether it is in America or in India, you have to find who you are and be comfortable with it," she said.

Priyanka's journey in showbiz started at the age of 17 when she was crowned Miss World. It was followed by her Bollywood debut in 2003 with The Hero: Love Story of a Spy.

Many in India rooted for her when she bagged the role of FBI agent Alex Parrish in Quantico for which she won the People's Choice Award — the first South Asian actress to do so. The Quantico fame also got her a role in Baywatch movie, alongside Hollywood A-listers Dwayne Johnson and Zac Efron.

The year 2016 also saw her becoming the presenter at Oscar and Emmy, followed by an invitation to the annual White House Correspondents Dinner. She was conferred India's fourth-highest civilian honour, the Padma Shri, featured in Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People of the world, and became the first Indian to come on the imdb list.



## Below-average films are celebrated in the name of realistic cinema: Nawazuddin



(Agencies) Last year, several films inspired by real-life events released, many of which enjoyed box office success and critical acclaim. But Nawazuddin Siddiqui isn't impressed. The actor says, "Realistic cinema ke naam pe bohot bada fraud chal raha hai. (There is a huge fraud going on in the name of reality cinema.) A lot of films are celebrated in the industry in the name of realistic cinema but they're all below average." Ask him to name a film deserving of the title, and he says: "I recently saw the film, The Court, and that's what I call real and mature cinema." The 42-year-old, known for his roles in films such as Gangs Of Wasseypur (2012), The Lunchbox (2013), Badlapur (2015) and Bajrangi Bhaijaan (2015), hopes that this situation will improve soon. "Right now, Bollywood is in the re-shuffling phase and maybe it will settle down. But as of now, there is a lot of confusion between actors and directors."

Has the National Award-winning actor (for films such as Talaash: The Answer Lies Within and Kahaani) achieved his worth in the film industry? "It's too early for me to question myself about that. If you look at my career, it all actually started in 2012 and I still have a few years to think about something like this," he says.

## Worked extremely hard for 'Bloody Hell': Kangana

(Agencies) Mumbai: She might not be known for her great dancing skills but actress Kangana Ranaut says she has worked extremely hard for an opera styled dance number in her upcoming film "Rangoon". The track "Bloody Hell" is out and Kangana feels confident that her song will leave fans floored.



"I'm better known for my so-bad-it's-good dance. But in this film, I did three major dance sequences in the first schedule," Kangana said in a statement here. The National-Award-winning actress says she was determined to put the best foot forward in bringing high energy to her character Julia. "Dance in the '40s was about high energy and for me, it was all too new. I rehearsed a lot and I don't think I was amazing. But I wasn't terrible either. Julia is a first rate performer and to justify her popularity, I needed to be damn good. However, I was determined. Even if it meant breaking bones, I had to do it for this part," she said. Director Vishal Bhardwaj roped in Norway-based choreographer Sudesh Adhana to train Kangana for the song.

The "Queen" star, who plays a diva from the 40s, rehearsed through out November last year for the song and it was shot in December, the release said.

## 'Noor' not just a film, but an experience: Sonakshi

(Agencies) Mumbai: Actress Sonakshi Sinha, who has wrapped up shooting for her upcoming movie "Noor", says it was not just a film but an experience too.

Sonakshi, who will be seen playing the role of a journalist in "Noor", on Friday shared a photograph of herself on Twitter and thanked director Sunhil Sippy for making her part of the film. "And its a wrap! Thank you for letting me be 'Noor' Sunhil Sippy and Vikram Malhotra! Not just a film... it was an experience! Will miss being her," Sonakshi tweeted. The movie is an adaptation of Saba Imtiaz's novel "Karachi, I Love You". The film is slated to release on April 21.





# Madonna's had lovers who are 3 decades younger, and she's tired of your judgment

(Agencies) Pop icon Madonna has described herself as "oppressed," saying she was tired of a gender double-standard over her relationships with younger men. The 58-year-old singer said in an interview published Tuesday that she has endured criticism throughout her entire career despite her professional success. "I've always felt oppressed," she told Harper's Bazaar

magazine. "A large part of that is because I'm female and also because I refuse to live a conventional life. I've created a very unconventional family. "I have lovers who are three decades younger than me. This makes people very uncomfortable. I feel like everything I do makes people feel really uncomfortable," she said. Madonna has been linked romantically to a number of men in their 20s at the

time, most recently Ivorian model Aboubakar Soumahoro and earlier French choreographer Brahim Zaibat and Dutch dancer Timor Steffens. The Material Girl -- who has four children and has been married twice -- also said she faced sexism in that she is often asked why she remains active as an artist. "Did somebody go to Pablo Picasso and say, 'Okay, you're 80 years old. Haven't you painted

enough paintings?' No. I'm so tired of that question." Madonna, who last year completed a global tour for her latest album Rebel Heart, will soon be directing a movie, Loved. Madonna wrote the screenplay for the film, an adaptation of Andrew Sean Greer's novel The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells about a woman who is transported to different eras as part of psychiatric treatment for depression.



## Here are the Netflix and Amazon TV shows that have gotten the best buzz over the last few years



(Agencies) As awards season continues, streaming giants Netflix and Amazon

are battling to decide who makes the most relevant TV shows. Both snagged a pair of Golden Globes on Sunday, Netflix for its royal drama "The Crown," and Amazon for Billy Bob Thorton's performance in "Goliath" and Casey Affleck's in "Manchester by the Sea." But awards aren't everything. Beyond pure popularity, there's also something to be said for being able to capture the cultural conversation more broadly. There is no perfect measurement of this, but one good proxy is the "Certified

Fresh" section in reviews-aggregator Rotten Tomatoes. To be considered "Certified Fresh," a show must have over a 75% positive rating on the site, and have 20 or more critic reviews (including five from "top critics"). So how do Netflix and Amazon stack up? Netflix is the clear winner, producing 22 "Certified Fresh" shows to Amazon's 6. This makes sense given the sheer amount of original content it is producing (1,000 hours in 2017!). But it also shows that Amazon shows, while they have done well in awards, haven't gotten into the public imagination in the way Netflix's have. For instance, the second season of Amazon's "Mozart in the Jungle" scored a Golden Globe for best comedy series last year, while not even getting enough reviews to qualify it as "Certified Fresh" (its Rotten Tomatoes critic rating was 82%). Last month at the UBS media conference, Netflix's content chief, Ted Sarandos, took a small jab at the disconnect. Though Amazon is spending a lot of money on shows and Tomatoes:

**Only 27 movies have ever hit \$1 billion at the box office - here they are**



(Agencies) With movie ticket prices increasing and the resurgence of franchises like "Star Wars," films earning over \$1 billion worldwide may become commonplace. But, for now, there are only 27 movies from the last 25 years that have managed to join this exclusive club. Using data from Box Office Mojo, we compiled a list of the highest-grossing movies that made \$1 billion or more. From "Minions" to "Furious 7" and more, keep reading for a look at the box-office hits.

## George Clooney backs Meryl Streep, Sonam Kapoor calls Trump a 'joker'



(Agencies) Actor-filmmaker George Clooney has extended support Oscar-winning actress Meryl Streep after to President-elect Donald Trumps commented on her speech at the Golden Globes. "Aren't you supposed to be running the country?" he asked Trump. Streep, honoured at the 74th Golden Globe Awards on Sunday night, slammed Trump in her

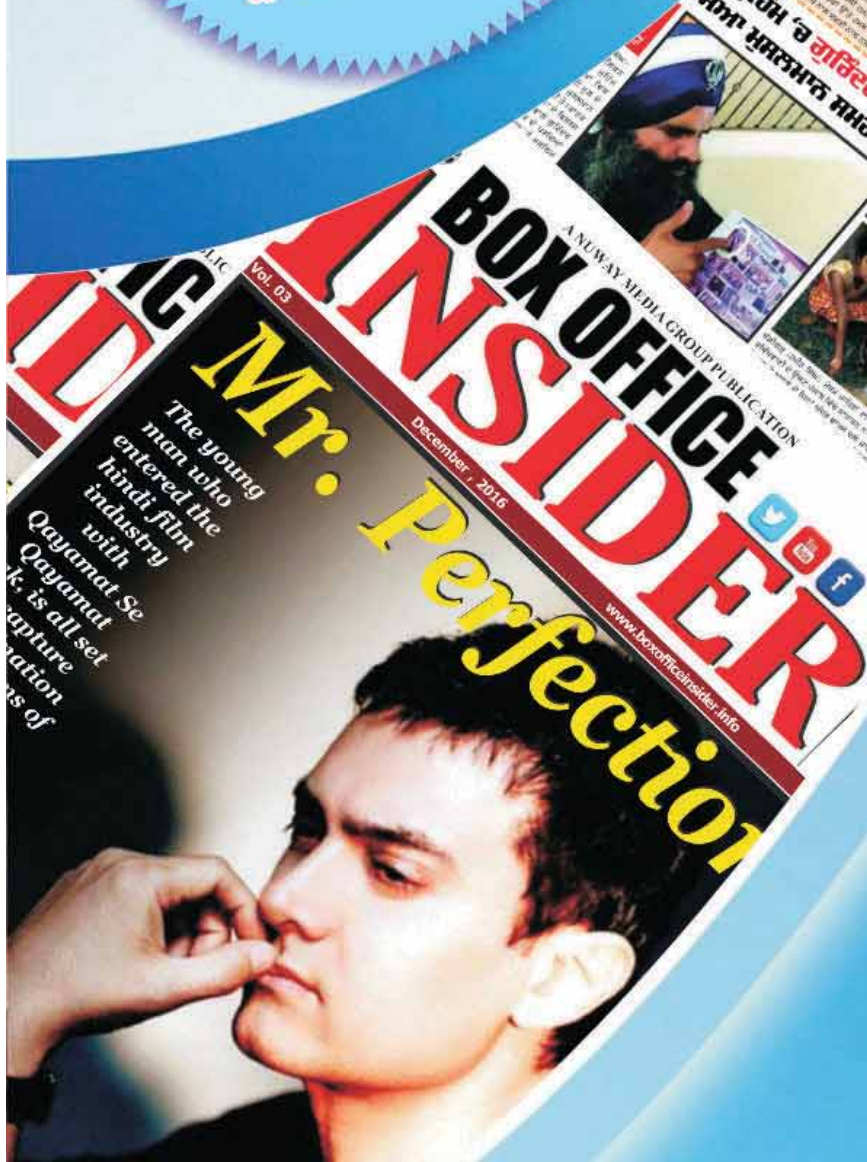
acceptance speech. She spoke of how upsetting it was when he imitated a disabled reporter during a speech in 2015. "This instinct to humiliate, when it's modelled by someone in a public platform, it filters down into everybody's life because it gives permission for other people to do the same thing. Disrespect invites disrespect, violence incites violence. When the powerful use their position to bully others we all lose," Streep had said as she accepted Cecil B DeMille Award at the ceremony. Having won the Oscar thrice, Streep has been nominated over a dozen times for the Academy Award. She is best known for roles in films like Mamma Mia!, The Devil Wears Prada, Silkwood and It's Complicated.





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