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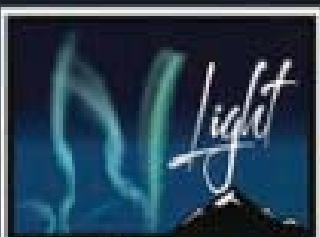
Coming Soon

Pathway to Citizenship for 11 Million Illegal Immigrants in US

Biden plans sweeping reversal of Trump's immigration agenda, from deportations to asylum policy



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Indian farmers allowed to protest in Delhi after clashes

Farmers from India's Punjab state have begun entering Delhi to protest reforms they say are against their interests.

Thousands of them marched to Delhi, where barricades at the border led to clashes with police.

But they are now being escorted by the police to a protest site where they say they will continue demonstrating. The government denies that the reforms, which open the farming sector to private players, will hurt farmers.

"Protesting farmers will be allowed to enter the national capital," the Delhi Police Commissioner told local media,

adding that they will be allowed to protest and urged them to do so peacefully.

The farmers have been marching to the capital since early this week. Two farmers associations put out a statement on Friday saying that they expect 50,000 farmers to reach the Delhi border from the neighbouring state of Haryana. Local media reports say drone cameras have been deployed for security surveillance at the Delhi-Haryana border.

The farmers are desperate to enter Delhi, says BBC Hindi's Dilnawaz

Pasha, who is with a group of farmers near the border. "They are travelling with trolleys full of rice and grains and are cooking their own food. They say they're ready for a long battle." Photos and videos show dramatic visuals of the farmers clashing with police, who have used tear gas and water cannons to stop them. Media reports say that the Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has urged the federal government to defuse the tension at the border. Farmers defied barricades to enter Haryana state on Thursday, despite police trying

to stop them with water cannons. Farmers defied barricades to enter Haryana state on Thursday, despite police trying to stop them with water cannons. Farmers in northern India have been protesting the reforms since they were first introduced in September. Thousands took to the streets back then, where they blocked motorways and railway tracks in different states. The reforms seek to loosen rules around sale, pricing and storage of farm produce - rules that have protected Indian farmers from the free market for decades.



AAPI Mourns the Passing Away of Dr. Ajay Lodha



(Insider Bureau)- "We are shocked and saddened at the passing away of Dr. Ajay Lodha, a visionary leader and past President of AAPI, who died early on November 21st, 2020, due to complications from COVID 19." Dr. Sudhakar Jonnalagadda, President of American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI) said here today.

Dr. Ajay Lodha passed away peacefully, after fighting COVID valiantly for last 8 months at the Cleveland Clinic, surrounded by his wife Smita, his son Amit and his daughter Shweta.

Describing this day as "the darkest day in AAPI history" Dr. Jonnalagadda, who has known him personally and had worked with at the Executive Committee of AAPI under the leadership of Dr. Lodha said, "In his passing away today, I have lost a dear Friend, Mentor, and Brother. We will cherish the wonderful days we spent together. Ajay, you will live in our hearts forever. We love you. OM Shanti."

Dr. Sajani Shah, Chairwoman of AAPI's Board of Trustees pointed to the fact that "The deadly Corona virus has placed the entire healthcare sector, and in particular the Indian American medical fraternity at the frontlines of the fight against the

pandemic. We are deeply saddened by another hero, who gave up his life in caring for his patients."

"Dr. Ajay Lodha's heroic fight with Covid 19 epitomizes the struggles of frontline health workers. Dr. Lodha along with other physicians of Indian origin who have lost their lives due to the pandemic will continue to inspire us and AAPI forever," said Dr. Anupama Gotimukula, President-Elect of AAPI.

Calling Dr. Lodha "a dear friend and courageous soul" Dr. Ravi Kolli, Vice President of AAPI said, "He was man of passion, integrity, determination and generosity. He was truly one of a kind and it was a privilege to have been his friend. He fought till end with great valor befitting of a warrior. His dedication and love of his family was remarkable. His commitment to AAPI family was unprecedented. He was full of ideas and ideals to make the world a better place for all. He accomplished more in his short time on this earth. He will for ever be missed especially his irresistible smile."

Describing Dr. Lodha as "One of the most beloved and dynamic AAPI leaders" Dr. Amit Chakrabarthy, Secretary of AAPI said, "To me he was a long-time

friend and advisor. I personally got to know him and his wife when we were contestants for AAPI treasurer about 12 years ago. I was reading his texts to me with all his wisdom and advice. Brought tears to my eyes. I remember when he made me change my plans and attend his global summit in Rajasthan. His requests are so heartfelt and genuine that one cannot refuse. At every AAPI meeting he was there partying with us with his charming magnetic personality. It is so devastating to hear of the great loss to me personally and to AAPI."

Dr. Satheesh Kathula, Treasurer of AAPI stated, "This is a very sad news for the AAPI family. I had the opportunity to work with Dr. Lodha in AAPI for many years and learned a lot from him. Dr. Lodha was an able leader and did many constructive changes during his tenure as the president of AAPI. He will be missed dearly. My heartfelt condolences to his family."

Dr. Suresh Reddy, Immediate past President of AAPI, recalled his close bond with Dr. Lodha. "I cannot forget, I can only cherish: The time you gave me your bed and you slept on the sofa; For the countless hours you worked to help me serve AAPI through your guidance. For so passionately

standing up for your belief in people, one of whom was me! For being my "Go to" guy for advice about mundane things in life also; For texting me from the hospital and saying that you will give your best fight like a true 'Rajasthani warrior' and, above all, for being my 'Forever Brother' through good time and not so easy times. AAPI and I will be forever indebted to you for what you have been to our Indian community, to the medical fraternity and to India and America as a whole."

Dr. Raj Bhayani, AAPI QLI President, who had worked very closely with Dr. Lodha said, "Dr. Ajay Lodha is one of a kind of leader and my closest friend who made a positive difference in the life of all those whom he had interacted with. His life journey was very inspiring as he has achieved so much during his short life span. His life has been a blessing and his memory a treasure. He is loved beyond words and will be missed beyond measure."

In a message Dr. Krishan Kumar of Long Island and a close friend of Dr. Lodha said, "Dr. Lodha sacrificed his life serving the community and his patients. He has left us for his heavenly abode for another mission. His charming personality and kindness will be remembered for ever. I will truly

miss him." Dr. Jagdish Gupta, a BOT member of AAPI and past president of AAPI-QLI and a close friend of Dr. Lodha showered praises on Dr. Lodha. "Dr. Ajay Lodha was a dynamic, enthusiastic, and visionary leader with endless energy, who always strives for excellence. Under his leadership, AAPI Convention and Global Healthcare Summit had a touch of brilliance, helping create life long memories to cherish. He made our organizations vibrant, strong and politically powerful and provided significant gains." Dr. Ajay Lodha was well known in the community and among his Fellow Physicians as a leader with a power house of entrepreneurial skills. Dr. Lodha had extensive background of overseeing quality assurance and quality improvement. He was a past president of RANA and RAJMAAI (Rajasthan Medical Alumni Association Inc.), Police Surgeon with Nassau County PBA and Director of Research Department at Flushing Hospital, NY.

A past President of AAPIQLI, Dr. Lodha was a former Chief Medical Officer and Senior Vice President of Caritas Health Care System representing St. John's Hospital and Mary Immaculate Hospital in New York.

World Vegan Vision Non Profit Organization of NYC, Who is promoting and creating awareness about healthy life vegan way donated 900 LB+ Grocery to hands of hope community Edison N.J and Foods Bank Network of Somerset N.J. Seen in Picture: World Vegan Vision Public Relations Director Nitin Vyas Committee and Volunteer Uma Swaminathan, Niren Chaudhary, Shailesh Mehta with Foods Bank Somerset Director Marie Scanell & Tim.



Indian national survives after being shot in Doha, embassy rushes to his aid

Haidar Ali, 35, who worked in Doha was shot by his Qatari employer in the face on October 29. Ali was shot when he asked his employer for a leave to visit his family in Bihar.

(Insider Bureau)- An Indian national has survived after being shot in the face by his employer in Doha, the capital city of Qatar. Haidar Ali, 35, who worked in Doha was shot by his Qatari employer in the face on October 29. Ali was shot when he asked his employer for a leave to visit his family in Bihar.

Ali has been discharged from hospital, but the matter has been taken up seriously by the Indian Mission in Doha.

"Mission has proactively extended assistance to the Indian national, with support of the Qatar authorities," said sources.

"He is out of danger and has been discharged from the hospital and Mission had assisted him in finding a suitable place to stay,"

an official added. The Mission is following up with the authorities in his legal case. A police case has been registered and accused has been arrested. The hearing in the case is on November 26. Dhiraj Kumar, ASO Community and Welfare at the Indian embassy in Qatar, has been personally following up the case. Haider Ali was discharged Sunday night and handed over to the Indian diplomat.

Meanwhile, his brother Afsar Ali spoke to India Today TV from Bela Village in East Champaran district of Bihar. A relieved Afsar said he spoke to his brother on Sunday.

Haider Ali was shot on October 29. He had booked a ticket to fly to India the next day but had to be admitted with a gunshot

wound at the Hamad General Hospital in Doha.

While Ali is out of danger, he still needs further medical treatment as he has lost an eye. He would need additional time due to his upcoming legal cases and medical condition, said an official.

Ali's family first learnt about the incident through a family member in Doha and were later contacted by an Indian embassy official in Doha.

Afsar who is pursuing his PhD in Kerala has been in his village due to the lockdown.

He said, "My brother was shot point-blank by his local sponsor. My father is a heart patient and is in shock. My brother has six children, five girls and a boy. His wife and



kids are in shock." According to him, Ali had been working as a welder for the past six years and also worked at the residence of his employer. He had not visited home since 2018.

They are worried if he will ever fully recover. Afsar Ali said, "For now we know that he would be bedridden for a while. We would need money for survival. The Qatar government should

provide us with compensation for what has happened to my brother." While the family waits to hear further on the health condition of Haider, they are also seeking financial compensation from the government of Qatar. The mission is in touch with the family members and is exploring all options of compensation claims and also medical care in Doha itself.

4 Indian-Americans Among 32 Students Chosen As Rhodes Scholars From US

Rhodes Scholarships provide all expenses for two or three years of study at the University of Oxford in England. The Scholarships were created in 1902 by the Will of Cecil Rhodes.

(Insider Bureau)- Four Indian-Americans are among the cohort of 32 students chosen from the US as Rhodes Scholars virtually for the first time this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The diverse group, that won scholarships to the Oxford University in England, comprises immigrants and students of colour.

American Secretary of the Rhodes Trust Elliot Gerson announced the names of the 32 Americans chosen as Rhodes Scholars representing the US on Sunday.

The four Indian-American students include Swathi R Srinivasan, Vijayasundaram Ramasamy,

Garima P Desai and Savarni Sanka.

Never before has a class of Rhodes Scholars been elected entirely virtually, with both candidates and selectors participating safely, independently and digitally, Mr Gerson said.

He said this year's class for the prestigious scholarship reflects the remarkable diversity that characterises and strengthens the United States.

Out of the 32 students, 22 are of colour; 10 are Black, equal to the greatest number ever elected in one year in the United States, nine are first-generation Americans or immigrants and one is a Dreamer with active Deferred Action for

Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status. Seventeen of the winners are women, 14 are men, and one is non-binary.

These bright young Americans will go to Oxford October next year to study in fields broadly across the social, biological and physical sciences, the humanities, and public policy.

They are leaders already, and we are confident that their contributions to public welfare globally will expand exponentially over the course of their careers, Mr Gerson said.

Swathi Srinivasan from Ohio is a senior at Harvard College with double concentrations in Social Studies and History of Science,



with a focus on public health inequality. She is also writing a thesis for the Chemistry Department. She was an intern at the UN Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS in Geneva, has done extensive research and activism on the opioid epidemic, and chaired the Policy Program at the

Kennedy School Institute of Politics. She is also a Ghungroo choreographer. At Oxford, she intends to do the M.Sc. in International Health and Tropical Medicine and the M.Sc. in Comparative Social Policy, the press release from the Rhodes Trust said.

Lord Meghnad Desai Resigns From UK Labour Party After 49 Years, Cites Racism



(Insider Bureau)-Indian-origin economist, author and peer Lord Meghnad Desai has resigned as a member of the UK's Opposition Labour Party over its failure to effectively tackle antisemitic racism within its ranks. The 80-

year-old peer said he has only ever been a Labour Party supporter but was forced to take the decision to cancel his membership on Thursday after 49 years after former party leader Jeremy Corbyn was readmitted

after just 19 days of suspension despite findings of "unlawful acts" by the country's human rights watchdog.

"It was a very peculiar decision to allow him back without any apology. He has been refused the party whip in the House of Commons for a few months, but that is a very lame response to a very big crisis," Lord Desai said. "I have been very uncomfortable and slightly ashamed that the party has been injected with this sort of racism. Jewish MPs were abused openly, and female members were trolled. It is out and out racism," he said.

The Labour Party has been plagued by allegations of

antisemitism over the years, with its disastrous electoral defeat in the December 2019 election also linked to the crisis.

Sir Keir Starmer took over as the new party leader this year with the promise of ridding the party of the scourge and had taken the step to suspend Corbyn last month after he seemed to downplay the very critical findings of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

The watchdog had found that Labour had broken the law in its failure to handle antisemitism, or anti-Jewish, complaints and there were "serious failings" by its leadership at the time. "I don't

see things really changing in the foreseeable future and have to ultimately live with my conscience. I can't go on being in an antisemitic party," said Lord Desai, even as he stressed that he has no plans of joining any other political party.

He has sent in his resignation letter to the Leader of the Labour Party in the House of Lords, Baroness Angela Smith, and despite many appeals for him to reconsider, he will now sit as an independent peer while his application to be part of the Crossbench group of the UK Parliament's Upper House is underway.

Hundreds Of Indian-Americans Celebrate Chhath Puja Amid Covid In US

(Insider Bureau)- Indian-Americans, mainly from Bihar, Jharkhand and eastern Uttar Pradesh, celebrated the Hindu religious festival, Chhath Puja by worshipping the Sun God at various places in the US.

The community members gathered in small numbers due to the COVID-19 pandemic at various water bodies across the country, from the banks of the historic Potomac river to a lake in New Jersey to makeshift pools in houses.

Hundreds of Indian-American devotees watched the celebrations, including the

worship of the sunset on Friday and sunrise on Saturday, live on Zoom and other social media platforms.

#WATCH New Jersey, US: Over 600 members of the Indian-American community performed rituals of #ChhathPuja at Lake Manalapan, on 21st November. pic.twitter.com/bu6Bor6UYV

-ANI (@ANI) November 22, 2020 Chhath, an ancient Hindu Vedic festival, is mostly celebrated in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. People during the festival fast, bathe in the rivers and offer prayers to thank Sun God for bestowing the bounties of life

on earth and fulfilling wishes. The four-day festival culminated on Saturday morning this year.

"The presence was limited to 25 people with family members maintaining social distancing. Additional people who visited the venue to watch the Chhath Puja were watching the procession from a distance at the bank of Potomac river to obey the state mandate on social gathering during this pandemic," said Kripa Singh, an attendee.

Mr Singh, a software engineer, along with his wife Anita, have been celebrating Chhath Puja on the banks of the Potomac river,



in the Virginia suburb of Washington DC since 2006.

"The whole series of event from Kharna to Morning Arghya was live telecast on Zoom and Facebook live for people who couldn't join in person because of the

pandemic and also for their families located overseas in India and Nepal. People from Nepal like Mohan Yadav, Dharmendra Thakur and Vijay Singh helped coordinate the live telecast," Mr Singh said.

Congress veteran Ahmed Patel succumbs to post-Covid complications at 71

Rajya Sabha MP from Gujarat and Treasurer of the Indian National Congress, Ahmed Patel passed away in the early hours of Wednesday owing to multiple organ failure after he was diagnosed with coronavirus, his son Faisal said.

(News Agencies)- Senior Congress leader Ahmed Patel passed away at a hospital in New Delhi in the early hours of Wednesday. The announcement of his demise was made by his son Faisal Patel.

In a statement on Twitter, Faisal said that Ahmed Patel passed away at 3.30 am on November 25. "After testing positive for Covid-19 around a month back, his health worsened further due to multiple organ failures," the

statement went on to add. Faisal Patel also requested well-wishers of his father to adhere to Covid-19 guidelines and avoid any mass gatherings to mourn the Congress leader's demise. Rajya Sabha MP from Gujarat and Treasurer of the Indian National Congress, Ahmed Patel was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the Medanta Hospital in Haryana's Gurugram on November 15.

In a tweet on October 1, Ahmed Patel had announced, "I have tested positive for Covid19. I request all those who came in close contact with me recently, to self isolate." An eight-time parliamentarian, Ahmed Patel served three terms in the Lok Sabha and five terms in the Rajya Sabha. He was appointed as the Treasurer of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) in August 2018. Ahmed Patel began his



political career by contesting local body elections in Gujarat's Bharuch district in 1976. He later took charge of the Congress' organisational structure both in Gujarat and at the Centre. In 1985, he was

appointed Parliament Secretary to the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Ahmed Patel also played a key role in setting up the Narmada Management Authority to oversee the Sardar Sarovar Project.

Fodder Scam: CBI opposes bail plea of RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav in Dumka Treasury case



In a counter-affidavit filed in the Jharkhand HC, the CBI has opposed the bail of RJD chief and former Bihar chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav in the Dumka Treasury case pertaining to excess withdrawal of Rs 3.13 crore.

(News Agencies)- CBI has opposed the bail plea of incarcerated RJD chief and former Bihar chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav in the Dumka Treasury excess withdrawal case. Lalu Prasad Yadav is currently serving the remainder of his sentence at the bungalow of the Director of the Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Ranchi. India's premier

probe agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) said in a counter-affidavit in the Jharkhand High Court that Lalu Prasad Yadav has not served half of the sentence awarded to him in connection with fraudulent withdrawal of 3.13 crores from Dumka Treasury. The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief was sentenced to seven years in prison under two

different sections.

The CBI, in its submission, quoted Article 427 of the CRPC which states that if someone is convicted under different sections, the sentence has to be served successively not concurrently.

Lalu Prasad Yadav's counsel had applied for bail in the Dumka Treasury case, citing completion of half of the sentence awarded to the former Bihar chief minister. The matter was heard by the Jharkhand High Court on November 6 and deferred to November 27.

This was done at the request of the CBI which had not filed a

counter-affidavit at the time. A bench of the HC had directed the CBI to file an affidavit on or before November 24.

Lalu Prasad Yadav was convicted in four out of five cases related to the fodder scam over fraudulent withdrawal of Rs 950 crore. He is already on bail in three out of these five cases while a trial is still underway in the case of excess withdrawal from Doranda Treasury to the tune of Rs 139 crore.

If Lalu Prasad Yadav is granted bail in Dumka Treasury case for fraudulently withdrawing Rs 3.13 crore, this could pave the

way for his exit from jail. The case is slated to be heard next on November 27. It is important to note that Lalu Prasad Yadav is already on bail in the Deoghar Treasury case pertaining to excess withdrawal of Rs 79 lakh. He was sentenced to 3.5 years in prison in the Deoghar Treasury case.

Similarly, Lalu Prasad Yadav was also granted bail over excess withdrawal of Rs 33.13 crore in the Chaibasa Treasury case on October 9.

The RJD chief was granted bail in all of the three cases on the grounds of having served half of the sentence awarded to him.

AYUSH ministry's actions blatant attempt at 'Khichadification' of medical education, practice: IMA

(News Agencies)-Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Tuesday issued a call for 'direct action' against the AYUSH Ministry's decision to allow postgraduate students of Ayurveda to perform a variety of general surgery, including orthopaedic, ophthalmology and ENT. The country's premier volunteer organisation, the IMA demanded the withdrawal of the notification of the amendment regulations of Postgraduate Ayurveda Education.

"The AYUSH ministry has issued a clarification claiming the technical terms and the modern developments are a common heritage of mankind. IMA rejects the clarification as deceptive camouflage of mixing the systems of medicine," the body said in a statement signed by IMA president Dr Rajan Sharma and IMA honorary secretary-general Dr RV Asokan.



The statement goes on to term the AYUSH ministry's action as a "blatant attempt at mixopathy and Khichadification of medical education and practice". Referring to the Central Council of Indian Medicine

(CCIM), the IMA says that CCIM amendments cannot be seen in isolation. "The National Education Policy 2020 speaks of medical pluralism and lateral entry laying the foundation legitimising Mixopathy. The NITI AAYOG in its wisdom has formed four committees in medical education, practice, public health and research to officially mix all systems into one Integrative system of medicine," the IMA said.

In addition, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) goes on to add, "All the six hundred odd medical colleges of India are expected to turn out Hybrid doctors of a Khichadi medical system by 2030."

"The patient's choice to choose the system of medicine is being taken away in the naked attempt to mix all the systems of medicine," the IMA alleged in its latest statement dated November 24.

Will build religious school on Dawood Ibrahim's land auctioned by SAFEMA, says SC lawyer

Days after it auctioned off six properties owned by Dawood Ibrahim, the competent authority is gearing up to hold a virtual auction for unsold properties of the fugitive gangster and his aide Iqbal Mirchi.

(News Agencies)- Supreme Court advocate Bhupendra Kumar Bhardwaj reached Mumbake village in Khed taluka of Maharashtra's Ratnagiri district to buy yet another property that belonged to fugitive gangster Dawood Ibrahim. Accompanied by an associate, Bhargava reached the village way before auction time and inspected the property on Tuesday.

Competent authority under the SAFEMA [The Smugglers and Foreign Exchange Manipulators (Forfeiture of Property) Act] is in the process of auctioning an unsold property owned by Dawood Ibrahim. On November 10, six pieces of land owned by the gangster were auctioned off by SAFEMA.

This property in Mumbake village was also slated to be auctioned

off but the authority decided to withdraw it from the auction at the last minute citing technical error in land measurements.

Out of the six properties of Dawood Ibrahim up for auction, Supreme Court advocate Bhupendra Kumar Bhardwaj bought four of them. The other two were bought by Supreme Court advocate Ajay Shrivastav. Among the properties was the ancestral home of Dawood Ibrahim.

"SAFEMA officers who were at the location could not give answers to all questions. There is construction on 33 percent of the land. There were shutters and there is no way to get on top of the construction. There is no proper demarcation of land even now," Supreme Court advocate Bhupendra Kumar Bhardwaj told

India Today.

He has been participating in the auction of Dawood Ibrahim's properties since 2017 but was able to buy four properties only recently.

The previous auction of the gangster's properties held by SAFEMA involved 30 gunthas of land at a reserve price of over Rs 60 lakh. Now, the same property has been re-appraised and now costs Rs 1.9 crore.

"I asked the SAFEMA authorities where is that extra 20 gunthas? They could not tell me. They did not have a proper map and the one which they had was not even proper. The structure on the land can collapse anytime, it is so bad," Bhupendra Kumar Bhardwaj added.

However, he still plans to go ahead with his bid.

Another bidder Ravi Kande, a man



who is a resident of a nearby village from Lote also landed at the property for inspection. Kande, said to be the brother of the village Sarpanch, had also participated in the auction conducted earlier this month but could not return home as the owner of any of the properties.

SAFEMA authorities said they have received many inquiries not just for Dawood Ibrahim's properties but also for the ones owned by his henchman Iqbal Mirchi in Mumbai's Juhu area.

These three properties owned by

Mirchi are being auctioned for the fourth time since no one approached the authority to buy it during the first three auctions.

Supreme Court advocate Ajay Shrivastav is not planning to participate in the upcoming auction since he has been busy taking over the two pieces of land he bought in the previous rounds of auction earlier this month. Shrivastav told India Today that he is planning to organise a large function with dignitaries to mark the occasion and plans to open a 'Sanatan Shiksha Mandir' on the said land.

Has Raj Babbar distanced himself from active politics after 2019 LS poll defeat?



A section of locals in Agra, especially Raj Babbar's classmates and childhood friends, believes he has distanced himself from active politics after the massive defeat in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

(News Agencies)- Has filmstar and former UP Congress chief Raj Babbar distanced himself not just from his party but also from active politics? A section of locals in

Agra, especially Raj Babbar's classmates and childhood friends, believes he has.

Raj Babbar has not come to Agra since his defeat from Fatehpur Sikri in the 2019 Lok

Sabha elections. Before that, Raj Babbar used to visit Agra several times a year. He is now only in contact with his core team, although he is still sending festival greetings to local community leaders.

Senior citizen Uma Shanker Sharma said, "Looks like he could not digest the loss by more than 5 lakh votes. It was the people of Agra who had launched him into politics."

Hindustani Biradari Vice-Chairman Vishal Sharma said

that when Raj Babbar decided to contest the Lok Sabha elections, 4 former MLAs left their parties and joined his core team but even they are not in touch with him now.

Babbar was elected as Agra MP twice and when the seat became reserved for SC/ST candidates in 2009, he contested from Fatehpur Sikri and lost. In 2014, he contested from Ghaziabad and again lost. In 2019, Babbar returned to Fatehpur Sikri but the result

was the same.

People close to Babbar claimed that he wanted to contest the 2019 elections from Moradabad but when BSP's Seema Upadhyay decided not to contest from Fatehpur Sikri, he chose the latter.

Even when Raj Babbar was at the height of his acting career, he remained connected to his roots in Agra. When he decided to enter the political arena from this city, he was welcomed by Agra with open arms.

BJP will make Bengal police lick boots, says BJP leader Raju Banerjee

(News Agencies)- West Bengal BJP leader Raju Banerjee in his attack on the Bengal government said the police force in the state do not extend any help to check the 'Gunda Raj' and if BJP comes to power, the party will make the police lick boots.

Speaking at an event in Durgapur on Tuesday, Raju Banerjee said, "See what is happening in West Bengal nowadays, will 'Gunda

Raj' prevail in the state? Police are not extending any help. What should be done with such police personnel? We will make them lick boots."

BJP leaders have been protesting against alleged lawlessness in Bengal under the Mamata Banerjee government. BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya on Tuesday claimed that security for women is the worst in the

state. Vijayvargiya, who is BJP's Bengal in-charge, has said that one set of laws is applicable in the whole country "barring here, where only TMC's rules prevail". Bengal has a woman chief minister but women in the state are not safe. Women safety and security in Bengal are the worst in comparison to other states. The law and order situation has completely broken down in the state," he contended.



Kanpur 'love jihad': SIT rules out conspiracy, says girls were cheated in 11 of 14 cases probed

The SIT, in its report, said there was no evidence to prove conspiracy or foreign funding in cases of alleged 'love jihad' in Kanpur.

(News Agencies)- The SIT, in its report, said there was no evidence to prove conspiracy or foreign funding in cases of alleged 'love jihad' in Kanpur. It, however, reported that men used false names in several cases to charm the girls, who said they later found out these men were from a different religion. A special investigation team set up in September to probe cases of alleged 'love jihad' in Kanpur has not found any evidence of conspiracy or foreign funding. However, the report submitted to Inspector General (Kanpur Range) Mohit Agarwal on Monday stated that girls were cheated in 11 of the

14 cases investigated by it. The report said that in several cases the men had used false names to persuade the girls or women for marriage or relationship. The girls said they later found out these men are from a different religion. According to the Kanpur IG, eight girls were found to be minors and a charge-sheet has been filed in 11 cases. The accused have been arrested. Those arrested have been charged with wrongful confinement of minor girls using false identity, rape, abduction and compelling them for marriage. The report stated that in three cases, women said they married

of their own will. The SIT report has come days after Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said his government will bring a law against 'love jihad'. The BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Haryana have already promised laws against 'love-jihad', a term used in political conversation to refer to conversion arising out of interfaith marriages. The SIT was constituted by Kanpur IG following allegations that a conspiracy has been hatched under which Muslim youths were luring Hindu girls into marriage in a bid to convert them. Fourteen such cases across Kanpur over the last two years were registered for investigation.



'I was victim of love jihad' Mukhtar Ahmed from Kanpur's Naubasta, already married to a Hindu girl, got married to another Hindu girl Kanchan (name changed) under the false identity of Rahul Singh. When India Today met Kanchan, she said Mukhtar had first introduced himself as Rahul Singh. She met him while

going to her coaching classes and slowly fell in love. The girl only came to know his real identity when they went to the court to get married. Even after coming to know his real identity, Kanchan says she had no other option but to go ahead with the marriage as she was in love and had already run away from home.

Jaipur groom fined for violating coronavirus rules, not wearing mask on wedding day



(News Agencies)- A groom was fined for not wearing a face mask during his wedding celebrations in Jaipur. The Jaipur Police fined the groom Rs 500 for not wearing a mask. The groom's wedding procession or 'baraat' was going from Vishwakarna area of Jaipur to Bindori. The Police fined the groom in Vishwakarma area. He was seen without a mask during the procession, sitting on a horse. Earlier, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot had given instructions to officials to ensure that people comply with the rule to wear masks when outside.

On Monday, CM Gehlot also urged people to take all necessary precautions against coronavirus in the wake of the wedding season. "As the marriage season is about to begin, it becomes even more important that people take all health precautions seriously, while shopping in the markets & attending functions. Saving lives is our top priority," he said in a tweet. The state government has recently taken decisions to stop the spread of the infection, he said, adding that wearing masks and observing social distancing is important for safety.

TRP Scam: Hansa Research hid info on commercial interests with TV channels says Mumbai Police

(News Agencies)- The holding company of Hansa Research has commercial interests with various TV channels, but it did not share this information with Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC), said the Mumbai police charge sheet in the television rating points (TRP) scam which was filed in a court here on Tuesday. The 1,400-page charge sheet was submitted before a magistrate's court earlier in the day by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Mumbai Crime Branch which is probing the case related to alleged rigging of TRPs. During investigation, it came to light that Hansa Vision Pvt Ltd,

the holding company of Hansa Research Pvt Ltd, has commercial interests with various TV channels, but it did not disclose about them to BARC, the document said. The scam came to light last month when ratings agency BARC filed a complaint through Hansa Research Group, alleging that certain television channels were rigging TRP numbers. Hansa had been tasked with installing BARC barometers, which record viewership data. According to a synopsis of the charge sheet, Hansa Research did not inform Meterology Data Ltd (MDL), a unit of BARC, about its commercial interests with TV channels and hid that

information. The charge sheet said there is no procedure to investigate or to conduct an inquiry and to take action against employees or officers of Hansa Research Group for any malpractice. Five out of the 12 persons arrested so far in connection with the scam are former employees of Hansa Research Group, it said. Hansa Research Group has the responsibility to install barometers and look after their maintenance in Mumbai and other parts of Maharashtra on behalf of BARC. Employees who look after installation and maintenance of BARC barometers are called



relationship managers. These relationship managers are mandated to be in contact with people in households where barometers have been installed and prevent any malpractice to manipulate TRPs. Accused Vishal Bhandari, who

was a relationship manager with the company, gave money to households to watch Box Cinema, Fakt Marathi, Maha Movie, and Republic TV channels for a longer period of time, the charge sheet said.

Red Alert: Trumpism

The November election in the United States took place under most extraordinary circumstances. A deadly pandemic, historic levels of unemployment, massive protests against racism and deep polarisation defined the context within which the electoral battle played out. Despite the odds, supporters of President Trump and all those who wanted him out of the White House participated, leading to a high turnout with an unprecedented number of mail-in ballots. When polling started on November 3, more than 100 million had already voted. Americans meant business. After all, this was no ordinary election. Defeating something larger than the man, i.e. Trumpism, turned into a goal for millions. Yet, Trump did not lose in political terms. Over 70 million Americans continue to support his world view—a toxic mix of high-pitched populist rhetoric underlined by xenophobia, racist overtones and a directness that politicians usually avoid.

Donald Trump's ascension to the highest office gave voice to White working and middle classes who have faced unprecedented economic decline in the past few decades. Two-thirds of Americans have no emergency savings and most live 'paycheck to paycheck'; in many parts of the country the minimum wage has not been upgraded for years. Skewed globalisation and neoliberalism have fueled inequality, bringing it to the levels of early 20th century, when such economic phenomenon led to cataclysmic changes in the politics of the West. This time, the fast-changing demographic have added to the anxiety. Roughly 40 per cent of the population is non-White and the fear that White supremacy shall dwindle over the next few years is real. Trumpism, therefore, has a formidable base and plays on economic and racial insecurities.

Trump blundered in his handling of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the police brutality protests that shook America and the world. Where competent handling of the virus could have well bolstered Trump to victory, he instead chose to downplay the advice of doctors and scientists, misrepresenting the risk of the virus. Small wonder that the US remains the most affected among developed nations. Countries with far less resources have handled the pandemic better. This is one of the reasons why the vulnerable senior voter population chose not to support him. Mishandling the protests against police brutality also hurt him. Commentators have noted that "Trump sought, like Richard Nixon in 1968, to ride a wave of white racial angst over race riots to a presidential victory...accusing Democrats of supporting lawlessness and riots". This excessive pandering of the Trumpists throughout his presidency and the

campaign was bound to alienate other groups within the voting population. In a recent interview, the leading public intellectual Noam Chomsky, nearly invisible in corporate media, stated that while Biden won the election, Trump did concerning well and the fact that people came out at all in his support is a huge victory for him. Trump, despite losing, succeeded at "[tapping into] reservoirs of anger and economic resentment among the working and middle classes who have been subjected to the bipartisan neoliberal assault of the last 40 years." Trumpism also blames American elites for their troubles. This is not too different from the strongmen playbook in other parts of the world. The irony is that these figures rise to power and serve the very elites they condemn. But Trump gained White America's trust in a way no politician has accomplished before. Of course, Trump cannot be singled out for White supremacy-racism and xenophobia are integral to American culture since its inception. In Trump they found a national and global mouthpiece.

The ultra-rich minority in America have more influence on federal policy than the average American does. Sam Pizzigati quoted Thomas Ferguson of The Institute for Economic Thinking, acknowledging that "making real change like taxing the rich and passing Medicare for all requires 'a real mass movement not dependent on the goodwill of the super-rich.'" Research analysts Shawn McGuire and Charles Delahunt mention "the underlying disease—money-driven policy outcomes—leading to present-day symptoms goes mostly unspoken". Economic stress, COVID-19 and racial tensions were key issues in the presidential elections. The Fox News exit polls demonstrated that Medicare for All—public health insurance—was supported by the American people. While the Democrats lost Florida in the presidential race, the state voted for a \$15 minimum wage, an issue that Bernie Sanders and the Democrats have argued for. Essentially, Americans want a bigger role of the government in leading a transition to a green economy, and free college is popular with them. Trump had promised a lot but his delivery remained a mix of Republican tax cuts for the rich and lip service to the impoverished. Once the celebration of Trump's defeat ends, pressure on Biden will mount to deliver on containing COVID-19 (not going anywhere despite media euphoria on vaccines) and the economy. Robert Freeman noted in a piece for Common Dreams, "Until those legions of humiliated working-class Whites have some of their dignity restored through meaningful work, they will continue to fester and infect any polity of the next 100 years."

At Thanksgiving, an America of obscene contrasts

At my family's Thanksgiving table, we begin the meal by saying what we're thankful for, and every year we list the same themes: We are grateful for our health. For the food on the table. We are grateful that we have one another. This year, many American families will find gratitude harder to summon heading into the holidays. Unemployment, widespread hunger and unchecked sickness and death are weighing heavily. The President doesn't seem too worried -- and neither does Wall Street. The Dow went above 30,000 on Tuesday, and then Trump popped out before the cameras to crow about the market's success. It was brief -- just one minute -- but obscene. There is perhaps no greater example of the distortions wrought by the President's reliance on the markets as indicators for American financial well-being than this: A record-high Dow, while record numbers of Americans are hungry.

The non-profit organization Feeding America estimates that by the end of the year, more than 50 million American households could be food insecure -- that is, lacking consistent access to healthy food. That's one in six Americans, and includes some 17 million children -- one in every four American kids. Experts say it is likely that there's more hunger in the United States today than at any point since 1998, when the Census Bureau began collecting comparable data about households' ability to get enough food," according to a report in the Washington Post. We've already seen the miles-long lines for food banks.

School officials across the country have tried to balance the health risk of keeping schools open with the

reality that millions of children rely on the cafeteria for meals they don't get at home. A study from Northwestern University found that because of the pandemic, "food insecurity has doubled overall, and tripled among households with children." When children are food insecure, they face a host of ills. Their cognitive function is impaired.

They are more likely to have asthma and anemia. And, of course, these children (and their parents) are more vulnerable to Covid-19. Many of us are grateful to have avoided the disease this year. But many others have struggled through sickness -- through damage to their bodies -- and also lost loved ones to Covid-19. It can be hard to feel too grateful for your own health when you know that more than a quarter million of your fellow citizens (maybe people that you knew or loved) have died of coronavirus, and that many of those deaths could have been prevented if our government had taken the threat more seriously and acted as necessary. And family togetherness? My family is gathering via Zoom this year -- nice, but hardly the same as being able to give my loved ones a big hug.

Traveling and gathering when Covid is again spiraling out of control is too risky. Is this the kind of American "greatness" Trump promised? An America that is hungry, sick and isolated? It is well past time that Americans were given the support they need to get through this pandemic. And American hunger didn't start with Covid-19. Well before the pandemic, tens of millions of families were living on a razor's edge, knowing that a job loss or an illness could push them over the brink.



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Fox Doesn't Need to Fear Trump's Wrath

The cable behemoth's audience yowled after the network seemed insufficiently supportive of the president's electoral hopes. But Fox's hold on crackpot news—and viewers—is secure.

It was a media story that sustained a thousand pundits, politicians, media critics and reporters for a generation, and it went like this: Fox News Channel, the devilish invention of Rupert Murdoch and Roger Ailes, rules the commanding heights of conservative broadcast news! It cannot be displaced! It is the tail that wags the dog of the Republican Party! The network that bolsters the Trump presidency and the essential source of news that issues hourly—and often untruthful—marching instructions for America's populist-right millions!

But then came Election Night 2020. Fox's coverage earned it Judas status among Trump's most ardent supporters. The network's crimes of betrayal and heresy? It was first to call Arizona for Joe Biden. In the following days, Fox joined the consensus projection that Biden was the winner of the election and show-host Laura Ingraham and co-host Brian Kilmeade drew criticism from the right for meekly allowing that a Biden presidency might be in the offing. Tucker Carlson, as Trumpie as a Trumpie can get without being a member of the family, earned damnation for doubting the berserk election-fraud theories of then-Trump attorney Sidney Powell.

Fox also slow-walked the voting-fraud allegations, and these combined tilts from the usual hard-Trump line fueled a new storyline: Fox was losing its mojo among conservative viewers and bleeding audience and influence to upstart, hard-to-find-on-your-dial channels like Newsmax and One America News Network (OANN). These two channels, unlike Fox, had lent high credence to the election-fraud stories and remained loyal to Trump. The president encouraged the Fox hatred, disparaging the network in a Nov. 15 tweet that ended, "Many great alternatives are forming & exist. Try @OANN & @newsmax, among others!"

Our president-for-the-time-being's move to buffalo his legions of supporters away from his historically loyal mouthpiece poses a central question about



the media-politician axis. Who possesses the real power here? The politician? The audience? The network? And if the network, which one? The answers arrived on the heels of the collapse of Trump's legal ploy to overturn the election.

Today, with the presidential election all but officially conceded, the Newsmax and OANN insurgency has faltered. But both networks had struck a chord in Trump country by reliably producing news that matches the priors of Trump supporters and leaving their political preconceptions unruffled. Reject the authority of the newsies, Trump commanded, and accept mine. And Newsmax and OANN bowed with enthusiasm that not even Fox in its toadiest moments ever mustered. Even after Michigan and Pennsylvania certified the Biden victory and Trump had allowed the GSA to fund the Biden transition,

Newsmax and OANN were still hyping the election-fraud angle, stoking its audiences passions with Foxier than Fox, pro-Trump kindling. "Bypass the big media," as one Newsmax on-air promo instructs viewers, taking a shot at not just CNN but Fox, too.

Both channels have historically drawn low viewership numbers, but that's changed at Newsmax. One top Newsmax show, which usually hovers around the 58,000-viewer mark, recently attracted a record 1.1 million viewers, only a couple of million shy of a top-ranked Fox show running in the same time slot. The idea that Fox could be outflanked on the harder right was supported by a recent Wall Street Journal report that a Trump-friendly private equity company had approached Newsmax to buy or invest in it. Suddenly, the prospect of extra-Trumpie news

networks competing with Fox and supplanting it for conservative primacy seemed possible.

Predictions of Fox's diminution—however stirring they might be to liberals—must clear several obstacles before they can be taken seriously. Again and again, Fox has proved itself resourceful in replacing "star" show hosts like Megyn Kelly and Bill O'Reilly with new versions of the same thing, such as Ingraham and Carlson, and carrying on after the departure of network auteur Roger Ailes. For another example, when Fox's favorite presidential candidates have underperformed—such as Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio in 2016—it's been quick to dismount for a winning candidate like Trump and pretend that it always supported him. For another thing, viewership habits are extraordinarily hard to break. In many households, Fox burns like a winter hearth all day long, as background, diversion and even rapt viewing. Audiences have to search their cable dials for the alt-Fox networks or download the OTT apps. Even if they do in times of peak interest like the "election fraud" episode, how many will remain after the hubbub subsides? As Biden moves into the White House and the election fraud story turns to vapor, we can expect

Fox to reclaim most of its defecting audience by going full-bore against Biden with its superior production values and much more talented news and opinion anchors.

The mismatch between the Newsmax and OANN pair and Fox cannot be exaggerated. As data published in the Financial Times shows, the contest isn't really two Davids and one Goliath as much as it is between two dust motes and the burning sun. Fox is expected to reap \$2.9 billion in revenue this year compared with Newsmax's teensy \$26 million and OANN's only slightly less pitiful \$48 million. More than half of those Fox revenues come from the affiliate fees that the cable operator pays to carry the channel, which means that if you're a Democrat and your cable package includes Fox, you're putting about \$1.65 in Rupert's piggy bank every month (96 cents for CNN and 29 cents for MSNBC). At Fox, they'll probably say a prayer of thanks on Thursday as they carve the turkey, expressing joy that it is two underfunded, amateurish operations attacking them from the right instead of a repositioned-to-the-right CNN or MSNBC. What of the argument that one of the alt-Fox networks could become competitive by adding Trump to the programming schedule? Good luck.

Planning for a post-Covid world

The Group of Twenty (G20) ended its annual summit without deliverables, but with a sense that global leaders have begun shifting their gaze to a post-Covid-19 world. The G20 has been largely missing in action through much of the pandemic. The inability to have physical interactions inhibited genuine diplomatic outreach. More damaging was the every-government-for-itself scramble that followed the outbreak, something that left little space for the spirit of multilateralism. The hostility between the two most powerful nations, the United States and China, did not make summitry easier. In any summit, participants reach out to their domestic public



as well as lay out an agenda for their fellow world leaders. Outgoing US President Donald Trump's decision to play golf during a special session on Covid-19 was a crude message for his pandemic-denying base

at home. But there was positivity in the manner the summit members spoke of the future. There was the expected noise on vaccine distribution, debt relief and the need to coordinate economic responses to the ailing

world economy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's important intervention was to underline the need to put climate change front and centre of the global agenda.

Over the next few G20 summits many of these abstractions need to be converted into concrete steps. The G20's strength is its ability to bring to bear the attention and resources of the most-powerful governments on the most-difficult global issues. Ensuring the revival of cooperation over global financial architecture, supply chain stability and climate will be the task of future hosts, including India, which has moved its chairmanship to 2023.

When China wanted to make peace with India

India spurned overtures from China between 1959 and 1960 to reach an amicable settlement. More importantly, policymakers misread India's relative position in the changing international environment. This proved costly with India sleepwalking into conflict with a radicalised Mao in 1962.

In April 1960, Zhou Enlai embarked on an ambitious diplomatic mission to India to attempt a resolution. Let us recall the context. The previous year, Sino-Soviet differences had come to the fore, ironically because Moscow publicly broke ranks with Beijing by taking a neutral position on the India-China dispute, and by the first half of 1960, Moscow had withdrawn its experts from China and suspended all economic contracts. The year 1959 had also witnessed two border skirmishes between India and China, including an especially nasty one in the western sector in Ladakh where nearly a dozen Indian security personnel were killed during a patrol in October. As a consequence, the Chinese had come under pressure, particularly from the Soviets. In a rather heated conversation between Nikita Khrushchev and Mao Zedong shortly after that skirmish, the Soviets came down hard on the Chinese for escalating the dispute:

Mao Zedong: "Nehru also says that the events in Tibet occurred on our fault. Besides, in the Soviet Union they published a

TASS declaration on the issue of conflict with India."

NS Khrushchev: "Do you really want us to approve of your conflict with India? It would be stupid on our part."

NS Khrushchev: "...If you allow him (Dalai Lama) an opportunity to flee to India, then what has Nehru to do with it? We believe that the events in Tibet are the fault of the Communist Party of China, not Nehru's fault."

Mao Zedong: "You will see for yourselves later that the McMahon line with India will be maintained, and the border conflict with India will end...The border issue with India will be decided through negotiations."

It was in such a backdrop that Beijing made a decision in January 1960 to take a more pragmatic line on the dispute with India as well as other unresolved frontier disputes with neighbouring countries. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) was also ordered to adopt a policy of restraint and avoid armed clashes. Mao sensed that China was facing a difficult international environment and, therefore, decided to seek a negotiated settlement. This basic sense of

insecurity is reflected in a May 1959 Chinese note to India, which might have been personally drafted by Mao.

"The enemy of the Chinese people lies in the east - the US imperialists have many military bases in Taiwan, in South Korea, Japan and in the Philippines which are all directed against China. China's main attention and policy to struggle are directed to the east, to the west Pacific region, to the vicious and aggressive US imperialism, and not to India or any other country in the southeast Asia and South Asia....our principal enemy is US imperialism...China will not be so foolish as to antagonize India in the west. Our Indian friends! What is [on] your mind? Will you be agreeing to our thinking regarding the view that China can only concentrate its main attention eastward of China, but not south-westwards of China, nor is it necessary for it to do so. Friends! It seems to us that you too cannot have two fronts. Is it not so? If it is, here then lies the meeting point of our two sides. Will you please think it over?" But Jawaharlal Nehru felt this Chinese telegram had been



"discourteous" and he rebuffed the implied suggestion to stabilise the crisis with China. Foreign minister Chen Yi was equally candid when he shared Chinese threat perceptions to Swaran Singh in April 1960. Chen candidly admitted, "Our relations with the US and Japan in the east are tense. It would be stupid if we created a tense situation with India in the west also. The USA has its bases around us, atomic missiles and atomic weapons around us. Our dispute with India is very small...We are in a serious situation and need your friendship...The situation in the east being so tense we cannot afford to have trouble in the west also...If two ordinary countries are negotiating, they do not expose their difficulties to each other. (But) I am telling you about our difficulties... It would be best if we could reach some overall

settlement, but if that is not possible some interim arrangement could be made." Zhou's Delhi visit was an outcome of Beijing's policy to defuse tensions and arrest a worsening of its geopolitical environment. In his meeting with Nehru, Zhou explicitly offered that the Line of Actual Control could form the basis of a settlement. But, for India, how could there be any swapping of claims or "horse trading", as Nehru put it, if all the territory, whether Arunachal Pradesh in the east or Aksai Chin in the west, were Indian? India spurned overtures from China between 1959 and 1960 to reach an amicable settlement. More importantly, policymakers misread India's relative position in the changing international environment. This proved costly with India sleepwalking into conflict with a radicalised Mao in 1962.

Getting ready for the vaccine

Heed the PM's message - prepare, but with caution

In his comments at a meeting with chief ministers to discuss Covid-19, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi underlined, rightly so, the need to take precautions which will help prevent the spread of the disease. In recent weeks, a range of factors - the most important of which is the fact that citizens have been reckless in their movement, interaction, and visits to crowded places - have contributed to a spike in Covid-19 cases across states. The fact that India's health infrastructure is today better equipped to cope with the pandemic, there is an established medical protocol to deal with the disease, and the country has had - for reasons that are still not clear - a low fatality rate is positive. But the

PM's cautionary note is important to save lives and states must strive towards his target - a positivity rate less than five per cent - till the vaccine is ready to be distributed.

And that, indeed, was the other focus of the PM's speech. He suggested that the government was on top of understanding the stages of vaccine development both domestically and internationally, and was in touch with foreign governments, companies as well as multilateral organisations. He emphasised the commitment to ensure that each citizen receives the vaccine and urged states to come up with comprehensive plans, including cold storage facilities, to ensure its distribution. But the PM also,

once again, expressed caution. Vaccines must be scientifically vetted before any final decision is taken; there isn't clarity on the number of doses that will be required; and there is also an absence of clarity on the costs of the vaccines.

This tentativeness is actually a positive signal. While claiming that it is preparing a vaccine strategy, the government is also clear that it does not have all the answers - yet. Indeed, this has been the most severe challenge to policymaking in times of the pandemic. How do you take appropriate decisions in the absence of full information and a fog of uncertainty? The good news is that with Pfizer (which health minister Harsh Vardhan has suggested may not be



appropriate for Indian conditions), Moderna, Oxford-Astrazenaca-Serum Institute, and now Sputnik V showing high rates of efficacy, India will have options. The

challenge is to procure, store, prioritise, distribute, and ensure that every Indian is equipped to battle the most disruptive health challenge in recent times.

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The ball is in China's court

With its strong response across spheres, India has shown that it has options and a willingness to exercise them



By Harsh V Pant

India's recalibration of its ties with China continues apace even as the situation along the Himalayan frontier remains tense. From Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi targeting China at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit to external affairs minister S Jaishankar talking of the need to respect territorial integrity and sovereignty at the East Asia summit, New Delhi is now more vocal than ever at articulating its frustration with Chinese behaviour. The irony in the Chinese leadership extolling the virtues of rules and norms in the conduct of international relations at various global forums is not lost on a world that is struggling to come to terms with Beijing's

aggression and a newfound sense of entitlement.

India has also mounted a vigorous challenge to China across sectors - political, economic, military and diplomatic - though it is not readily evident if Beijing is cognisant of how far to the brink its reckless behaviour has taken the Sino-Indian relationship. At the same time, military talks between the two sides have continued and, for New Delhi, the objective remains complete disengagement and full restoration of peace and tranquility along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the western sector. Earlier this month, there were reports that at the eighth round of corps commanders meeting, China had proposed moving its troops back to Finger 8, and a mutual return of Indian and Chinese troops to their

original locations on the south bank of Pangong Tso. The aim, it seems, is to reduce the possibility of inadvertent clashes and incidents at a time when harsh weather conditions are exacerbating an already volatile situation.

This three-step disengagement and de-escalation process is to include removal of armoured personnel carriers, withdrawal of troops from specific areas on the north and south banks of the Pangong Lake in eastern Ladakh, and a verification of the disengagement process by both sides.

The fact that this proposal came from the Chinese side should be viewed in the context of Indian Army occupying all the dominating heights on the southern bank of

Pangong Tso and Chushul in August, positioning itself on Gurung Hill, Magar Hill, Mukhpari, Rechin La and Rezang La. This strengthened New Delhi's bargaining position and underscored for Beijing that India remains willing and able to fight its way out of the crisis if needed.

Chinese military superiority is real and growing, but the Indian military has much greater exposure to fighting at high altitudes. Military gains on the battlefield are key to diplomatic outcomes at the negotiating table, despite India's lacklustre record in this regard. In the current crisis, India has been able to alter the tactical calculus of the Chinese military and so disengagement is now much more of a serious consideration. Beijing is signaling that it doesn't want to go any further, at least in the near future. There is a new administration in Washington and the Chinese leadership will be reluctant to start with it on a sour note by initiating a crisis with India. So, all eyes are now on the next round of corps commanders meeting where India's position will be spelt out more clearly.

But the larger challenge remains one of reducing the trust deficit which is widening by the day between the two Asian giants. It is striking that PM Modi has been interacting with key world leaders on a regular basis bilaterally, but one leader is missing in that matrix. Xi Jinping and Modi have been part of a number of multilateral

platforms, but Modi has challenged Chinese actions without naming the country. India's decision to keep itself out of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) should also be viewed through the strategic lens. New Delhi had announced its decision on RCEP last year when it had misgivings about the trade pact and about the role China would have in it. Those misgivings have become sharper post Covid-19 and border tensions. The use of trade policy for geopolitical ends has been trademark Chinese behaviour and India is trying hard to reduce its vulnerabilities vis-à-vis China. China's rise and its attendant consequences was the central determinant of Indian foreign policy even before the border crisis of this year.

But after the military standoff across LAC, it is clear that Indian policymakers will have to ascertain the China factor and assess its implications for all major policy choices they make. After all, as Jaishankar has underlined, the choices nations make today will have deep "strategic implications" tomorrow. India's policy choices today will have a great bearing on its future global role. And as Chinese behaviour spurs greater clarity in Indian actions and choices, a more confident New Delhi should hopefully be better able to shape its strategic environment in consonance with its priorities.

The BJP focuses on the local

The party's vigorous campaign for local polls shows why it remains dominant nationally

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s stated aim is to win elections from Parliament to the Panchayat. While a lot of attention is paid to the party's strategy and success in national elections, its organisational machinery that helps convert support to votes, and the careful branding of Narendra Modi as the leader who is committed to India's national interests, there is often inadequate attention to how the party builds its strength from the local to the national.

Two recent episodes show the extraordinary importance the BJP gives to the local - confirming the adage that all

politics is, eventually, local. In Jammu and Kashmir, where district elections are scheduled, the BJP has invested tremendous energy and resources in ensuring that it registers a respectable presence. This is important for the party - and the government - to show that its constitutional changes in the Union Territory have popular sanction as well as build its own independent strength in the region. At the other end of the country, in Telangana, for local civic polls in Hyderabad, the BJP has deputed its powerful general secretary Bhupender Yadav - who is in

charge of crucial states such as Gujarat and Bihar - to oversee the party's effort, besides sending ministers to campaign. With four parliamentarians from the state and two state legislators in the assembly, the party sees an opportunity to position itself as the principal opposition to chief minister K Chandrashekhar Rao; Telangana is also a key target for the 2024 polls since it is among the regions the BJP believes it can expand its numerical strength. All of this is happening in the backdrop of party president JP Nadda about to embark on a 100-day tour of all states to strengthen the party. There are



three clear lessons from this visible energy that the BJP is investing in even local polls. One, every region - irrespective of the party's historical weakness or its demography - is on the party's radar; and it is willing to work hard and invest energy in expanding its base.

Two, the party recognises - and this may also spring from the focus the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has on grassroots work - that the route of capturing power at the state level is often through winning battles on the ground, on issues that are closest to citizens.

Steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick

FOLLOW THE STEPS BELOW: If you are sick with COVID-19 or think you might have it, follow the steps below to help protect other people in your home and community.

Stay home except to get medical care

- **Stay home:** People who are mildly ill with COVID-19 are able to recover at home. Do not leave, except to get medical care. Do not visit public areas.
- **Stay in touch with your doctor.** Call before you get medical care. Be sure to get care if you feel worse or you think it is an emergency.
- **Avoid public transportation:** Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.



Separate yourself from other people in your home, this is known as home isolation

- **Stay away from others:** As much as possible, you should stay in a specific “sick room” and away from other people in your home. Use a separate bathroom, if available.
- **Limit contact with pets & animals:** You should restrict contact with pets and other animals, just like you would around other people.
 - Although there have not been reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people with the virus limit contact with animals until more information is known.
 - When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick with COVID-19. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with them. See COVID-19 and Animals for more information.



Call ahead before visiting your doctor

- **Call ahead:** If you have a medical appointment, call your doctor’s office or emergency department, and tell them you have or may have COVID-19. This will help the office protect themselves and other patients.



Wear a facemask if you are sick

- **If you are sick:** You should wear a facemask when you are around other people and before you enter a healthcare provider’s office.
- **If you are caring for others:** If the person who is sick is not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then people who live in the home should stay in a different room. When caregivers enter the room of the sick person, they should wear a facemask. Visitors, other than caregivers, are not recommended.



Cover your coughs and sneezes

- **Cover:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- **Dispose:** Throw used tissues in a lined trash can.
- **Wash hands:** Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.



Clean your hands often

- **Wash hands:** Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is especially important after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
- **Hand sanitizer:** If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.
- **Soap and water:** Soap and water are the best option, especially if hands are visibly dirty.
- **Avoid touching:** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.



Avoid sharing personal household items

- **Do not share:** Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people in your home.



cdc.gov/COVID19

RCEP reinforces China's edge in Asia

India's negative response to free trade pacts, and the focus on self-reliance, shows its turn against globalisation. This will have many implications



Amid a definitive shift towards disaffection for globalisation in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic-induced economic crisis, 15 East Asian economies agreed to establish the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the largest ever free trade agreement (FTA). This should not be surprising as the driver of RCEP during the eight years of negotiations has been the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean), whose membership includes some of the world's most open economies. In 2019, the trade to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio of the grouping was nearly 88%.

The idea of RCEP emerged during the 19th Asean Summit in 2011,

where its members resolved "to establish an Asean-led process by setting out principles under which Asean will engage interested Asean FTA partners in establishing a regional comprehensive economic partnership agreement...". The idea of an FTA in the East Asian region was mooted by Japan in 2006 when it proposed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership in East Asia between the then members of the East Asian Summit (EAS), which also included India. But while the Japanese initiative received a tepid endorsement from EAS leaders in 2009, Asean seized the moment to initiate the process of establishing RCEP, immediately after the grouping's FTAs with New Zealand and India became

effective from 2010. Now, as the focus of RCEP members shifts to their capitals for its ratification, one question uppermost in most minds will be the role that China could play in the group's dynamics. Will this FTA of East Asia, in which Asean has been looking to play a central role, hinge on China?

This seems to be a real possibility, especially since China has opened its market significantly to RCEP members, providing opportunities for enhanced economic engagement. To do so, China has offered to reduce its average tariff from 9.4% in 2014 (considered as the base year for effecting tariff cuts) to 1.2% in the 10th year of implementation of the agreement, for its imports from all the Asean members and

Australia. Its market opening to Republic of Korea goes even further; average tariff on Korean imports will be below 1% by the 10th year. In addition to tariff cuts, China has offered to maintain tariffs at 5% or less on almost 90% of its imports. Several RCEP members, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Viet Nam, have reciprocated China's offers by agreeing to deep cuts in their tariffs.

A policy announcement made by Chinese President Xi Jinping earlier this month suggests that opening of its market to RCEP members is part of its larger strategy. Xi reportedly said, "We will remain open and cooperative, and build the Chinese market into the world's market, a shared market and everyone's market". He proposed several measures to meet these objectives, three of which are significant. First, open the market to a new level; second, promote innovative development of foreign trade through government support to cross-border e-commerce; and, finally, making additional efforts to forge FTAs with more countries and regions. RCEP, which includes a chapter on e-commerce, fits Xi's strategy well.

Xi has thus produced this counter-narrative to the "decoupling from China" thesis, receiving a powerful endorsement through the establishment of RCEP. In addition, despite the political differences that several RCEP members have had with China, their economic engagement with the world's largest trading nation

is set to go up by several notches with the implementation of the East Asian FTA. This is a development that all major economies must take serious note of.

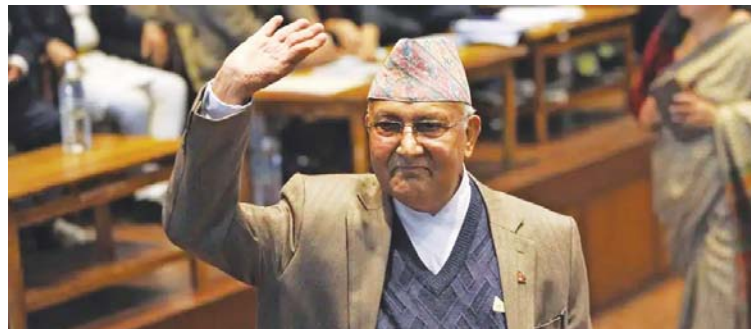
Where does India stand vis-à-vis RCEP? Since the decision was taken to disengage from RCEP a year ago, several members of the grouping have made overtures towards India. The most recent was the Ministers' Declaration on India's Participation in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership adopted four days prior to the endorsement of the agreement. The Declaration extended an invitation to India to "commence negotiations ... at any time after the signing of the RCEP Agreement once India submits a request in writing of its intention to accede to the RCEP Agreement ...". However, a critical comment from external affairs minister, S Jaishankar, after the formation of RCEP, signals that the government has foreclosed its options of joining the grouping, largely owing to China's presence. Not only has the government shut its doors on RCEP, but it has also adopted an economic strategy that militates against the logic of globalisation supported by FTAs. While FTAs have foisted the production networks cutting across national boundaries, the Indian government has been focusing on building domestic value chains in a number of critical sectors through the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan. This policy direction promoting self-reliance was reinforced by Jaishankar's observation that the India's past trade agreements have been detrimental to the country's interests, causing de-industrialisation in some sectors. The minister's prognosis on FTAs, coupled with the newly-minted economic strategy, could be a signal of the government's rethink on globalisation.

Given the government's critical response to RCEP and the possibility that China will play a key role in the East Asian region through this FTA, will there also be a rethink on the three-decade-old Look East/Act East policy, one of the more enduring pillars of India's global economic integration policy?

In Nepal, how domestic politics is colliding with geopolitics

Last month, Nepal's Prime Minister (PM) KP Sharma Oli's government quietly issued a circular to its administration to replace "Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal" with "Nepal" in its documents. Many saw it as a matter of practicality. To others, however, the move showed Oli in his true political colour - a conservative leader, who had never owned up to Nepal's 2006 political transformation to a secular federal democratic republic from the 250-year-old Hindu monarchy that had put a tight political leash on Nepal's linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity. The 2006 mass

movement was led by civil society groups and political parties, in Nepal, the Left is home to cultural conservatives too) but



including Oli's own then-Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML). But well into the second decade of the mass movement, there are people on the political Right (and don't get taken by the communist label;

the sweeping changes is tainted, for it was signed in New Delhi. China, whose reading of the ground situation was out of sync with the turn of events, belatedly consented to the move when it saw that the monarchy was fast losing its political base. Now, many seem keen to dismantle the political edifice. The move is aimed at isolating Oli's political nemesis, Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda", who was a key architect of the 2006 change and is making a bid to remove the PM, but it also puts Oli's signature conservatism to the heart of the polity.



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How Joe Biden Can Rein in Donald Trump's Reckless Middle East Policy



One evening last November, while reporting on the front lines outside the Libyan capital of Tripoli, I got caught in an Emirati drone bombardment aimed at Libyan pro-government fighters. Alerted by the whirr of the craft overhead, the fighters whisked me inside a concrete villa, and we watched the streaks of the airstrikes from inside. A few days later, a group of foreign and Libyan workers at a biscuit factory east of Tripoli got no such warning. Around midmorning, an Emirati drone fired the first of five missiles through the roof of a storage hangar, destroying some supplies but sparing lives. The panicked workers fled north to an alfalfa field. The missiles followed them.

I arrived on the scene a few hours later to find the smoldering wreckage and impact craters in the field. The corpses had been removed, but the site was strewn with bits of skull and flesh, tufts of hair, and an orphaned sandal. In total, eight civilians died in the bombing, and more than two dozen were wounded.

The remnants of the missiles I saw pointed to the United Arab Emirates as the source—a conclusion that a Human Rights Watch investigation later corroborated. It was one of countless UAE drone strikes on civilian targets that have taken place during the latest phase of Libya's yearslong civil war, adding to similarly devastating attacks in Yemen that the

Emiratis launched in tandem with Saudi Arabia.

Both interventions, ostensibly undertaken against terrorists, Islamists and Iranian-backed militias, were enabled and prolonged by President Donald Trump's feckless deference and signaling to Arab autocrats. Trump might tout his efforts to pull American forces out of the Middle East, but over the course of his presidency he still has wielded American power in the region to detrimental effects: He has blessed the Emirati- and Egyptian-backed war in Libya, vetoed a congressional resolution to end American military aid to the Saudi-Emirati campaign in Yemen, and exhorted Arab states to buy

American arms—all of which has destabilized parts of the region and devastated swathes of its citizens.

On top of all this, Trump's administration announced plans on November 10 for a massive weapons sale to the United Arab Emirates. In return for the Emirates' signing the Abraham Accords, Trump's overhyped UAE-Israel normalization agreement, the president wants to sell Reaper armed drones to Abu Dhabi, along with the advanced F-35 fighter aircraft and precision munitions. The delivery could take years, and the deal is already facing opposition on Capitol Hill: On November 18, a bipartisan group in Congress, concerned about the Emirates' human rights violations in Libya and Yemen, announced they would introduce legislation to block the transfer. Regardless of the outcome of this move, the announcement of the package seems a fitting consummation of Trump's destructive impulses in the region.

As president, Joe Biden will have to grapple with the aftermath of Emirati adventurism and the habits of other authoritarian Arab allies that have been lavished with American military support, not just under Trump but under previous administrations, as well. Already,

there are positive signals that Biden intends to do this by pursuing a policy toward Arab states that is less personalized, less transactional, more values-based and more focused on advancing the welfare of the region's citizens than accommodating the phobias and ambitions of its ruling elites. For example, some of Biden's top advisers have expressed skepticism about the sale of offensive American weapons to the Gulf. The early reactions of some Arab regimes to Biden's election suggest they sense this shift, and they are uneasy.

But even with Biden's initial good intentions, the institutional inertia of American arms transfers and other forms of military engagement with Arab allies will be hard to escape. This will be true especially if the Biden administration tries to reenter the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, in which case he could be tempted to use continued military support to reassure jittery Arab regimes. And, fearing that these regimes could increasingly turn to Russia and China as arms suppliers as he tries to shift America's energy to other parts of the world, Biden could similarly fall back on weapons sales to compete economically and militarily.

What The U.S. Election Meltdown Looks Like to Other Countries

Nearly three weeks after a presidential election plagued by long lines and even longer ballot-counting delays, President Donald Trump still hasn't conceded the race to Joe Biden, his administration is refusing to help with an orderly transition and his supporters are pulling every lever they can to drag out, block or even overturn the results. Never before has the basic machinery of U.S. democracy looked so dysfunctional. And the rest of the world has been watching almost as closely as Americans themselves.

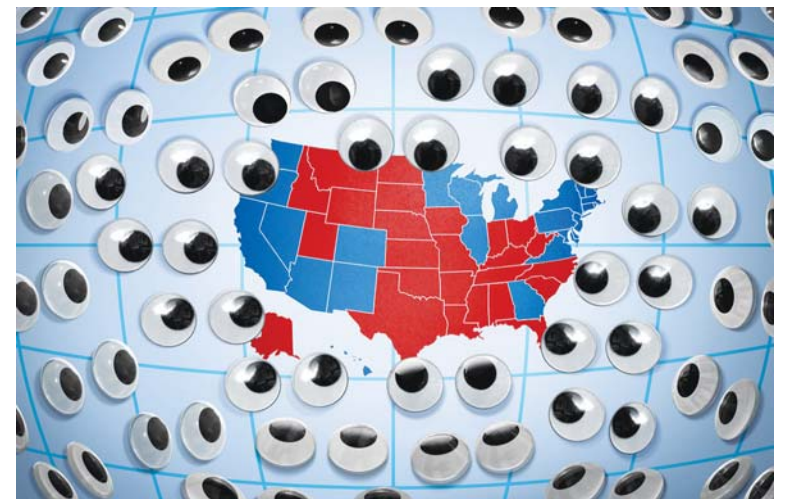
The United States has set itself up as a global model for democratic elections, impressing many people with the longstanding stability of its system, but also fostering some annoyance with its high-handed

efforts to promote its own style of democracy worldwide. Now, with its system in a public meltdown under the stress of its own presidential election, how do people overseas see what's happening here? And how will it affect America's standing going forward? We asked writers from a range of countries, either watching from overseas or from their jobs in the US, what they thought of this recent election, and how it made their fellow-citizens feel about the United States.

Some described a sense of comeuppance, as the self-appointed democratic beacon turned out to be flawed after all; others were disappointed to watch their own autocrats or regional strongmen already capitalizing on the US's

domestic chaos. European allies, though surprised at the confusion, are largely taking it in stride as they await a better relationship with the Biden administration. China and Russia, officially, couldn't be happier. And the former British ambassador asks what many Americans were asking just a couple of weeks ago: Why can't the United States just hire more ballot counters? Their responses are below.

'Ordinary Iranians now know the number of electoral votes in Wisconsin and Michigan' Negar Mortazavi is a journalist and political commentator based in Washington, D.C. She is a columnist for The Independent and host of the Iran Podcast. Because of the crippling sanctions that have devastated



the Iranian economy, U.S. foreign policy has an enormous impact on the lives of Iranians; more than it has on Americans themselves. One tweet about Iran from Donald Trump impacts the Iranian market and the value of its currency. For that reason, Iranians have been following U.S. politics very closely.

Ordinary Iranians now know the number of electoral votes in Wisconsin and Michigan, and the latest status of counts in Arizona and Georgia. And this election, like Trump's presidency itself, has been shocking to many Iranians who have followed U.S. politics over the years.

Vancouver scholar offers first 'decolonized' English translation of famous ancient scripture

Author says revered sacred text more relevant than ever

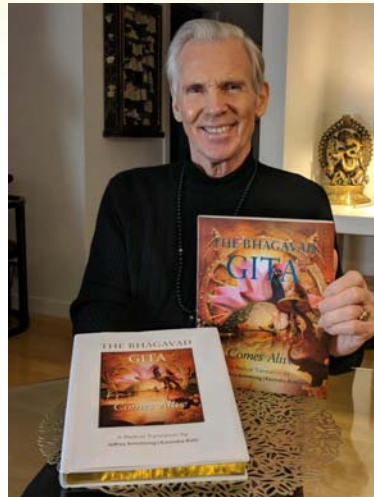
(Insider Bureau)- Vancouver, BC- Ten years in the making, a new English version of the world's most translated - and mistranslated - ancient Indian scripture could be the purest because it does not include colonial, western or Christian distortions.

Written more than 5,000 years ago - some calculate 7,500 years ago - the Bhagavad Gita is considered the ultimate guide on how to navigate life's struggles and dilemmas and find meaning within existence. It is the central and enduring sacred text of Hindu and other eastern cultures that can be found in households worldwide. The book also has prevailing global influence as a "leading book of yoga," and a following that includes Arianna Huffington who recently wrote: "The Bhagavad Gita is a source of wisdom in this crucible time." Translated hundreds of times

Considered a literary masterpiece with universal appeal, the Gita has been translated hundreds of times in 75 languages since 1785. It even provided the premise of the multi-star Hollywood movie, The Legend of Bagger Vance.

When local Vedic (Hindu) scholar and linguist Jeffrey Armstrong embarked on being the first Canadian to translate the Gita into English, he thought he was doing a straight Sanskrit-to-English translation. Through his research, he discovered that previous western versions had distorted the Gita with concepts, words and theories that do not exist in Sanskrit or Indian cultures.

Armstrong spent 10 years "decolonizing" the text to capture it accurately. The Bhagavad Gita Comes Alive: A Radical Translation released this week on Amazon, timed with Diwali celebrations. Armstrong says the book's teachings are more relevant than ever.



"As we navigate a changing world amidst a global pandemic, climate change, and universal calls for social justice, the Gita offers guidance and lessons that are timely, including about ethical and moral dilemmas, politics, and cooperating with nature," said Armstrong, vice-chair of the Vedic Friends Association and scholar with the British Board of Dharmic Scholars. A few of the Christian words and concepts that

Armstrong avoids in his translation include: God, heaven, hell, soul, and sin. "These words and concepts cannot be used as synonyms for Vedic and yogic words and philosophies. I offer the Gita in its true essence where I keep key Sanskrit words and use English to support their true meaning and intent." For example, the word "soul" originated with the Greeks and is defined as the essence of a human being who has one lifetime followed by consequences. The Bhagavad Gita Comes Alive replaces "soul" with the correct and intended Sanskrit word, "atma," which means "the invisible, immortal being with no beginning or end."

Testimonials

Dr. David Frawley - American Hindu scholar who was awarded India's third highest civilian honour, Padma Bhushan, by the Indian government:

"There has long been demand for a version of the Gita that corrects distortions. With this translation by Jeffrey Armstrong, who deeply understands the connotations and subtle connections of the Sanskrit terms around which the Gita revolves, we finally have an extensive and profound English version of the Bhagavad Gita." Professor Ved P. Nanda: Head of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), a North American non-profit organization that aims to preserve and promote Hindu ideals and values. The University of Denver's international law department is named after Nanda, who is an awarded adjunct professor at the university. The Indian government awarded Nanda its third highest civilian honour, Padma Bhushan:

"Jeffrey Armstrong has produced a master translation, carefully preserving its intended meaning."

Indian-Origin Homeless Man Arrested For Pushing US Woman Before Train

(Insider Bureau)- A 24-year-old Indian-origin homeless man has been arrested and booked on suspicion of attempted murder after he pushed a woman onto subway tracks just as a train was entering the station.



Aditya Vemulapati was arrested and booked on suspicion of attempted murder, reckless endangerment, attempted assault in the first degree and assault in the second degree, according to a criminal complaint filed by Manhattan prosecutors. A report in NBC News said a judge ordered Vemulapati held until his December 4 court date. Video footage from the station showed Vemulapati at a subway station in Union Square here pushing Liliana Llanos just as the incoming train pulled into the

station. Llanos miraculously escaped and sustained only minor injuries. She fell in between two train tracks and narrowly missed the train's impact as it passed over early morning

Thursday. Vemulapati was taken into custody at the scene, police said. The report said Llanos had headphones on and was listening to Bible passages. Witnesses say she was waiting for the train when Vemulapati approached her, appearing to talk to himself. From the footage it appeared that he had timed the shove just as an incoming train was approaching the station and pushed her without saying a word, the report added.

"It's very disturbing. We see him waiting, calculating for the train to approach the station and at the opportune moment he pushed the victim onto the tracks," Kathleen O'Reilly, NYPD Chief of Transit Capt., said.



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How to find meaning when death is all around us



There's a process by which people make sense of the events of their lives -- both the things they chose to do, and the things that happened by chance, by accident, against their will, out of their control; experiences they knew were momentous while they were happening, and those that seemed insignificant at the time. In hospice, this process is called "meaning making." As a hospice chaplain for many years, it was my job to facilitate patients' and families' meaning-making work. While meaning-making is usually intense in the months and years before dying and is the last great developmental task of human life, this particularly human ability to make meaning actually emerges in early adulthood. Luckily, it

develops and deepens all through the first years of adulthood and into middle and old age. Luckily" I said, because while you may not be at the end of your life or on hospice care right now, we are all currently living in a hospice world. By hospice world I mean simply this: a community in which death is daily before our eyes. A hospice world is a world in which we are all acutely aware of our own and each others' mortality. Covid-19 has, in a matter of months, reshaped so much of lives that it's become very difficult to not keep death daily before our eyes. Or, if not death, then at least pandemic, sickness, and danger. It was always true that death was possible. Most people just weren't necessarily aware of

it. You always could have been hit by a car, or fallen down the basement steps. You always could have died next week, and so could your loved ones. Most of us just didn't think about it. Most of us didn't really believe it. And now, we do.

How this knowledge affects each of us will differ. But this upending of life as we once knew it demands that we find a way through all the changes and losses.

This pandemic has been a loss in so many ways. Yes, loss of life, of course. But also loss of what we thought this year would be: milestone events like weddings and graduations, relationships, jobs, dreams, even a particular sort of loss of freedom or innocence.

These losses, these changes in life that were not chosen or wanted, might consume some people, or might barely bother others right now. But at some point, they will likely demand our attempts to make sense of them. Meaning is already being made of Covid-19. As an obvious example, look at surgical masks. What were once scraps of blue paper, a bit of metal and elastic

are now either symbols of beneficence towards others and belief in science -- or symbols of oppression and loss of liberty.

There's an awful lot of moral power and meaning ascribed to a disposable bit of medical equipment.

So while we are already starting to find a deeper meaning aspect of this pandemic, it always remains true that meaning-making is easiest in hindsight and hardest while you're still living the upheaval.

For those who are exhausted, who are barely coping with the demands of each Covid day, it may be too soon or impossible at the moment to think about making meaning of what's happening.

But for those who are yearning to make sense of their lives right now, there are tools you already have to help you.

Your 'spiritual toolbox'

Every person is walking around with a spiritual toolbox. This toolbox is all the different ways people try to make sense of the things they cannot make sense of. It has the tools each of us use to try to bring order to our world when our world has descended

into confusion or chaos. It's what a chaplain helps a patient tap into. It's what we use to make meaning.

Every person -- whether they are spiritual or religious or not -- has these tools, but not every person's tools are the same. Some people have a bounty of ways to cope, to make meaning, to reconcile with losses. Some have very few.

Religion is often one of the best tools a person has to make sense of the big traumas and small disappointments that have marked their lives. It's not just the wisdom about the nature of the world and suffering that can help at a time like this. It's also scripture, ritual, hymns, stories and memories of holidays with family.

A pandemic, and the hospice world it throws us into, is one in which we are searching to make meaning of rapidly changing events and expectations. We're not always aware of how we're doing it.

Religion isn't the only tool people have to make meaning, however. A rejection of religion can be as powerful a tool as the embrace of it.

The only way Republicans can lead again

President Donald Trump is conducting an all-out assault on our democracy. There is no other way to look at this. The President lost the election and his legal team has failed to produce evidence of voter fraud. So now President Trump is attempting to convince state legislatures to overthrow the results. Voters made their decision, and yet he wants to force a different outcome. His attorney, Rudy Giuliani, is spewing the kinds of conspiracy theories that even conspiracy theorists shy away from. This is dangerous stuff. When some writers, such as Barton Gellman, writing in the Atlantic, predicted this would happen, too many people shrugged off the warning. None of this should come as a surprise. In February, Congressman Adam Schiff, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, warned the Senate at the end of the President's impeachment trial: "We must say enough-enough! He has betrayed our national security, and he will do so again. He has compromised our elections, and he will do so again. You will not change him. You cannot constrain him. He is



who he is. Truth matters little to him. What's right matters even less, and decency matters not at all." Confronted with all of the testimony and evidence as to how Trump abused presidential power, Senate Republicans didn't take Rep. Schiff up on his warning. With the exception of Sen. Mitt Romney, who voted to convict Trump, the rest of the party stood by the President. Sen. Susan Collins assured voters that "I believe that the President has learned from this case. The President has been impeached. That's a pretty big

lesson." By now it should be clear that the only lesson President Trump learned from the impeachment process was that almost every elected Republican would support him regardless of what he did. He could use public policy for his self-interest, he could intimidate opponents and spread disinformation, and, yes, he could threaten our democratic institutions. When President Trump took steps that were a dangerous use of presidential power--spreading false information about Covid-19 and other issues, dangling foreign aid

as leverage for his personal interest. (He denies that was his intent.) failing to clearly separate his business concerns and his role as President and making supportive messages to White extremist groups, the GOP did not do a thing. Indeed, even now some elected officials, such as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, have openly stood by Trump's efforts to attack the election results. Republicans have offered a number of excuses for their silence. According to Sen. McConnell, "We're going to have an orderly transfer from this administration to the next one, what we all say about it is, frankly, irrelevant." The GOP will own this moment for decades to come. When historians look back to understand what happened when the incumbent president recklessly attempted to overturn an election in the middle of a devastating pandemic, where every day of the transition counts in terms of saving lives and moving us back to normal, they will see that most of the party didn't do anything. It's the story of the Trump presidency.

India announces major commitments at Afghanistan Conference 2020



The Indian delegation led by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar announced a host of commitments towards building capacities and capabilities of Afghan nationals as well as its institutions.

India on Tuesday announced major commitments towards reconstruction and rehabilitation at the 2020 Afghanistan Conference that was organised in Geneva November 23 and 24 through video conferencing. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar led the Indian delegation. He said that India and Afghanistan concluded the agreement to construct the Shahtoot dam, which would provide safe drinking water to 2 million residents of Kabul city. "I am happy to announce today an agreement with Afghanistan for building the Shahtoot dam, which would provide safe drinking water to 2 million residents of

Kabul city. It builds on the 202-km Phul-e-Khumri transmission line of 2009 through which will provide power to the city. India will also launch Phase-IV of High Impact Community Development Projects in Afghanistan, which include around 150 projects worth US\$ 80 million," said Jaishankar. As neighbours, the Indian minister emphasised the "strategic partnership" and long-term commitment to the development of Afghanistan. "Our development portfolio of more than US\$ 3 billion for Afghanistan is aimed at building capacities and capabilities of Afghan nationals as well as its institutions with a view to

improve governance and public service. There is no part of Afghanistan today untouched by our 400 plus projects, spread across all the 34 provinces of Afghanistan," he said.

Speaking at 2020 Afghanistan pledging conference on 24 November, Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani said he would like to "thank India for its commitment of over \$2 billion",

"Large infrastructure projects completed include the construction of 218 km road from Delaram to Zaranj (on Iranian border) which provides alternate connectivity for Afghanistan through Iran; India-Afghanistan friendship dam; and the Afghan Parliament building which was inaugurated in 2015, a symbol of Afghan democracy," added Jaishankar.

More than 65,000 Afghan students have studied in India. "Afghanistan's growth has been constrained by its landlocked geography and highlighted India's efforts to provide an alternate connectivity through Chabahar

port and a dedicated Air Freight Corridor between India and Afghanistan," read the Ministry of External Affairs press release after the conference.

"While I speak 15,000 students are presently studying in India. 3,000 scholarships so far have been granted to young Afghan women to pursue higher studies in India. Going beyond basic education, we also provided vocational training to a large number of women in Afghanistan. This number shall increase every year with our long term commitment to help rebuild Afghanistan," said Jaishankar.

During his address, Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani said, "I'd like to thank India and Iran for the Chahbahar corridor in related sea corridor as well as the air corridor."

It may be noted that India's humanitarian assistance of 75,000 tonnes of wheat to strengthen the food security of Afghanistan during the Covid

pandemic has been transported through Chabahar port.

For India, apart from trade and connectivity, a sustainable, stable future for Afghanistan cannot be achieved unless there is a permanent solution to the ongoing conflict and rights of women and minorities are respected.

Speaking on the issue, Jaishankar said, "India has invested heavily in peace and development in Afghanistan. We strongly believe that the gains of the last two decades must be preserved and the interests of minorities, women and vulnerable sections must be ensured."

Expressing "grave" concern over the increasing level of "violence" in Afghanistan, he said, "While we support all efforts to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan, India calls for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire. We also believe that the peace process must be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled."

China turns new civilian settlements near LAC into military infra, satellite images reveal



Beautifully constructed homes, recreational facilities and roads, all disguised as civil infrastructure near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) on the Chinese side is part of the People's Liberation Army's new warfare tactics to enhance its military network.

These so-called civilian dwellings part of integrated model villages are nothing but an extension of cantonments with no population occupying these places close to

the borders. A set of seven new high-resolution satellite images, covering the Torsa river valley near the Bhutan-China border, puts on display the possible execution of this new Chinese warfare strategy, which China hopes to deploy all along its western borders.

Images released on Sunday by space firm Maxar Technologies showed Chinese construction at a newly-built Pangda village in the valley. However, the real story of

Chinese deception is not a remote village with less than three dozen residential structures, but what comes with it.

India Today TV has learnt that China has been adopting a policy of setting up dual-use integrated villages close to the borders that can be used as strategic military assets by the Chinese armed forces.

The images reviewed by India Today TV also clearly show newly-built military storage bunkers and under-construction roads at the strategic locations on the other side of the village, revealing the actual use of such facilities in the border area.

The integrated villages are essentially an extension of cantonments, close to the border areas. The aim of these integrated model villages is to ensure the co-existence of the military and civilian population at the frontier areas of the Tibetan Autonomous Region that is sparsely populated,

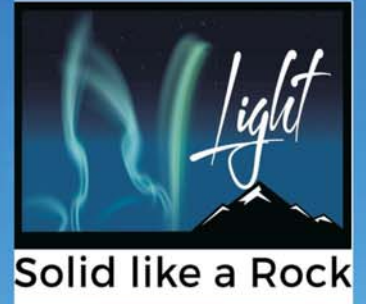
sources say. These are newly-developed villages meant for settling civilians but that's hardly happened. Earlier, India Today TV had reported the existence of such facilities along the Line of Actual Control region months before the stand-off between the two sides began in May 2020. "Both the army and civilians can use it. The development also strengthens the claim over land in case of an escalation. They are extensions of military cantonments," an official said. "If these were indeed meant for civilians, people would be residing here. But these integrated villages largely remain unoccupied," said an official in the security establishment.

Usually, these villages also have reconnaissance towers. China has already set up over two dozen of such integrated villages across the LAC, including in the eastern sector opposite Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim.

Some of the earlier established villages are well-connected by newly-made Chinese four-lane roads. India has also adopted a policy of opening some of the places near the LAC for tourists. The new Chinese construction area, seen in the images about 9 kms to the east from the site of the 2017 India-Chinese stand-off in the Doklam plateau, has now established how China - in the guise of the setting of civilians villages - is actually enhancing its military establishments close to the borders.

The high-resolution images, captured by Maxar's sub-half meter high-resolution commercial satellite Geoeye 1, focuses on new buildings, under-construction roads and military bunkers in and around Pangda village. The village structures seem to have been built during the past 12 months. But the construction of the village is not the only feature of these images.

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Far from home, Rohingya refugees face a new peril on a remote island



(News Agencies)-After fleeing a brutal crackdown which left thousands dead in their homeland of Myanmar, the Rohingya are once again under threat. In Cox's Bazar, the massive refugee camp in Bangladesh to which many of the Rohingya refugees fled, violence and drug and human trafficking are on the rise. The Bangladeshi government has begun relocating hundreds of the refugees, against their will, to the small remote silt island of Bhasan Char. On the first visit to the island by journalists, the BBC went to investigate what the future holds for the tens of thousands of Rohingya still living in limbo. It's been six months since 55-year-old Rashida

Khatun has heard from her children. Khatun and her family live in Cox's Bazar, but in February, before the coronavirus had fully taken hold in Bangladesh, two of Rashida's children set off on a perilous journey. Driven by their belief in a better future, her 17-year-old daughter and 22-year-old son boarded a small fishing vessel with two dozen other Rohingya refugees and began the 10-day journey from Cox's Bazar to Malaysia. Sitting in her makeshift house of bamboo and plastic, with a white head scarf draped over her head and shoulders, Khatun described how her family fled from their homeland of Myanmar in 2017 after the military attacked her village in Maungdaw and burnt down her

house. Three years ago, a military operation in Myanmar destroyed entire Rohingya Muslim villages. UN investigators say as many as 10,000 people were killed and more than 730,000 Rohingya fled the massacre for Bangladesh. The UN called it a "textbook ethnic cleansing". After years of living in temporary shelters, and with no hope of returning to their ancestral homeland, Khatun's son and daughter had become desperate to escape the escalating violence and lack of opportunities in the camps. So they decided to flee to the Muslim majority country of Malaysia. "One of my relatives in Malaysia phoned me last year. He said that many Malaysian men want to marry Rohingya women," Khatun said. "He

assured me my daughter would be able to get married there and that my son would be able to get a good job." Travelling by boat from Bangladesh to Malaysia has become the most common route out of the camps for young Rohingya, but it's a treacherous journey. In the same week Khatun's children departed, a fishing boat carrying dozens of refugees capsized just off the coast of Bangladesh. Fourteen people died. After 10 days at sea, Khatun's children - who we have not named to protect their safety - made it within sight of the Malaysian coast. But they were being tracked by the Malaysian Navy. Refused permission to dock by the Malaysian authorities, their

tiny fishing vessel was left stranded for a month floating in the Andaman Sea. Eventually, Bangladesh's coast guard, bowing under the pressure from local media and human rights groups, intervened.

Along with hundreds of other refugees who had also been refused entry to Malaysia, Khatun's children were not allowed to return home to the camps of Cox's Bazar, but were instead taken to the small island of Bhasan Char, in the Bay of Bengal. Back in Cox's Bazar, Khatun received a call from an unknown number. "My daughter sounded very anxious. She was crying when she told me that she was being taken to an island named Bhasan Char." It was the last time she spoke to her daughter.

The Island

The island of Bhasan Char, located 60km (37 miles) off the coast of Bangladesh, emerged less than 20 years ago from the sea. Situated less than 2m (6ft) above sea level, the island is made entirely of silt, Himalayan sediment washed down river and into the sea.

Thailand revives law banning criticism of king in bid to curb protests



(News Agencies)-Thailand has revived a controversial law against criticising the royal family in an attempt to curb months of anti-government protests.

Several activists have been summoned to face charges under the lèse-majesté law, which carries a sentence of up to 15 years in prison for each count. It is the first time in over two years that such charges have been filed. Thailand has been rocked by student-led protests for months, with demonstrators demanding changes to the

monarchy. Protesters are also calling for constitutional reforms and the removal of the country's prime minister.

On Tuesday, a prominent student activist, 22-year-old Parit Chiwarak, said he had received a summons for lèse-majesté - among other charges - but that he was "not afraid". "The ceiling has been broken. Nothing can contain us anymore," he tweeted, along with a photo of the summons. At least six other key protest leaders, including human rights lawyer Anon Nampa and Panusaya Sithijirawattanukul, are expected to face the same charges, according to reports.

The most feared law in Thailand is back in use, after a three-year break, reportedly ordered by King Vajiralongkorn.

Its revival follows increasingly outspoken criticism of the king by protesters, in chants, on stage, and in what for many Thais is shockingly vulgar graffiti. This is something very new in Thailand. Even in previous episodes of political unrest few dared to attack the monarchy. But this generation of activists insists that the spending and power of the king must be challenged.

They will now face a law which allows secret trials, and puts huge pressure on defendants to admit guilt to reduce the often draconian prison sentences. But it may prove less effective in suppressing anti-monarchy sentiment than in the past, now that scandalous reports about the royal family are circulated instantly on social media.

Its use may even be counterproductive, costing the

Thai monarchy sympathy while it is engaged in a campaign to shore up support for the institution.

Thailand's lèse-majesté law, which forbids any insult to the monarchy, is among the strictest in the world.

The reintroduction of charges under the lèse-majesté law comes ahead of a planned demonstration on Wednesday at the Crown Property Bureau, an institution that controls the royal fortune on behalf of the monarchy, located in the capital, Bangkok. This latest development follows increasingly outspoken criticism of the king by protesters. King Vajiralongkorn has been criticised for spending much of his time in Germany. Protests have included demands to curb recently expanded powers to the monarchy and have challenged the king's decision to declare Crown wealth as his personal property, making him by far the wealthiest person

in Thailand. It had until now been notionally held in trust for the benefit of the people.

There have also been questions over King Vajiralongkorn's decision to take personal command of all military units based in Bangkok - a concentration of military power in royal hands unprecedented in modern Thailand.

Last week, at least 41 people were injured after clashes between protesters and police in the Thai capital, Bangkok. Protesters were attempting to reach parliament, where lawmakers were debating possible changes to the constitution. They hurled smoke bombs and bags of paint at police, who retaliated with water cannon and tear-gas solution. Why are there protests in Thailand? Thailand has a long history of political unrest and protest, but a new wave began in February after a court ordered a fledgling pro-democracy opposition party to dissolve.

Uighurs: China rebuffs Pope's criticism as 'groundless'

(News Agencies)-Beijing has dismissed Pope Francis's criticisms of its treatment of China's Muslim Uighur minority in Xinjiang.

It came after the head of the Roman Catholic Church joined a growing group of international voices, describing the Uighurs as "persecuted" in a new book.

It is believed that the Chinese government has detained up to a million Uighurs in what the state defines as "re-education camps".

China's foreign ministry said the Pope's remarks were "groundless".

" Revealed: China's hidden camps

" Who are the Uighurs?

" China expands its Uighur detention camps - report

In his book Let Us Dream: The Path to A Better Future, Pope

Francis writes that "I think often of persecuted peoples: the Rohingya, the poor Uighurs, the Yazidi". It is the first time he mentions the Uighurs in that context. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian



with contraceptive devices, apparently to control the population growth.

China initially denied the existence of the camps, before saying the internment sites provide job training and education.

The Uighurs are a mostly Muslim Turkic ethnicity who regard themselves as culturally and ethnically close to Central Asian nations. The majority live in China's Xinjiang province, where they number about 11

million people, or around 45% of the population. Observers say that over the years, central government policies have gradually curtailed the Uighurs' religious, commercial and cultural activities, as large numbers of majority Han Chinese have been encouraged to move to the region.

responded saying Beijing "has always protected the legal rights of ethnic minorities equally".

Beijing is believed to have detained more than one million people from Xinjiang in recent years, citing terrorism and security risks. It has also been alleged they are forcing Uighur women to be sterilised or fitted

Donors pledge billions to Afghanistan, but with strings attached

(News Agencies)-International donors have pledged billions of dollars in civilian aid for Afghanistan, but many imposed tough conditions pending on progress in peace talks under way between the country's government and the Taliban.

Dozens of foreign nations, international institutions and the European Union took part at a virtual global conference hosted from the Swiss city of Geneva on Tuesday.

But many, including the United States and Germany, introduced restrictions on future funding and some committed for just the next year - departing from four-year pledges made in the past.

"We're pleased to pledge today \$300m ...with the remaining \$300m available as we review progress in the peace process," US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale said in a virtual address to the conference. The US, which invaded Afghanistan in 2001 to

pursue the Taliban, has contributed roughly \$800m a year in civilian aid in recent years.

Another top donor, Germany, pledged 430 million euros (\$511m) in 2021 and signalled it would keep contributing until 2024 but also stressed that progress towards ending almost 20 years of war was needed.

The Taliban and the Afghan government have been engaged in talks in Qatar's capital, Doha, since September. The historic discussions quickly became bogged down by disputes on the agenda, the basic framework of discussions and religious interpretations.

But Hale said "significant progress" had recently been made, including a tentative agreement on ground rules that could allow negotiators to proceed to the next stage of forming an agenda. However, an increased level of violence in the country seems to depict a different reality in terms of progress.

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- If you have family or friends who have one of these conditions, do not visit them if you feel sick.



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Why Bhutan's Sakteng wildlife sanctuary is disputed by China

(News Agencies)-Sandwiched between China and India, the tiny Himalayan nation of Bhutan is feeling the squeeze as its giant neighbours square up for supremacy. A close ally of India, Bhutan got a shock when China made sudden new claims in the summer - over a wildlife sanctuary in the east of the country, on land that had not been considered disputed.

Most Bhutanese commentators don't want to discuss this in detail, but many believe Beijing is trying to drag the Buddhist majority nation - population 750,000 - into the territorial stand-off with India.

Since April the world's two most populous nations have deployed tens of thousands of troops further west along their border, with both accusing each other of trespassing into each other's territory.

China shares land borders with 14 countries and says it has settled its frontiers with most of them. India and Bhutan are notable exceptions, with no progress made in years of talks over disputed areas.

Beijing views disputed territory in the two countries as part of Tibet, which it invaded and annexed in the 1950s. 'Chinese attempt to irritate Bhutan'

Beijing's surprise move came during a virtual conservation meeting in June, when it laid claim for the first time to Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary, which spans about 740 sq km (285 sq miles) in eastern Bhutan.

The government in Thimphu had requested aid for projects in the park from the Global Environmental Facility, a US-based group which finances eco-friendly projects. Chinese representatives objected, saying the area was in dispute and funds should not be allocated. Bhutan rejected the claim, pointing out the area had never featured in 24 previous rounds of boundary talks.



A 25th round scheduled for earlier this year was delayed by the Covid crisis.

In July, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin left no doubt when he said "the boundary between China and Bhutan is yet to be demarcated, and the middle, eastern and western section of the border are disputed". The eastern section was an obvious reference to the Sakteng reserve. Bhutanese historian Karma Phuntsho says: "Sakteng national park was never a disputed area and it was always under Bhutanese control. There is no evidence of any affiliation [of that region] to China." The recent claim by a Chinese official at the Global Environment Facility is perhaps a Chinese attempt to irritate Bhutan as there are border disputes to settle in other areas. "A way to put pressure on India" Border talks between Thimphu and Beijing have focused since 1984 mostly on around 269 sq km in the west and around 500 sq km in the north of Bhutan. "All official Chinese maps have showed Sakteng as part of Bhutan. In 2014, China came out

with its most ambitious map ever, with vast territorial claims, including India's Arunachal Pradesh. But even in that map Sakteng park was shown as part of Bhutan," said Tenzing Lamsang, the editor of weekly newspaper The Bhutanese.

Bhutan is no stranger to feeling caught between China and India. Border negotiations stalled following a crisis three years ago over a plateau known as Doklam in India, and Donglang in China. In June 2017 Indian forces confronted Chinese troops, who had started to expand an unpaved road in the crucial tri-junction between India, China and Bhutan. The area actually fell within Bhutan's claims but India challenged Chinese troops on behalf of its tiny ally. The plateau is of strategic importance to Delhi because it overlooks the Siliguri corridor, known as the "chicken's neck", a narrow strip of land that connects India's north-eastern states with the rest of the country. India fears that in any future conflict, Chinese troops could seize the corridor. Though both countries disengaged following talks, it showed how border disputes might escalate. Subsequent satellite pictures showed the Chinese army had built a vast network of military installations, including heliports, not far from the flash point in Doklam. So China's decision to claim the Sakteng sanctuary now is being seen in the context of the wider stand-off, as Asia's giants jockey for advantage. It is a way to put pressure on India, not just Bhutan. The Sakteng sanctuary borders India's Arunachal Pradesh, which is also claimed by China. Beijing's view seems to be Sakteng is an extension of Arunachal Pradesh," said Sangeeta Thapliyal, professor of international studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi.

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Trump relents as administration begins Biden transition

But the president, in announcing the move by the GSA, said he was still not conceding.



threatened, and abused - and I do not want to see this happen to her, her family, or employees of GSA. Our case STRONGLY continues, we will keep up the good ... fight, and I believe we will prevail!" He continued:

"Nevertheless, in the best interest of our Country, I am recommending that Emily and her team do what needs to be done with regard to initial protocols, and have told my team to do the same." The shift in

posture capped a three-week period that has seen a defiant president refuse to acknowledge the encroaching reality of a Biden victory. Since election night, Trump has proclaimed rampant fraud stripped him of victory (but presented no credible evidence), backed scores of lawsuits to disqualify votes (but made no progress) and personally lobbied state lawmakers to overturn Biden's win (but found no takers). By Monday, even senior White House officials said the

president's statement was becoming inevitable, as key states like Georgia and Michigan started to certify Biden's victory. Still, those same officials were unaware Trump had cleared the way for the presidential transition to begin until they saw his Monday night tweet, which was drafted with input from the White House Counsel's Office, according to one official familiar with the discussions.

Trump had spent much of the weekend contemplating what he should do as his options to contest the election dwindled. He solicited advice from top confidants and campaign aides. He criticized his legal team's lackluster performance. One person familiar with those discussions said "everyone but Rudy [Giuliani]" encouraged the president to greenlight the transition process, while continuing to pursue legal options to challenge the election. People close to Trump

told him that he did not have to concede, but that he should at least allow the transition to kick in, according to a Republican close to the White House. The president's allies were concerned about protecting his legacy while also hoping to avoid Biden using a botched transition as a major talking point, the person said. On Monday, Trump acceded to the advice, albeit in his own Trumpian way.

"You'll have stuff like this that's very close, but you'll never be an outright confirmation of the results or acknowledgment of a loss," said one adviser to the Trump campaign.

Similarly, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer tweeted that Monday's news was "probably the closest thing to a concession President Trump could issue."

Later in the evening, Trump further hammered the point that he had no intention of stopping his legal fights.

(News Agencies)- More than two weeks after clinching electoral victory, President-elect Joe Biden can finally start his formal transition to the White House.

The General Services Administration on Monday finally acknowledged Biden as the apparent winner of the 2020 presidential election, allowing his team to get working on the logistics of the transition.

President Donald Trump acknowledged the move in a tweet, attempting to take credit for the decision, but stressed that it did not amount to a concession. By law, the president-elect cannot access federal transition funds or contact federal agencies to plan staffing until the GSA recognizes an electoral winner.

"I want to thank Emily Murphy at GSA for her steadfast dedication and loyalty to our Country," Trump tweeted, referring to the head of the GSA. "She has been harassed,

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Coronavirus: French lockdown to ease after second peak passes



(News Agencies)-France will begin to ease its strict coronavirus restrictions this weekend, allowing non-essential shops to reopen, President Emmanuel Macron has said.

People will also be able to share "moments with the family" over the Christmas period, Mr Macron announced.

But he said bars and restaurants would have to remain closed until 20 January.

France has reported more than 2.2 million cases and more than 50,000 confirmed coronavirus-

related deaths since the start of the pandemic.

In a televised address on Tuesday evening, Mr Macron said the country had passed the peak of the second wave of virus infections.

He said that the bulk of lockdown restrictions would be eased from 15 December for the festive period, with cinemas reopening and general travel restrictions lifted, as long as new infections were at 5,000 a day or less.

On Monday, France reported 4,452 daily Covid-19 infections -

its lowest tally since 28 September.

The latest seven-day rolling average for new infections in France is reported to be 21,918. That figure peaked at 54,440 on 7 November.

"How new lockdowns are changing life across Europe

"Tracking the global pandemic: Where has been hit hardest?

"Covid vaccine update: When will one be ready?

Mr Macron said the recent news of successful vaccine trials offered "a glimmer of hope" and that France would aim to begin vaccinations against Covid-19 "at the end of December or at the beginning of January", starting with the elderly and most vulnerable.

The French president said the situation would be reviewed on 20 January, and if infections remained low, bars and restaurants would then be permitted to reopen. Universities would also be able to accept students again. However, if the situation had worsened, he said

he would look at options to avoid triggering a third wave.

"We must do everything to avoid a third wave, do everything to avoid a third lockdown," Mr Macron said.

He later tweeted to say that all businesses forced to remain closed during the restrictions, such as restaurants, bars and sports halls, would have the choice of receiving up to •10,000 (£8,900) from a "solidarity fund" or the payment of 20% of their turnover.

He said that France's ski resorts may have to remain closed until next year because the current risks associated with the virus made it difficult for such sports to resume. However, he said he would discuss the issue with other European leaders and provide an update in the coming days. Ski resorts were responsible for numerous outbreaks of Covid-19 cases across Europe in the early days of the pandemic. Mr Macron said the lockdown would be replaced by a nationwide curfew between 21:00 and 07:00, except on Christmas Eve and New Year's

Eve. France has been under a second national lockdown since the beginning of November. People have only been permitted to leave home to go to work, buy essential goods, seek medical help or exercise for one hour a day. Anyone going outside must carry a written statement justifying their journey.

While all non-essential shops, restaurants and bars have been shut, schools and crèches have remained open. Social gatherings have been banned.

Measures to deal with coronavirus outbreaks remain in place across Europe, but a reduction in daily reported cases in some areas - coupled with the reported success of a number of vaccines - has led countries to revisit their restrictions. Some of the latest developments include: "Along with France, politicians from other nations - including Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte - have said that Europe's ski resorts should close over the winter and that it is too risky to spend the Christmas holiday on the snow

Melania Trump's hometown in Slovenia hopes its fame will last



(News Agencies)-Torta Melanija takes pride of place in the display case of a smart patisserie attached to Sevnica's only hotel. Waves of light, golden chocolate wobble atop an expanse of cream-covered white chocolate mousse - a colour scheme chosen in honour of Sevnica's most famous daughter, Melania Trump.

For the past four years, the people here have leveraged minor international fame to promote their central Slovenian town and its products. But now the Trump presidency is entering its final weeks, there is the sense of the end of an era for Sevnica as well. "We wanted the cake to be elegant, to resemble Melania -

with gold, because of the Trumps, and white because of the White House," says Nusa Vidmar, the owner of the Slascicarna Julija patisserie.

It also contains nuts, which were a seasonal ingredient when Melania Trump became First Lady in January 2017.

Visitors arrive in this town of 5,000 people via a winding route that follows the River Sava through a forest and emerges at a sawmill, where logs are piled high on trailers.

On the banks of the Sava, a short drive out of town, a lumpen figure on a tree stump raises an arm - whether in distress or greeting is for the viewer to judge. This is the second version



of a statue simply called Melania. The original, wooden figure, which bore not even a passing resemblance to Sevnica's famous ex-resident, was burned by an unknown arsonist over the summer. In Sevnica they studiously separate politics from their tangential connection to Washington DC.

"In our patisserie, we have a lot of people from all over the world - they all tried the Torta Melanija, but I don't think they just came for the cake," the owner remarks. "It was a big thing for us - a big thing for Slovenia as well. It was a historical moment - and I don't think that we will see such a moment again."

But that does not mean an end to the benefits the Melania connection will bring to Sevnica. Inside the stout 16th-Century castle on the hill above the town, a collection of local products branded "First Lady" are on sale. To some it might seem like cashing in, and what Melania Trump might make of having a salami named in her honour is anybody's guess. But developing a range of high-end, locally produced gifts - including wine, chocolate and beauty cream - involved a joint effort by local authorities and businesses. Mayor Srečko Ocvirk says that unified approach reflects a community that is now confident in presenting Sevnica to

the world. "Sevnica is not a traditional tourist destination. But what happened four years ago had a very good effect on the recognition of the town," he believes. "That brought local people together and encouraged businesses to join forces and co-operate."

Despite Mrs Trump's impending departure from the White House, Sevnica has decided to continue to offer its First Lady products, and even add more items to the range. Taking the air close to the Melania statue, local resident Smiljan Slukan confides that his father was Melania's form teacher at primary school. But that doesn't affect his view of the US presidential election's outcome. "It wasn't a big deal for me personally when she became First Lady, and her departure probably won't make an impact on me now." A strictly non-scientific straw poll on the streets of the town suggests this is a widely held view. But in the patisserie, Nusa Vidmar begs to differ. "These four years will always be part of us," she declares. "Especially the cake."

CDC urges overwhelmed contact tracers to prioritize efforts as cases soar

Given increased demand on contact tracers, CDC advised against contacting infected people who are more than two weeks out from their positive test.

(News Agencies)-The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is advising overwhelmed local health officials to triage their coronavirus contact tracing efforts, writing that the latest infection surge is making it difficult to reach every close contact of Covid-positive patients in time to help contain the disease's spread.

"As the burden of COVID-19 worsens in an area, and the capacity to investigate new cases in a timely manner becomes more difficult or is not feasible, health departments should prioritize which cases to investigate and which contacts to trace," reads

new guidance from the CDC. The CDC said state and local public health departments should prioritize contacting people who tested positive for Covid-19 within the last six days, members of their immediate household, the elderly and people with health conditions that make them more vulnerable to the virus, and people who live or work in congregate settings like nursing homes and prisons, where the virus has spread rapidly.

Given increased demand on contact tracers, CDC advised against contacting infected

people who are more than two weeks out from their positive test, except in rare circumstances, since it is likely too late to prevent them from spreading the virus to others.

How we got here: The new guidance comes as cases, hospitalizations and deaths soar nationwide, straining a public health workforce that was already stretched thin. Some states and cities have already urged residents to do their own contact tracing because there aren't enough people



available to call every positive case. Labs say the infection surge is also slowing down their ability to process Covid tests, which could delay local health departments' efforts to begin the contact tracing process. The U.S. is adding more than 1 million new

cases per week and nearing 260,000 deaths. Officials fear that travel and family gatherings over Thanksgiving - against the CDC's advice - will fuel further spread, diminishing the country's ability to track and contain the virus.

Kash Patel, recently installed Trump loyalist, now leading Pentagon transition



Patel was named chief of staff to acting Defense Secretary Chris Miller just two weeks ago, the day after the president fired Defense Secretary Mark Esper.

Trump administration to begin talking with the incoming Biden team to begin the transition process. Background: Patel was named chief of staff to acting Defense Secretary Chris Miller just two weeks ago, the day after the president fired Defense Secretary Mark Esper. His former chief of staff, Jen Stewart, resigned shortly after. Trump allies were also installed in top positions

overseeing intelligence and policy. Stewart was leading the transition effort before she left the Pentagon, so it was expected that Patel would take over those responsibilities. Patel previously worked for Rep. Devin Nunes (R.Calif.), the top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, and as a staffer played a key role in helping Republicans discredit the Russia probe. He also held a number of roles in the Trump administration, including on the National Security

Council staff, in the office of former acting Director of National Intelligence Richard Grenell, and most recently as a top White House counterterrorism official. Other personnel moves: Tom Muir, the director of Washington Headquarters Services, will be the agency transition director, the Defense Department transition task force lead and the senior career executive for transition, the spokesperson said.

Xi Jinping seeks to 'manage differences' as he congratulates Joe Biden

(News Agencies)-China's President Xi Jinping broke his silence on Joe Biden's election victory, sending the US president-elect a message that he hopes to "manage differences" and focus on cooperation between the world's two largest economies. The congratulatory note, reported by the official Xinhua News Agency, said China wants to advance a "healthy and stable" relationship and uphold the principles of "no conflict" and "no confrontation." Biden appreciates the congratulations he's receiving from world leaders, including Xi, a spokesman for the president-elect's transition office said.

China's ruling Communist Party leaders had held off on offering extended comments as President Donald Trump pursued unfounded

claims of fraud in an effort to overturn the Nov. 3 election. An earlier Foreign Ministry statement sent congratulations and said China respected the American people's choice. Trump has ratcheted up tensions with Beijing over the course of his administration, hitting China with tariffs in continuing trade disputes, blaming it for the coronavirus pandemic and condemning its treatment of ethnic Uighurs in the Xinjiang region and its crackdown on freedoms in Hong Kong. As Biden prepares to take office, the world is watching to see how he handles the relationship between Washington and Beijing, after a campaign in which he faced few questions about how he would

handle Beijing more effectively than Trump. Officials have suggested the president-elect would take a less confrontational approach to China than Trump, cooperating on issues such as arms control and climate change. Biden's team has acknowledged that the Obama-era effort to work more closely with China -- and look past some of its violations of human rights, intellectual property threats and regional expansion -- is over.

Trump's Rift

Still, the new administration will inherit -- and be forced to navigate -- the Trump-era rift between the U.S. and China. Trump is planning more hard-line moves against Beijing in



the remaining weeks of his term, Bloomberg reported earlier this month, potentially escalating tensions as the Biden administration takes over. Actions being considered include countering illegal fishing and more sanctions against party officials or institutions causing harm in Hong Kong or Xinjiang, Bloomberg

reported. The Trump administration is close to issuing a list of 89 Chinese aerospace and other firms that would be unable to access US technology exports because of military ties, Reuters reported this week, a move that could escalate tensions as the Biden administration prepares to take over.

Trump strips Biden's options to boost the economy

gridlock on the way in Washington, all eyes are on the Fed to pump up the economy in the face of congressional intransigence.

But interest rates are already at zero. The Fed has given billions in aid to companies and municipalities, but it's not putting money in consumers' pockets, which is what millions of Americans need most. And Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's move last week to wind down most of the emergency lending programs that the Fed introduced at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic for the time being deprives the central bank of one of its most direct ways of boosting the economy.

"It is not that the Fed is out of firepower," said Ernie Tedeschi, policy economist at Evercore ISI. "It's just that the Fed is really reaching down deeper and deeper into its toolkit, and it has tools that are less effective than the tools that it's already used."

Much of the work on Biden's behalf will fall to Janet Yellen, his pick to be Treasury secretary. The former Fed chair will bring her deep knowledge of the central bank's toolkit, from her lengthy experience inside the Fed system, to partner with her former Fed colleague, current Chair Jerome Powell.

The most direct way the Fed could increase its aid to the economy is through two temporary lending programs designed to help mid-sized businesses and municipal governments — two of the programs Mnuchin is shutting down at the end of the year. Though Yellen, if confirmed, could at least partially reopen them, the terms of the CARES Act — the massive spending

program approved by Congress at the onset of the pandemic in March — potentially limit the secretary's authority to send more funds to cover losses from Fed loans after the end of the year. Both programs have only doled out a small portion of their available funds, in part because the Fed and the Treasury Department designed them so the government wouldn't lose much money on the loans. Yellen could also increase that risk appetite. But Mnuchin has now moved to significantly reduce the pot of money that's going to be available to lend, arguing that the programs were no longer

necessary, drawing a backlash from the Biden camp.

"The Treasury Department's attempt to prematurely end support that could be used for small businesses across the

tougher for Biden, although all the central bank can really offer vulnerable industries is help in building up debt more cheaply — a bridge to the other side of the crisis, rather than a long-term



solution. Republicans will probably block his most ambitious spending programs, as they did with President Barack Obama in the years after the 2008 financial crisis. It's just frustrating that

[Congress] couldn't get this done," Sheila Bair, who headed the FDIC during the 2008 crisis, said of another round of economic aid. "The Fed's been heroic in these interventions, but monetary policy is just not a good mechanism for channeling money to households."

Said Seth Carpenter, chief U.S. economist at UBS: "Pre-Covid, central bankers were saying, 'We want more fiscal policy. We're growing but it's sluggish.' That was pre-Covid. Then you had the worst shock anybody's seen, so it seems like it can only reinforce that pre-Covid perspective. Central bankers

were already saying monetary policy can't do it all by itself."

"It's got to help what they're doing, but it just takes years to get back" to where we were, he added.

In the meantime, the central bank will do what it can. Markets will be watching to see if the Fed further ramps up its bond purchases to help keep longer-term borrowing costs low, to encourage businesses to make longer-term investments.

The administration itself is limited in what it can do without more spending from Congress. There aren't many immediate options for the Biden team to further aid the economy without more funding from Congress, beyond temporary relief like tax deferrals or smaller scale structural changes that will only help over the long run.

But Yellen, if confirmed, could work to boost the confidence of businesses worried about how they'll be treated and uncertain about new regulations, said Karen Dynan, an economics professor at Harvard University. "You don't want businesses just to get stuck where they are in not wanting to expand or rehire workers or make investments because they don't know what's coming down the road from Washington," Dynan said.

Trump pardons former national security adviser Flynn

waiting until after the Nov. 3 election to issue clemency, a signal of how politically explosive the case has become. Flynn has become a revered figure to Trump's base, and Flynn's attorney - conservative firebrand Sidney Powell - has recently become a prominent Trump surrogate promoting baseless conspiracy theories about election fraud against Trump.

Top Democrats have already warned they would consider any effort by Trump to pardon his associates to be an abuse of power, akin to the one the House impeached him for almost a year ago. After the pardon was issued, House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff and House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler slammed the decision as an erosion of the rule of law, meant to reward an ally for resisting an investigation that involved Trump himself.

Republicans, though, celebrated the decision. White House chief of staff Mark Meadows called it a "well deserved day for an American patriot."

The pardon comes as a federal judge in Washington D.C., Emmet Sullivan, is weighing whether to allow Trump's Justice Department to dismiss the charge against Flynn. Attorney General William Barr authorized the dismissal amid Flynn's ongoing legal fight, alarming DOJ veterans worried that he had distorted the process to benefit a political ally of the president. Sullivan, however, declined to immediately dismiss the case and instead sought an outside adviser, who argued that the Justice Department's legal argument for dismissing the case should be rejected as a pretext for aiding a Trump ally. Sullivan has been weighing a final decision since late September,

when he held a hearing and learned that Powell had been in contact with Trump about the case. Sullivan has also raised alarms about documents DOJ relied on in the case that appeared to have been altered, though Justice Department officials insisted the alterations were inadvertent.

It's unclear if Sullivan will immediately end the matter or seek further inquiry about his options, given concerns he raised that Flynn may have lied under oath regarding the circumstances of his plea agreement.

Trump's pardon is just his latest act of clemency for a close associate implicated in the Russia probe. He also attacked Justice Department prosecutors, including former members of Mueller's team, who helped secure the conviction of longtime adviser and friend Roger Stone for lying to congressional

investigators and intimidating a witness. In July, Trump commuted Stone's sentence but has not issued a full pardon, though Stone has pleaded for one in recent days. Trump's direct efforts on behalf of his associates threw the Justice Department into turmoil earlier this year, prompting Barr to issue what appeared to be a veiled threat to resign.

Nevertheless, Trump kept up his attacks on the Justice Department and the FBI, and Barr has remained quiet.

Flynn served as Trump's national security adviser for just 24 days after Trump took office in 2017. Trump removed him amid a clamor of questions about Flynn's contacts with Russia's ambassador to the United States in the final days of 2016, while the outgoing Obama administration was leveling sanctions against Russia for the

Kremlin's election interference. Nearly 10 months after Flynn's departure, he pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about those interactions, and admitted that he had also lobbied on behalf of the Turkish government - while advising Trump - without disclosing it. But Flynn's allies long maintained that Flynn had been set up by the FBI and tricked into pleading guilty. And when Sullivan, the judge in Flynn's case, seemed poised in late 2018 to sentence Flynn to prison, Flynn shelved his cooperation strategy and fired his legal team. He then fired his legal team and hired Powell, a Fox News favorite who once wrote favorably about Sullivan but has since relentlessly attacked him as biased. Flynn later moved to rescind his guilty plea and accused the FBI and Justice Department of entrapping him in order to pursue a case against Trump.

The secretive consulting firm that's become Biden's Cabinet in waiting

"They avoid becoming registered lobbyists or foreign agents and are instead becoming strategic consultants," she said. WestExec is loaded with other former top Democratic national security and foreign policy officials who raised money for the Biden campaign, have joined his transition team, or have served as unofficial advisers.

At least 21 of the 38 WestExec employees listed on the firm's website donated to the Biden campaign; Flournoy alone raised more than \$100,000.

Five WestExec staffers — all veterans of the Obama administration — are on leave from the firm to help staff Biden's review teams for the Pentagon, the Treasury Department, the Council of Economic Advisers and other agencies, which are charged with coordinating the transfer of power between outgoing Trump officials and Biden's appointees. Two other WestExec principals were among those who briefed Biden last week on national security: Bob Work, who served as deputy secretary of defense in the Obama administration and was asked to remain on for the first few months of the Trump administration, and David Cohen, a former deputy director of both the CIA and the Treasury Department who is also in the running for a top post.

Meanwhile, Jen Psaki, a former White House communications director under President Barack Obama who went on to work for

WestExec, is now advising Biden's transition team. And two other former WestExec hands, Lisa Monaco and Julianne Smith, are considered potential Biden administration hires.

In fact, WestExec was so prepared to storm a new Democratic West Wing that the firm negotiated a clause when renting its office space that states it can break the lease if members are called back to public service, the American Prospect reported this month.

WestExec is one of a number of Washington consulting firms staffed by former diplomats, military officers and former White House aides that often "serve as the government in waiting for the party that's out of power," said Meredith McGehee, the executive director of Issue One, a Washington good government group. And it's not the only such firm with ties to the Biden campaign or transition.

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, whom Biden tapped on Tuesday as his ambassador to the United Nations, is a senior vice president at the Albright Stonebridge Group, the "commercial diplomacy firm" started by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Biden's agency review teams also include at least three other Albright Stonebridge staffers. Nelson Cunningham, meanwhile, a co-founder of "private sector diplomacy" firm McLarty Associates, which has done consulting for clients such as

Chevron and Walmart, was a Biden campaign bundler and has informally advised Biden's team on policy. There's nothing wrong with people who work at such firms going into the administration, McGehee said. But she urged Blinken and other potential Biden Cabinet picks who've worked at firms such as WestExec to go further than the law requires by publicly disclosing any clients for which they had done significant work. (Biden's appointees will have to disclose their most recent clients once they go into government, but not older ones.) There's nothing wrong with people who work at such firms going into the administration, McGehee said. But she urged Blinken and other potential Biden Cabinet picks who've worked at firms such as WestExec to go further than the law requires by publicly disclosing any clients for which they had done significant work. (Biden's appointees will have to disclose their most recent clients once they go into government, but not older ones.) The firm's co-founders have also been reluctant to discuss their consulting work publicly. POLITICO asked Flournoy in a recent interview to discuss how WestExec Advisors might influence a Biden administration; all she would say is that the firm is not a purely Democratic outfit. "We also have a number of important Republicans," Flournoy said, citing Meghan O'Sullivan, a former

National Security Council official who worked for President George W. Bush. Another senior adviser on the WestExec roster is Elbridge Colby, a former assistant secretary of defense in the Trump administration who gave \$500 to the president's re-election campaign. Flournoy has spoken a bit about WestExec's work with Silicon Valley start-ups to land contracts at the Pentagon, where she sees a need to better leverage new technologies that are not necessarily the forte of larger, more traditional defense contractors.

"The name of the game is how do you enable the Department of Defense to really access that cutting-edge commercial technology and adapt it to military purposes," Flournoy said in a 2019 podcast interview at the University of Chicago. "It is one of the things that WestExec is trying to help with. How do you let these smaller, cutting-edge technology firms actually navigate the DoD and national security space?" Both WestExec and the Biden transition team declined to provide any additional information on the identity of the firm's clients. And the Biden transition deferred questions to WestExec. A person familiar with WestExec's inner workings, however, said Haines' engagement with the firm "was minimal — averaging less than a day a month over the two years she served as a consultant."

"The most significant project she did for them was a public report

sponsored by Open Philanthropy Project on testing and evaluating deep learning systems," the person said.

Still, WestExec has come under fire in recent days from progressive and watchdog groups that are concerned that Flournoy has been too cozy with the defense industry, citing donations to the think tank she co-founded, the Center for a New American Security, and her work for the Boston Consulting Group.

Most recently the Project on Government Oversight published a critique of Flournoy by two former veteran defense policy wonks citing all three of those affiliations, as well as her perch on the board of Booz Allen Hamilton, a major Pentagon contractor. But an employee for WestExec pushed back on POGO's claim that WestExec is "helping defense corporations market their products to the Pentagon and other agencies." "The most significant part of the business centers on assisting U.S. companies with global footprints navigate geopolitical risks," said the person, who asked not to be named in order to discuss internal matters. A spokesperson for Flournoy, meanwhile, also told POLITICO that in her previous job at the Boston Consulting Group, which is a strategic partner of WestExec, Flournoy "was not involved in business development with DOD, full stop; that would have been a violation of her Obama Administration ethics agreement."

To challenge the BJP, the Congress needs a massive surgery

robbed the party of its political vibrancy. Grassroots workers became frustrated. Powerful leaders such as Sharad Pawar and Mamata Banerjee formed separate parties and seized the Congress's remaining base. When asked about this, Congress leaders proudly say that Syama Prasad Mukherjee, founder of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), was also a member of Jawaharlal Nehru's Cabinet. But Mukherjee left Nehru's Cabinet and founded BJS, taking the support of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. This provided the ideological foundation for the BJP. So, politics evolved into a clash of ideology versus dynasty. Under

the umbrella of the Nehru-Gandhi family, dozens of other political dynasties began to thrive. The top family made sacrifices and others felt entitled to help themselves to the benefits.

After the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984 and Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, the Congress could have developed new leadership and embarked on a fresh path. It did nothing. It came back to power, but did not strengthen the organisation. This is why Rahul Gandhi inherited a fragmented party and despite his marathon efforts, he could not inject new spirit. He could not balance the old and new. In contrast, the Narendra Modi-Amit Shah combine in the BJP created an

election machine. They packed off senior party members to invisible margdarshak mandal, recruited powerful politicians from other parties, and snatched many states from the Congress. Even where the Congress performed well in assembly polls, it could not retain power. After every election, the BJP starts action on the next elections, while the Congress leaders waste time squabbling. Rahul Gandhi gave up the party president's post after losing the election in 2019, but confusion prevailed. He should have either retired from politics or nominated a successor. He did neither. Today, those who are misleading the Congress high

command are the English-speaking elite, not those who have done grassroots political work.

The Congress was once a party of people in touch with the pulse of India, the desis for want of a better word. Jawaharlal Nehru was an acclaimed writer in English. But, at the same time, he spoke fluent Hindustani in public. Today, when times have changed, on the one hand, there is a party that fosters majoritarianism and along with this, reinvents itself across the country to be in tune with the needs of regional languages and traditions.

On the other hand, there are those who reside in Delhi's posh

neighbourhoods and curse the party leadership. If each of these leaders had also developed a safe constituency for themselves, the Congress today would have had more than 100 Members of Parliament. The party needs to get rid of them and ensure that its leaders are conversant in the regional languages of their places. And, in the absence of pan-India leaders, Rahul Gandhi must take charge. Even today, the Congress is in power in six states, either on its own or in a coalition. This is a good enough foundation to rebuild the party and challenge the BJP. But does it have the will to do so?



Biden plans sweeping reversal of Trump's immigration agenda, from deportations to asylum policy

While the COVID-19 public health crisis and its impact on the U.S. economy will preoccupy President-elect Joe Biden during his first weeks in office, the incoming Democratic administration is also expected to quickly start dismantling President Trump's immigration agenda.

After Mr. Biden is sworn-in in January, his administration will move to fully restore an Obama-era program that shields 640,000 undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children from deportation, halting Mr. Trump's unsuccessful efforts to end it, people familiar with the plans told CBS News. The incoming administration also intends to rescind Mr. Trump's travel and immigration restrictions on 13 countries, most of which are African or predominantly Muslim.

Mr. Biden will look to implement a 100-day freeze on deportations while his administration issues guidance narrowing who can be arrested by immigration agents. Obama-era memos that prioritized the deportation of immigrants with criminal convictions, recent border-crossers and those who entered the country illegally more than once were scrapped in 2017 by Mr. Trump so that no unauthorized immigrant would be exempted from being arrested and removed from the country. A source familiar with Mr. Biden's

plans said new guidance would be designed to curb so-called "collateral arrests," which are apprehensions of immigrants who are not the target of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operations but are nevertheless taken into custody because they are in the country without legal status.

Mr. Trump made immigration a major theme of his insurgent and successful 2016 campaign. Despite frequent court challenges, his administration achieved rare success on this front in four years, reshaping the U.S. immigration system through more than 400 high-profile and little-noticed policy changes. However, all of Mr. Trump's immigration measures — from the so-called "travel ban" and the efforts to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, to new requirements for green cards and the asylum restrictions for migrants at the U.S. southern border — were enacted without Congress through proclamations, policy memos, regulations or other executive actions. With his defeat, Mr. Trump's immigration policy changes are now vulnerable — and Mr. Biden's team is eager to begin the process of undoing most of them. "All that stuff was done administratively through the [president's] executive

authority, and so a new executive can basically reject those and start from scratch," a source familiar with the Biden team's plans told CBS News.

At the southern border, Mr. Biden has pledged to discontinue the Trump administration's policy of requiring non-Mexican migrants to wait in Mexico for the duration of their U.S.



asylum cases. It is unclear, however, how the cases of thousands of asylum-seekers currently waiting in northern Mexico will be adjudicated and whether any of them will be paroled and allowed to continue their proceedings in the U.S. A source familiar with the Biden team's planning said the incoming administration will withdraw from the three bilateral agreements Mr. Trump brokered with Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras that allow the U.S. to send rejected asylum-seekers to those countries and have them seek refuge there.

The incoming administration will also look at reinstating an Obama administration initiative that allowed certain at-risk children in Central America to request refugee or parole status and reunite with their families in the U.S. if their

parents were authorized to be in the country, the source said. The Obama administration created the Central American Minors program in 2014 in response to a rise in border crossings by unaccompanied migrant children but Mr. Trump ended it in 2017. The potential revival of the program, coupled with increased foreign aid to Central America, would be part of a broader Biden administration approach to address unauthorized migration from the region — a diplomatic task Mr. Biden was charged with overseeing during President Obama's tenure.

The Trump administration has also expelled tens of thousands of unauthorized border-crossers, including unaccompanied children, without court hearings or asylum screenings through an order issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). While the Trump administration has defended the policy as one based on public health, former officials have said they were pressured into authorizing it.

Mr. Biden has yet to say whether his administration will continue, alter or completely scrap Mr. Trump's pandemic-era limits on immigrant and work visas. Mr. Biden's campaign promised that the former vice president will direct the CDC to review the expulsions policy "to ensure that people have the ability to submit their asylum claims while ensuring that

Mr. Biden's team is also planning to begin the process of terminating the "public charge" rules the Trump administration implemented to deny green cards and immigrant visas to applicants who U.S. officials determine rely — or could rely in the future — on government benefits like Medicaid, food stamps and Section 8 housing vouchers. Because the 2019 rules were instituted through the regulatory process, experts expect their rescission to take longer than that of presidential directives. Citing the coronavirus-induced economic downturn, Mr. Trump invoked his executive authority this spring to limit legal immigration and the issuance of temporary work visas — and those restrictions have yet to be lifted.

we are taking the appropriate COVID-19 safety precautions." The president-elect has promised to dramatically increase refugees admissions, moving away from the record-low 15,000 spots set by Mr. Trump and raising the cap to 125,000. Mr. Biden has also pledged to grant Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to certain Venezuelan exiles in the U.S. to shield them from deportation. León Rodríguez, who led U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) during the Obama presidency, said a Biden administration should prioritize reviewing Mr. Trump's efforts to end TPS protections for approximately 300,000 immigrants from El Salvador, Haiti,

Nicaragua, Sudan, Nepal and Honduras. In September, a federal appellate court allowed the Trump administration to terminate the programs, but TPS beneficiaries are not set to lose their protections until March 2021.

Jennifer Molina, a spokeswoman for the Biden campaign, said the incoming administration will also create a task force to help locate hundreds of migrant parents who were separated from their children at the U.S.-Mexico border in 2017 and 2018 and remain unreachable. "President-elect Joe Biden will restore order, dignity and fairness to our immigration system. At its core, his immigration policy will be driven by the need to keep families together," Molina said in a statement. While Mr. Biden's team will have the legal authority to overturn Mr. Trump's policies, Doris Meissner, a former commissioner of the now-defunct Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), said it will not be an easy endeavor, given bureaucratic requirements, the ongoing COVID-19 emergency and the volume of changes implemented over the past four years. "The Trump administration had an extraordinary preoccupation with immigration issues and they invested an enormous amount of attention and single-minded focus on immigration," Meissner, who is also a senior fellow at the non-partisan Migration Policy Institute, told CBS News. "An administration that wants to undo those changes would have to devote a similar amount of time and effort — and arguably more, because you don't want to just be undoing things. You want to be moving a proactive agenda as well."

Does the US owe amnesty to future illegal immigrants?



a new border wall system to stop the coyotes from smuggling illegal immigrants and prevent the drug cartels from bringing deadly drugs across our southern border.

The administration is on target to complete its goal of 450 miles of this new border wall system by January. As Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Chad Wolf has stated, Border Patrol agents requested this wall system. And it works. Where the wall has been built, apprehensions decrease by at least 90 percent. Biden, on the other hand, has stated that we would immediately stop construction of the border wall system. "Building a wall will do little to deter criminals and cartels seeking to exploit our borders," his campaign website states. Instead, he would direct federal resources to our ports of entry because he stated that "all the bad stuff is happening" at the ports of entry. Our U.S. Border Patrol agents, who operate between the ports, would strongly disagree. The debate moderator and Biden also perpetuated the claim that the administration cannot find the parents of 545 illegal immigrant minors separated from their adult caregivers during the White

House's brief "No Tolerance" policy. The Department of Homeland Security has debunked this claim, explaining that out of the 485 parents who plaintiffs' counsel have been able to contact, they have yet to identify a single family that wants their child reunited with them in the child's native country.

The result is the child remains in the U.S. while the parent remains in their home country. The reason is simple. The parents hope their children become the next "Dreamers" and that they will receive amnesty in the U.S. so their family can eventually join them here.

Sponsors of the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act - including then-Sen. Joe Biden - which became law in the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 (TVPRA), laid the groundwork for many immigrant minors coming to the U.S. and recklessly changed the course of U.S. immigration. They claimed their legislation would protect immigrant minors, but the bill lowered the bar for such minors to receive immigration benefits and services - providing easily foreseeable consequences that parents would intentionally send their children unaccompanied

across the border in the hopes of gaining a family foothold in the U.S.

Predictably, the number of unaccompanied immigrant minors coming to the U.S. subsequently ballooned - from fewer than 20,000 in 2010 to more than 75,000 in 2019. So, it is no surprise that the parents Biden discussed at the debate want their children to remain in the U.S., separated from them. In fact, the policies established by the advocates for TVPRA incentivize such behavior.

Americans need policies that would continue to secure all of the border, fight human trafficking and drug cartels, and discourage parents from sending their unaccompanied children on the dangerous journey to the U.S. By contrast, the policies advocated by Biden would concede large portions of the border, enrich human traffickers and drug cartels, and perpetuate the cycle of illegal immigration by giving amnesty to Dreamers and over 11 million illegal immigrants in the U.S. These policies would prioritize illegal immigrants over Americans. Americans are owed more.

Lora Ries is a senior research fellow for homeland security at The Heritage Foundation.

When immigration was raised at last week's presidential debate, former Vice President Joe Biden said he would quickly pursue amnesty for over 11 million illegal immigrants in the U.S. He added that he would immediately reinstate the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program and offer a pathway to citizenship for the so-called "Dreamers" because "we owe them."

These proposals would give smugglers and criminal cartels their next advertisement for new illegal immigrant customers.

Promise of amnesty is the single greatest public relations coup for coyotes (smugglers) imaginable. They will use that promise to recruit many tens-of-thousands of illegal immigrants to pay them many tens-of-millions of dollars to try to sneak them, including children, across the border.

Nothing could be more irresponsible and dangerous. All that does is enrich criminal cartels at the expense of American taxpayers.

Providing amnesty and citizenship to illegal immigrants would eventually cost Americans, according to a detailed study by the Heritage Foundation, a net fiscal burden of \$6.3 trillion for Social Security, Medicare, welfare programs, public education and other government benefits and services. This would also reverse the recent progress the federal government has made on immigration reform and border security. The Trump administration has sought to rescind the unconstitutional DACA program created by President Obama. Customs and Border Protection has quickly built approximately 400 miles of

The Nationalist Case for Amnesty

Perhaps 10 million undocumented immigrants live in the United States. Their fate is among the most polarizing, seemingly intractable issues in American politics.

Proponents of a substantial amnesty often make humanitarian arguments, highlighting the most affecting challenges faced by families "living in the shadows." That makes it easy to conclude that the debate is best understood as pitting globalists who emphasize the needs of the least well-off against nationalists who insist that the nation must prioritize what's best for its own citizens. That fault line certainly runs through the immigration debate. But it can be misleading. Imagine that the welfare of undocumented immigrants counts for nothing at all-that their fate should turn

entirely on what makes U.S. citizens best off. Given that constraint, there's still a strong case that an amnesty is the best policy.

Many on both sides of the debate intuit otherwise because they conceive of undocumented immigrants as laborers who crowd into segregated urban enclaves, follow harvests, or sleep in worker bunks at meatpacking plants. In this telling, they might interact with Americans when making up our motel rooms or bussing our tables, but were they deported, the worst consequences most of "us" might suffer would be higher prices for lettuce or lawn maintenance.

There are wealthy Americans who interact with undocumented immigrants almost entirely as consumers of cheap labor; there

are working-class Americans who interact with undocumented immigrants mostly as competitors for jobs; and those incentives do, in fact, fuel self-interested positions on the issue. But so many undocumented immigrants have been in the United States for so long that literally millions are deeply integrated into American communities. They have friends, classmates, neighbors, and co-workers who are U.S. citizens. Many of them have enjoyed significant economic success too. All of that helps explain polls such as the one Fox News did in 2017, which noted that setting up "a system to legalize undocumented immigrants working in the U.S. receives bipartisan support: most Democrats (95 percent legalize vs. 4 percent deport),



Republicans (69-28 percent) and independents (82-13 percent) want legalization to happen." In 2015, Pew found that "a solid majority (72%) of Americans-including 80% of Democrats, 76% of independents and 56% of Republicans-say undocumented immigrants currently living in the U.S. should be allowed to stay in this country legally if they meet certain requirements." Most recently, a

2019 Gallup Poll found that 81 percent "favor allowing immigrants living illegally in the U.S. the chance to become citizens if they meet certain requirements over a period of time." Watching Lou Dobbs or listening to Rush Limbaugh, one could be forgiven for concluding that support for a substantial amnesty is a radical position that cosmopolitan elites want to foist on "regular Americans."

House Democrats Begin Drafting Amnesty Plan to Send to Joe Biden

House Democrats have started drafting a plan to provide an amnesty for all 11 to 22 million illegal aliens living in the United States, a proposal on which Democrat Joe Biden has repeatedly said he will sign off.

A report by Politico notes that House Democrats, led by Rep. Linda Sanchez (D-CA), are working on an amnesty plan they hope to file immediately after Biden takes office:

Still, Democrats say they're determined to put forth a comprehensive immigration reform bill that Biden can sign off on. Rep. Linda Sanchez (D-Calif.) is drafting a bill that Democrats hope to drop right as Biden enters the White House. [Emphasis added] The

Politico report details how the open borders lobby is currently urging Biden to follow through on not only an amnesty for all illegal aliens, but also a halt to all deportations for at least 100 days and an end to President Trump's constitutional travel ban that has stopped immigration from terrorist-sanctioned countries.

Politico reports:

Tapping Mayorkas, former deputy secretary of the Department of Homeland Security under Obama, is a "conversation starter," Franco said. But she and other immigrant advocates say staffing is just one piece of it. They want the former vice president to impose a 100-day moratorium on deportations, rescind many



of Trump's more than 400 executive orders on immigration (like the so-called Muslim ban) and lay the groundwork for tougher goals like a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants - all promises he made on the campaign trail. [Emphasis added] Privately, multiple Hispanic Caucus members

said a large number of Democrats would be "severely disappointed" if Biden didn't push immigration reform early. "That's not going to sit well with a lot of folks," said one lawmaker in the caucus. [Emphasis added] On Wednesday evening, Biden said he plans to send an amnesty for "over 11

million" illegal aliens to the United States Senate in his first 100 days. "I made a commitment, in the first 100 days, I will send an immigration bill to the United States Senate with a pathway to citizenship for over 11 million undocumented people in America," Biden told NBC Nightly News. Such an amnesty would come as about 24.5 million Americans are either jobless or underemployed. An amnesty would immediately flood the U.S. labor market with a newly legalized population of millions who would begin competing for work against America's working and middle class. Every year, already, about 1.2 million legal immigrants

are rewarded green cards and another 1.4 million foreign nationals are given visas to arrive in the U.S. These legal immigration admissions are in addition to the hundreds of thousands of illegal aliens who annually cross U.S. borders and overstay their visas. Exit polling after the election reveals that voters across party and racial lines overwhelmingly want less overall immigration to the U.S. More than 3-in-4 voters, for instance, said it is important to reduce immigration with continued high unemployment, and more than 62 percent said, even after unemployment has leveled off, immigration should remain lower than its current levels.

Joe Biden is slammed for saying he will immediately push a bill for pathway to citizenship for 11 million



President-elect Joe Biden has been slammed for saying that presenting an amnesty bill for people living in the country illegally would be a top priority when he takes office, rather than focusing on the COVID pandemic. 'I am going to make a commitment in the first 100 days, I will send a immigration bill to the United States Senate with a pathway to citizenship for over 11 million undocumented people in America,' Biden said in an interview with NBC News on Tuesday.

Newly-elected congresswoman Nicole Malliotakis, a Staten Island Republican, blasted the statement in an

interview with Fox News guest host Mark Steyn on Wednesday night.

'It is disheartening that this is his focus. It's not providing relief to the millions of American that are struggling right now, during this pandemic,' said Malliotakis, who unseated incumbent Democratic Rep. Max Rose in the district representing Staten Island and parts of southern Brooklyn.

'It's not insuring that we help those small businesses that are hanging on by a thread due to government restrictions and mandated shutdowns. It's not how are we going to get this vaccine distributed to our

front-line workers and our most vulnerable across the states,' she continued.

'It is actually a policy that would help the citizens of other countries and not Americans. And it's very sad that he wants to dismantle the policies put in place by President Trump that have been effective in stemming the tide of illegal immigration,' said Malliotakis. Malliotakis criticized Biden for other prior statements he has made, indicating he wants to suspend deportations and halt any work on the southern border wall.

'He is going to get a fight from the Republicans in Congress, who are very much pleased with the

progress we've made under President Trump and don't want to unravel that,' she vowed.

Malliotakis, a New York native, is the daughter of immigrant parents, born to a Greek father and Cuban mother.

In his interview on Tuesday, Biden also indicated that climate change would be a priority in his first 100 days, as well as speeding federal financial assistance to state and local governments.

In a Fox News panel on The Ingraham Angle, guest hosted by Tammy Bruce, conservative commentators piled on Biden's remarks about his top priorities. Pete

Hegseth slammed Biden's priorities for his first 100 days as 'open borders and amnesty, climate shaming with John Kerry running around the world in his jets, and then bailouts for blue states.'

'He is the vehicle for the left... he has a list of things he needs to pay out to begin with,' said Hegseth, a Fox & Friends weekend co-host. 'This is about America Last,' chimed in podcast host Sara Carter. 'This is putting America last and putting globalism forward.' Biden has pledged to undo many of Trump's restrictive immigration policies. The hundreds of planned changes could take months or years to

implement. On the first day of his presidency, Biden intends to rescind Trump's travel bans targeting people from 13 countries - most of them either majority-Muslim or African nations.

Biden also plans to revive the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program put in place in 2012 by Obama that offered protections to immigrants living in the United States illegally after entering as children. Trump sought to rescind the DACA program but was blocked by the U.S. Supreme Court in June. Biden's nominee for secretary of homeland security, Alejandro Mayorkas, was cheered by pro-immigrant activists.

Immigrant advocates to Biden: Be better than Obama

"Hell yeah, I'm optimistic. But ... I know how this works. Nothing is going to be enough."

President-elect Joe Biden will begin his administration with one quality that's automatically a positive for immigrant advocates: He's not President Donald Trump.

But immigrant advocacy groups aren't planning to hold back on their demands. They expect Biden to follow through on his promise to quickly undo Trump's immigration policies - and while he's at it, atone for the mistakes of the Obama administration.

So far, advocates are encouraged by Biden's pick to lead the Department of Homeland Security: Alejandro Mayorkas, a Cuban-born lawyer and one of the architects of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. Still, they're gearing up to ensure Biden keeps immigration a top focus amid a long list of competing interests, from coronavirus response to climate change to racial equity. Biden already has a long to-do list to rebuild the U.S. immigration system. But he could be hamstrung by a divided Congress that's never managed to pass comprehensive immigration reform.

"Hell yeah, I'm optimistic. I don't know what the hell we were going to do if Trump won again," said Marisa Franco, executive director of Mijente, a grassroots Latinx advocacy group. "But then the other side of me is like, 'I know how this works.'"

"Nothing is going to be enough that [Biden] does and that's the same issue that folks in the crime-and-justice movement have and folks in policing [reform] have. I think it's very possible for things to get lost and that's what our job is: To make sure it doesn't," Franco added.

Biden must move quickly to prove he has learned from President Barack Obama's mistakes on immigration. Obama - despite creating DACA - was dubbed "deporter in chief" and is known for expanding the detention of immigrant families and dragging his feet on major immigration legislation.

Tapping Mayorkas, former deputy secretary of the Department of Homeland Security under Obama, is a



"conversation starter," Franco said. But she and other immigrant advocates say staffing is just one piece of it. They want the former vice president to impose a 100-day moratorium on deportations, rescind many of Trump's more than 400 executive orders on immigration (like the so-called Muslim ban) and lay the groundwork for tougher goals like a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants - all promises he made on the campaign trail.

Privately, multiple Hispanic Caucus members said a large number of Democrats would be "severely disappointed" if Biden didn't push immigration reform early. "That's not going to sit well with a lot of folks," said one lawmaker in the caucus.

Biden on Tuesday acknowledged that some of his priorities for the first 100 days could be impacted by "the kind of cooperation I can or cannot get from the United States Congress." But he vowed to take quick action on immigration.

"In the first 100 days, I will send a immigration bill to the United States Senate with a pathway to citizenship for over 11 million undocumented people in America," Biden said in an interview with NBC News' Lester Holt.

Biden and his transition team know the president-elect will have to rebuild trust with immigrant communities and do more than just end the harm caused by the

Trump administration, one person close to the transition said.

Among Biden's list of immigration promises, he plans to reinstate DACA, created under Obama to shield undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children from deportation. The Trump administration has repeatedly sought to dismantle DACA - but has been blocked by courts on several occasions.

Biden also vowed to protect Temporary Protected Status, which protects immigrants from countries devastated by natural disasters or armed conflict. In 2018, the Trump administration began phasing out the program for more than 300,000 immigrants from El Salvador, Nicaragua, Haiti, Honduras, Sudan and Nepal. Biden plans to extend the status to Venezuelan exiles.

The president-elect also pledged to reunite more than 500 children detained at the border with their families. And he plans to expand the annual global refugee admissions cap from Trump's fiscal 2021 limit of 15,000 to 125,000 - a goal that advocates say will take time, but sets a positive tone.

"I definitely think he's going to move the ball forward," said Kerri Talbot, director of federal advocacy for the Immigration Hub, an advocacy group.

Talbot predicts immigration will remain a big focus of a Biden administration. For starters, he'll

have to undo a lot of what Trump did. And lessons from the Obama era will position Biden to pursue "more humane and smarter priorities."

There's also going to be court cases and litigation bubbling to the top, so it won't be possible to ignore immigration," Talbot said.

Talbot and other advocates argue pro-immigrant policy isn't just federal immigration policy. Biden is expected to push for a pandemic relief package that explicitly factors in immigrant communities - similar to the Heroes Act that House Democrats passed earlier this year. That bill would allow immigrant and mixed-status families to receive direct relief payments and ensure access to Covid-19 testing and treatment for all regardless of immigration status. Much of Biden's immigration agenda won't happen overnight - regardless of whether he personally prioritizes it or not. Executive orders won't override all of Trump's actions and the process for implementing new regulations requires multiple bureaucratic hurdles.

One challenge will be building a better asylum system, particularly at the U.S.-Mexico border. And that could be even more complicated if migration to the border surges early next year. And the recent hurricanes in Central America, the economic downturn and Trump's departure makes a surge a distinct

possibility. "Long term, they can change policies, but it will take time to do it," said Andrew Selee, president of the Migration Policy Institute. "And I don't think they're going to have any new tools in the tool kit on Day One to handle that." That means the Biden administration will be forced to keep a lot of Trump measures at the border, while they try to build a better system, Selee said.

What's more, it's not likely comprehensive immigration reform will get much traction on Capitol Hill if Republicans hold on to their majority in the Senate. And advocates and former DHS officials anticipate the Trump administration - led by Stephen Miller, the chief architect of Trump's immigration policy - will further constrict immigration before Biden takes office.

Still, Democrats say they're determined to put forth a comprehensive immigration reform bill that Biden can sign off on. Rep. Linda Sanchez (D-Calif.) is drafting a bill that Democrats hope to drop right as Biden enters the White House.

If Democrats don't pass immigration reform or a pathway to citizenship at the very least, Democrats will "be in a world of hurt" next election cycle, said Chuck Rocha, former senior adviser to Sen. Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign.

"It hurts us in the next election if we can't take something back to the community that we're doing for them," Rocha said.

However, some advocates and lawmakers insist Democrats "shouldn't put all their eggs in a basket" and should be ready to pursue a piecemeal approach. They're also watching whether the Biden administration will follow recommendations drafted this summer to unite the moderate and progressive wings of the Democratic Party. The recommendations were crafted by allies of both Biden and Sanders. And they include a big victory for Sanders supporters: reversing the use of Section 287 under the Immigration and Nationality Act, which allows DHS to enter agreements with local police to act as immigration agents.

Why land grab scheme of J&K is called Roshni Act and how it happened

Ahead of DDC elections in Jammu and Kashmir, the J&K administration has released a list of 868 people who illegally grabbed land in the UT in the garb of what is emerging as the 'Roshni Act Scam'.

Two politically significant developments are happening in Jammu and Kashmir. One, election to the District Development Councils -- first polls since the abrogation of Article 370 and bifurcation of the erstwhile state - in which Gupkar Alliance of the National Conference and the PDP are participating.

Second, ahead of the election, the Union Territory administration, under the BJP-led NDA, has released the 868 names in the first list of those who illegally grabbed land in Jammu and Kashmir.

The land grab happened over several decades in Jammu and Kashmir but it was validated between 2001 and 2007.

Ironically, Jammu and Kashmir was the leader among Indian states to have introduced land reform law in 1950.

In 2001, the Farooq Abdullah government brought out a law called the Jammu and Kashmir State Land (Vesting of Ownership to Occupants) Act to regularise

the unauthorised occupation of land. Or, it granted legal ownership rights to those who had grabbed the government land in Jammu and Kashmir over several decades.

At that time, Farooq Abdullah's National Conference was part of the BJP-led NDA. His son Omar Abdullah was a minister in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government. The law provided for the collection of a fee for the legalising the illegal act of landgrab. The money thus raised was to be used for up-gradation of power generation in Jammu and Kashmir. The scheme in public view was to provide electricity, roshni in Hindi-Urdu. This is why this Act is called the Roshni Act and the scam Roshni scam.

The embracing arm of Roshni Act Under the rules, anybody who had previously grabbed a piece of government land could approach the authorities, pay a fee and become the rightful owner of the land. What followed was that those who had not grabbed

the land purchased such land from the poor who had erected some structure on the government and became the new legal owners of the land. The 2001 Roshni Act had set the cut-off date for regularising unauthorised land in 1990. This created a batch of claimants who had grabbed the government land after 1990.

In 2002, Farooq Abdullah's PDP lost the Assembly election. It was replaced by the Congress-PDP government under Mufti Muhammad Sayeed. The new government pushed the cut-off date from 1990 to 2004.

Under the power-sharing formula, Ghulam Nabi Azad of the Congress became chief minister in 2005. Two years later, the Ghulam Nabi Azad government shifted the cut-off date to 2007 to accommodate new claimants and complainants.

This was why the National Conference today defended the decision of the Farooq Abdullah government saying, "this law was enacted by Farooq Abdullah government in 2001, but it was



amended later by other governments. We are not blaming the other governments" The unearthing of Roshni scam The Jammu and Kashmir government had originally planned to raise Rs 25,000 crore under the Roshni scheme. But it ended up fetching only Rs 76 crore from regularisation of 71,000 acres of land in Jammu and over 4,000 acres of land in Kashmir. The first red flag was raised in 2014, by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG). A year later, the state vigilance department indicted more than 20 officials in the Roshni scam. But it did not get the sanction from the government for prosecuting those officials. In November 2018, the

Jammu and Kashmir High Court restrained the occupants of the land regularised under the Roshni Act from selling or carrying out any transaction over the property.

Road to land recovery

A little later on the same year, the Jammu and Kashmir administration under Governor Satyapal Malik - after the fall of PDP-BJP government in June 2018 - repealed the Roshni Act and ordered a CBI inquiry into the scam. On October 9 this year, the high court held the Roshni Act as unconstitutional and directed the government to make the complete identities of influential persons who grabbed the land regularised under the law public.

Ahmed Patel, Congress's Chanakya and Sonia Gandhi's top aide



Congress's top strategist Ahmed Patel died on Wednesday. He was suffering from complications related to Covid-19. Patel was one of the closest aides of Congress chief Sonia Gandhi and her political adviser for a long time. He was the trouble-shooter of the Congress and had steered the party out of difficult situations many a time.

As Congress President Sonia Gandhi paid tribute to party

veteran Ahmed Patel, who passed away on Wednesday, she mourned the loss of an "irreplaceable comrade, faithful colleague and a friend."

Sonia Gandhi's top aide, Ahmed Patel died at 71 after his health worsened after a Covid infection.

A Nehru-Gandhi family loyalist and an eight-time Parliamentarian, Ahmed Patel started his political journey with the Youth Congress. In 1977, hand-picked by Indira Gandhi, he reached the Lok

Sabha at the age of 28 from Bharuch in Gujarat at a time when the Congress was defeated by the Janata Party following the Emergency.

The young parliamentarian then, Ahmed Patel never looked back. Patel was an eight-time parliamentarian -- five times in the Rajya Sabha, three times in the Lok Sabha. His last Rajya Sabha election was contested keenly. He was currently the Congress treasurer, a post that he occupied thrice.

The Chanakya of Congress Ahmed Patel was considered by many as the 'Chanakya' of the Congress. Having worked closely with three generations of the Gandhis, Ahmed Patel was hailed as a key strategist behind the Congress's victory in the 2004 and 2009 General Elections. The Gujarat Congress leader, however, never became a minister at the Centre.

Often referred to as Sonia Gandhi's Man Friday, Ahmed Patel served as the political secretary to Sonia Gandhi for years and featured in the list of the most powerful leaders in the Congress.

Ahmed Patel maybe just another senior Congress leader for the outside world, but internally, his importance is part of folklore.

Ahmed Patel was an architect of the Congress teaming up with Shiv Sena and becoming part of the Maha Vikas Aghadi government in Maharashtra and preventing Sachin Pilot from going a Jyotiraditya Scindia way in defecting to the BJP. Ahmed Patel worked behind the scene to persuade Pilot to stay on.

This is not the only story. As per political pundits, post-2014, Ahmed had more goodwill and influence on party colleagues than the Gandhis.

Patel, however, maintained a low profile with no liking for limelight

or the TV cameras and mostly preferred his role as a backroom strategist. But, Ahmed bhai, as he was popularly known as in political circles, managed to remain one of the key players in the Congress.

Sonia Gandhi's top Lieutenant The Congress troubleshooter, Ahmed Patel, was one of the closest aides of Congress chief Sonia Gandhi and her political adviser. When Sonia Gandhi decided to enter politics, she chose Ahmed Patel as her political secretary to help her solidify her position in Indian politics. Together, they steered the party out of crisis situation many a time.

On Wednesday, as Sonia Gandhi offered condolences, she wrote, "I have lost a colleague, whose entire life was dedicated to the Congress Party."

Pak's million mutinies, ghosts and Doval's doctrine of 'defensive offence'

Indian spooks have succeeded spectacularly in Pakistan by not only engineering the greatest intelligence coup of the century.

For decades, India has been on the receiving end of Pakistan's relentless export of terrorism, the commodity in which it has enjoyed both a comparative as well as a competitive advantage. Faced with Pakistan's use of terrorism as an instrument of state policy, India struggled to devise an adequate response. After every big terror attack, there was a standard response in India: the government threatened to retaliate and talking heads on TV nudged government strategists to pay back Pakistan in the same coin. The standard response to this unsolicited advice was that India couldn't stoop to Pakistan's level. But many security experts have reasoned that the real reason was that India just never bothered to build the leverages, capacities and capabilities that would have allowed New Delhi to hit Pakistan where it hurt.

Since 2014, however, things started to change, or so we are being told by the Pakistanis. For some time now, the Pakistanis have been trying to implicate India in problems that are really the result of blowback of their own flirtation with terrorism and using it as an instrument of the security and foreign policy of the state. There is, however, no solid evidence to back up Pakistan's allegations against India, unless of course, someone is ready to subscribe to the pulp-fiction dossier, or if you will, shoddy 'literature', that Pakistan recently publicised with much fanfare.

If the Pakistani 'dossier' were to be taken at its face value, it would seem that India has more than paid back to Pakistan. That Indian spooks have succeeded spectacularly in Pakistan by not only engineering the greatest intelligence coup of the century - turning Pakistan's strategic assets into its deadliest enemies - but also boxed in Pakistan so hard by exploiting its fault-lines that it now fears its very survival. The accusations and 'achievements' being attributed to India, however, aren't true.



Because if these were, then Pakistan would certainly have a smoking gun that was more convincing than a 'dummy dossier' or a kidnapped former naval officer who has been presented as some kind of an Indian James Bond. Even so, the fact that the Pakistanis are petrified of India doing to them what they have been doing for decades to India is something that at least gives India a major psychological advantage over her arch enemy. At one level, it puts the Pakistanis on the defensive; at another level, it makes them chase ghosts and prevents them or distracts them from fixing the things that are actually responsible for the 'million mutinies' erupting in several parts of the country or are on the verge of exploding in Pakistan. As is their wont, Pakistan always looks for exogenous actors and factors to explain their problems. National Security Advisor Ajit Doval has been their favourite bugbear for some years.

Pakistanis have latched on to a speech Doval had given at a university long before he was appointed NSA. In that speech, he had spoken about the need for India to craft a strategic response to Pakistani export of terrorism. After he was appointed NSA by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, Pakistan's strategists presumed that the Doval doctrine of 'defensive offence' - 'go and attack the place from where an offence is coming from' - had been operationalised.

According to Pakistan, this doctrine is all about paying Pakistan back in the same coin. In other words, Pakistan's security analysts believed that India would use terrorism to respond to Pakistan's terrorism. In fact, Doval appears to have instilled such trepidation in the Pakistanis that from the moment he became NSA, some retired personnel of the Pakistani military cleared to appear on and write in Pakistani media have been trying to paint him as some kind of a one-man army who can disrupt, disorder and dismantle Pakistan.

The Doval doctrine soon became part of Pakistan's strategic folklore.

By and by, the 'doctrine' has been elevated to the status of being an embodiment of the '5th generation' war that every Pakistani military person loves to mouth incessantly that India is supposed to be waging on Pakistan.

The reality is, however, nowhere close to what the Pakistanis imagine it to be.

If at all there is a Doval doctrine, then it has manifested itself not in any covert action that Pakistan keeps accusing India of but in the overt action - the 2016 surgical strikes and 2019 Balakot airstrikes. While there is no denying that India's posture and approach to tackling terrorism emanating from Pakistan has changed in style and substance since 2014, India continues to remain loath to using proxies or

non-state actors against Pakistan.

In other words, India doesn't still subscribe to using terrorism as an instrument of state policy; rather India is now using state power as a legitimate instrument for the protection of the state and furthering its objectives. The Balakot air strike in 2019 and the surgical strike in 2016 are prime examples.

This is very different from what Pakistan accuses India of.

Pakistan has often raised the issue of alleged Indian sponsored terrorism with its interlocutors from other countries, only to be rebuffed. On any number of occasions, Americans at the most senior levels of successive administrations have refuted Pakistan's allegations against India. And yet Pakistan continues to peddle the same old version in the hope that one day, perhaps, someone will buy their story.

The fact, however, is that virtually every terror attack that Pakistan tries to place at India's door has its roots and links inside Pakistan and is the result of the deep state's affair with jihadism going horribly wrong. Other militant attacks - by Baloch or Sindhi freedom fighters, or even by disgruntled elements in Pakistan-occupied Gilgit Baltistan and the Pashtun areas in Pakistan - are also the outcome of the neo-colonial model followed by the Pakistan army against people who it calls its own.

Take for example the heavy-handed treatment meted out to the entirely peaceful Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) which is fighting for constitutionalism but is accused of being a catspaw of India. That the struggle for constitutionalism is seen as treason is something that can only happen in a Praetorian state like Pakistan. Ditto for the jailed civil rights activists in Gilgit Baltistan.

If peaceful, political and civil society movements are going to be crushed by the Pakistan military and the 'deep state', and the disaffected people pick up the gun, how is it India's doing?

The sudden spate of accusations being hurled against India is essentially nothing more than the perpetrator playing the victim even as it ratchets up violence in Jammu and Kashmir.

On its part, Pakistan doesn't even admit to the involvement of its terrorists and spy agency ISI to the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks though security agencies worldwide concur on Pakistan's role in the terror attacks. In the "most wanted" list released earlier this month, Pakistan was careful to skip the names of the mastermind and key conspirators of the Mumbai terror attacks. The Federal Investigation Agency did name 20-odd people accused of a role in the attacks but these were mostly members of the crew of two boats used by the attackers to travel to Mumbai and those who helped finance the attacks through money transfers.

But Pakistan's denials don't mean its hands are clean.

As far as India is concerned, the 'D' doctrine isn't so much the Doval Doctrine as it is the Deterrence doctrine. But if the Pakistanis prefer to name it after the Indian NSA, there is no reason for India to deny them their dread of Doval. Quite to the contrary, India needs to press ahead filling Pakistan's deep state with fear about India's response and let Pakistan chase ghosts and shadows.

Tarun Gogoi: Congress's man of all seasons who rose in Indira-Rajiv era, foresaw BJP's rise in Manmohan era

When Sanjay Gandhi's death and Rajiv Gandhi's elevation saw many from 1976-era youth Congress leaders falling the wayside, Tarun Gogoi caught Rajiv's eye, putting him in the league of Ahmed Patel, Digvijaya Singh, Tariq Anwar etc and the ministerial assignments kept coming. Tarun Gogoi's end came when his party needed him most. At a ripe age of 86, Tarun Gogoi was trying to work out a 'great alliance' against the ruling BJP in Assam for the May 2021 assembly election. Tarun Gogoi shot to fame in 1976 when he was made the joint secretary of AICC and an office-bearer of the Indian Youth Congress under Ambika Soni's leadership. Sanjay Gandhi had reportedly asked AICC president Devkant Barooah (of India is Indira fame) to have a look at the young Gogoi. Barua gave Tarun Gogoi the key responsibilities to organise AICC's Guwahati session where Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had famously said, "Youth has stolen thunder out of us." It was a direct reference to the rise of son Sanjay Gandhi and his core team that had Tarun Gogoi, Pranab Mukherjee, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Kamal Nath, Ashok Gehlot and

many others. Reporting for the India Today magazine, columnist Sunil Sethi had observed, "Guwahati had never seen anything like it before. Five tumultuous days melted into cold nights as people from the remotest corners of the country poured in to witness or participate in the greatest show in the country-the All India Congress Committee (AICC) session. Nearly 10 km out of the city, the once thickly forested bit of flat land known as Khana Para, was, by the touch of some magic wand, transformed into a glittering miniature township called Jawaharnagar. The entrance ticket here was the tricolour Congress party badge, emblazoned on a thousand banners and flags every inch of the way. The most significant event of the session was the emergence of the Youth Congress as a major force."

The post-Independence Congress, under Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, had made a convention of sorts in holding its sessions at newly created cities such as Guwahati (where the Dispur area was named as the state capital), Chandigarh, Faridabad,

Bhubaneswar, Durgapur etc to provide impetus and introduce the party's legacy to the new towns. Apart from the emergence of Sanjay+Youth Congress power, Tarun Gogoi was witness to the 'Seven Sisters' being given shape. This was for the first time that the prime minister, Union ministers, chief ministers of various important states and other powerful players had gathered in Northeast India. The idea of the seven sisters -- Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh -- pooling their efforts and resources, was deliberated extensively. Tarun Gogoi ensured cultural extravaganza too. As Indira Gandhi wore the traditional dresses of the northeastern states each day of the session Assamese silk saree, Naga shawl and skirt, Cargo dress from Meghalaya, there were cultural shows, folk dances from each state alternated with some of India's best-known artistes such as Yamini Krishnamurthi, Uma Sharma and Ustad Latif Ahmad Khan. The bonhomie witnessed in November 1976 at Guwahati was short-lived as by March 1977, Indira Gandhi was out of power and subsequently ousted as the



Congress president, too, by many who had shared the dais with her at Jawaharnagar. A breakaway group was formed that had Pranab Mukherjee, AR Antulay, Buta Singh, G Venkatswamy and Tarun Gogoi as members. Indira, by that time, living at Mohammad Yunus' 12 Wellington Crescent, New Delhi had to build the party from scratch. Old timer Shubhabrata Bhattacharya witnessed Indira handing over the first vehicle of the Congress [I] to treasurer Pranab Mukherjee and Tarun Gogoi. Mukherjee excitedly took the wheels, inviting Gogoi to sit next to him. The idea was to drive till 24, Akbar Road, the new party office and flaunt it. Just as Indira returned to her residence after seeing off Mukherjee-Gogoi, the jeep broke down at the Teen Murti

Marg (presently Mother Teresa Marg). Gogoi, Bhattacharya and others had to push and push hard till Mukherjee got the right momentum to accelerate. For Tarun Gogoi, there was no looking back. When Sanjay Gandhi's death and Rajiv Gandhi's elevation saw many from 1976-era youth Congress leaders falling the wayside, Tarun Gogoi caught Rajiv's eye, putting him in the league of Ahmed Patel, Digvijaya Singh, Tariq Anwar etc and ministerial assignments kept coming, culminating in three consecutive terms as chief minister of Assam from 2001 to 2016. The longest-serving chief minister of Assam achieved a lot including breaking the bone of many militant and separatist movements in the state, making Assam a lot more safe and secure.

The deep roots of Trump's 'voter fraud' strategy



President Trump alleged "fraud" even while votes were still being counted - the culmination of a strategy at least months in the making. In the early hours of a frosty November morning in Connecticut, 49-year-old Candy snuggled into her bed after a long night shift. She immediately unlocked her phone - and began scrolling

through her social media feed, as she does most nights. But this was different - it was election night. The result was still hanging in the balance. Candy scrolled, catching up on the night's news while waiting for her favoured candidate to speak out. And just after 1 a.m., he did: Candy agreed. She was frustrated and she wanted to do something - so when one of her

best friends invited her to join a Facebook group called Stop the Steal, she jumped at the opportunity.

"The Democrats have said since the beginning of all this Covid stuff that they're going to do whatever it takes to get Trump out - and I think that they have succeeded," she later said.

Candy was expecting this. For months allegations of "rigged elections" and "voter fraud" have been punctuating her Facebook feed.

And she's not the only American who had been exposed to voting disinformation for months before polling day.

Tweets and democracy Research by the BBC's Anti-disinformation unit reveals that disinformation about voter fraud has been plugged by influential accounts on social media repeatedly, for months.

And it came from the very top. President Trump first started tweeting allegations of fraud as far back as April.

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external sites. View original tweet on Twitter

Between then and the election, he mentioned rigged elections or voter fraud more than 70 times. For example, he tweeted this in June:

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external sites. View original tweet on Twitter

It's not a new theme. Mr Trump made claims of voter fraud back in 2016 - after an election he won. But this time around, the evidence suggests many more people have been seeing unsubstantiated claims all over their social media feeds for weeks. Candy is just one of them. Hundreds of thousands joined big Facebook groups under the "Stop the Steal" banner. Our research found that

influential right-wing accounts were instrumental in amplifying these claims - and were frequently retweeted by President Trump. That includes a number of figures with big followings who have gone on to be involved in a protest movement centred around the unsubstantiated idea of a "rigged" election.

Where did #StoptheSteal come from?

On election night the hashtag #StoptheSteal sprung up on Twitter after the first of many misleading videos about voter fraud went viral.

The video showed a poll watcher being denied entry to a Philadelphia polling station. It has almost two million views on Twitter, and was shared by multiple pro-Trump accounts. We investigated the video shortly after it was posted.

Trump administration rejects massive Alaska mining project

The controversial copper and gold mine was opposed by several leading Republicans, including Donald Trump Jr.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers denied a permit for the Pebble Mine in Alaska on Wednesday, effectively killing plans to build the massive copper and gold project that opponents had warned could wipe out the world's largest sockeye salmon fishery.

The decision from the Trump administration, which had reversed course several times on the issue, comes just weeks before President-elect Joe Biden takes office. Biden has said he opposed the project.

The company seeking the permit for the mine had recently filed a plan to mitigate the ecological damage from the Bristol Bay project, which POLITICO reported in late August was not expected to satisfy the Army Corps of Engineers.

In a statement, the Army Corps said it had determined the mining company's plan to deal with the huge amounts of rock and other fill material that would be displaced by the mine "does

not comply with Clean Water Act guidelines and [ACE] concluded that the proposed project is contrary to the public interest. This action is based on all available facts and complies with existing laws and regulations. It reflects a regulatory process that is fair, flexible and balanced."

In a statement, John Shively, CEO of Pebble Limited Partnership, the U.S. subsidiary of Canadian mining company Northern Dynasty Minerals, said it was "dismayed" by the government's decision and vowed to appeal it.

"Since the beginning of the federal review, our team has worked closely with the USACE staff to understand their requirements for responsibly developing the project including changing the transportation corridor and re-vamping the approach to wetlands mitigation," Shively said in a statement. "It is very disconcerting to see political influence in this process at the eleventh hour."

The mining project divided Republicans and Alaska politicians normally in favor of expanding domestic mineral

production. President Donald Trump faced a public pressure campaign from Republicans, including mega-donor Andy Sabin, Bass Pro Shops CEO Johnny Morris, Fox News commentator Tucker Carlson and the his eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., to block the project. Prospects for the mine further worsened over the summer with the release of secretly-recorded tapes featuring the then-CEO of the Pebble Limited Partnership, Tom Collier, boasting about how he would influence Alaskan politicians to ultimately support the project. Those prompted Sens. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) to affirm their outright opposition to the projection after sending mixed signals up until that point.

The Army Corps' 29-page formal record of decision concludes "benefits of the proposed elimination and alteration of wetlands, streams and other waters within the [Corps] jurisdiction do not outweigh the detriments that would be caused by such eliminations and alterations,



based upon the information contained with the [final environmental impact statement], the extensive public comments received, and the analysis of the public interest review factors." Environmental groups cheered the move. "Amen to certainty for this cherished area, the tribes and community of Bristol Bay, and its wildlife and waters," Joel Reynolds, a senior attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said in a statement. "This region has been whip-sawed with uncertainty about its fate for a decade, and this move

recognizes there was never any way to mitigate the harm Pebble Mine would do." Reynolds called on EPA to reject Pebble's 404c permit application to "permanently protect" the watershed. Democrats, many of whom have opposed the project for years, were quick to welcome the announcement. "I am pleased the Administration and Army Corps of Engineers has done the right thing by rejecting a Clean Water Act permit for the Pebble Mine project in Alaska's Bristol Bay region," said Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.), top Democrat on the Energy Committee, in a statement.

Cheetah: The Comeback

Madhya Pradesh is a frontrunner among three states in the hunt to host the cheetah when it is reintroduced to India's wilds.

As experts from the Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India (WII) start the process of evaluating sites to reintroduce the majestic cheetah to India's wilds, a competition of sorts has also begun between states to play host.

The cheetah was declared extinct from India in 1952. Maharaja Ramanuj Pratap Singh Deo of Koriya is believed to have hunted and shot the last three recorded Asiatic cheetahs in India in 1947. Now, over 70 years later, the fastest land animal appears set to make a comeback in India.

In 2009, Jairam Ramesh, then minister for environment and forests, had initiated the cheetah reintroduction project, but it was stayed by the Supreme Court in 2012 on the

grounds that the African cheetah was an alien and exotic species and because the National Board for Wildlife, the apex wildlife body in the country, had not been consulted in the matter. In January 2020, though, after the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) filed a petition, the Supreme Court finally allowed the Centre to introduce the African cheetah to a suitable habitat in India. A committee, including M.K. Ranjitsinh, wildlife conservationist and former IAS officer, Dhananjay Mohan, IFS, director of the WII, and a deputy inspector general from the ministry of environment and forests (MoEF), has been set up under the orders of the apex court to monitor the implementation of the project.

The committee has asked the WII to carry out a technical evaluation of all possible sites. Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar are eager to host the big cats in their respective forest reserves, and a fourth state, Gujarat, is still evaluating sites. While Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan were part of the original plan, Bihar is an interesting, new claimant. Y.V. Jhala, dean, faculty of wildlife science at the WII, will travel to Madhya Pradesh on November 26 to begin site evaluation at four habitats. "We will visit all probable sites before narrowing down on the better ones for reintroduction, depending on factors like prey base, topography and safety," says Jhala. The state had initially shortlisted two sites, the Kuno Palpur sanctuary,



which has also been cleared as a second home of the Asiatic lion, and the Nauradehi sanctuary in Sagar district, but has now offered two more options, the Gandhi Sagar sanctuary on the northern boundary of Mandsaur and Shivpuri district. "Protection measures have been strengthened, protected areas have been added, augmentation of prey base has been done through translocation of herbivore species and villages have been relocated outside reserves to create inviolate areas," says J.S. Chauhan, additional principal chief conservator of

forests, wildlife wing, Madhya Pradesh. He adds: "Madhya Pradesh has been a pioneering state in wildlife translocation and has a number of successful initiatives involving species such as tigers, swamp deer and bison to its credit." Chauhan believes the habitats in the state have a good chance of being selected. According to a top Madhya Pradesh government official, once a site is cleared, it will not take long for the cheetahs to be reintroduced to the chosen habitat. "It will take a couple of years since a lot of work is being done simultaneously," says the official, adding that talks are on with donor groups in South Africa and Namibia to source the animals.

Yoga of Immortals

A boon from the Himalayas: Towards multi-disciplinary healing



In a world stricken by an unprecedented pandemic, the emergence of a unique Himalayan protocol - Yoga of Immortals, mindfulness and the like has proven to be the great healer across specialities and specializations. The rich to the disadvantaged, the blood pressure patients to the diabetics, the able bodied to the differently-abled, fair skinned to their darker counterparts, men to women, Asians to Europeans, Africans to Americans, students to the working class, sportsmen to peacekeepers, soldiers to the utterly pious, all have converged on the common, powerful pulpit of self-awakening that is Yoga of Immortals. Such a conflation of disparate strata of society is a testament to the efficacy and potency of the practice of meditation originated, honed, simplified and pioneered by the Himalayan Yogis of India. Young Visionary Ishan Shivanand is the founder & master trainer of the ultimate Yoga of Immortals umbrella of courses, being taught and learnt across the globe for the last three decades in its current form and in existence since times immemorial. This yogic science, which employs an array of vigorous and soothing pranayama, consciousness, mindfulness and energy channelization techniques pre-dates all yoga forms and is also widely known as the genesis of the contemporary yoga revolution. After the rapid spurt in the popularity of meditation worldwide in the last few months owing to the spiked mental health disease incidence, today, meditation has become a touchstone of a good routine and no surprise to witness a vast multitude of masses and classes - celebrities to vanilla civilians, all embracing Yoga of Immortals meditation for the sundry benefits it confers, ranging from peace of mind to clarity of thought, emotional release to mental de-stress, psychic detox to self healing. Yoga of Immortals meditation has something for everyone - for those looking to reduce anxiety to those with urinary incontinence and has emerged as a great unifier, a leveller non-parallel, transcending the geographical and human demographical barriers. For the homestuck humankind shackled by Coronavirus, Ishan Shivanand's innovative app encompassing Yoga of Immortals (YOI) curriculum became a godesend. Its users and practitioners became part of the medical research by a team of doctors from Rutgers, Mayo Clinic et al, reported remarkable improvements in anxiety levels, mental peace, inner equilibrium and optimal health even as they were rendered immobile in their homes. YOI has not only helped further the vision of integrative health for all but also in decreasing behavioural health issues. YOI has clinically proven to improve wellness outcomes, personal sleep patterns, productivity, absenteeism in corporates practicing it, besides upping their financial productivity as evidenced by clinical presentation of over 10000 people - with a randomised sample size of 1000 with very positive results.

This DIY body butter is all you need to nourish your dry skin this winter

Because of the dry and cold weather, your skin tends to get really dry and needs more TLC. This body butter will provide all the nourishment you need!

If your skin becomes Sahara desert-like during winter, then you need more than just a body lotion to moisturise it. Under such circumstances, body butter comes in handy. The consistency of body butter is much thicker, richer and concentrated, which goes deep inside the layers of your skin to nourish and moisturise it.

A good body butter can easily help your skin heal and rejuvenate. And while you can definitely buy one from the market, nothing beats the 100% natural and homemade one! It is not only free of chemicals but it also ensures there's no contamination.

SO, HERE'S HOW YOU CAN



EASILY MAKE ONE AT HOME:

All you need is:

1 cup shea/cocoa butter

1/2 cup coconut oil

1/2 cup almond oil

Essential oils of your choice (optional)

FOLLOW THESE SIMPLE STEPS TO GET YOUR OWN

BODY BUTTER:

Prepare a double boiler to melt the shea/cocoa butter and coconut oil together.

After they have melted, remove the bowl from the heat, and let the mixture cool down.

Now, add the almond and essential oils, and stir it gently.

Wait for a few minutes or until the oils start to partially solidify. Once it gets solidified, use a hand blender to blend the mixture for a few minutes.

After blending it for a few minutes, if you see butter-like consistency, it is ready to use!

Transfer the final product into a

clean container for daily use. Shea/cocoa butter can be easily found in online stores, and is not even that expensive. Both cocoa and shea butter are known for their moisturising properties. They are also believed to improve the skin's appearance over time, so investing in these two can go a long way!

Almond and coconut oil make for excellent moisturisers for your skin, and have antibacterial properties. And with a smell so nice, it's a great addition to your body butter.

Since we are not adding any artificial fragrances, adding essential oils can serve the purpose. Not only will it give a fresh aroma to your body butter, but it will also benefit your skin depending on what essential oils you are choosing.

Go ahead and try this body butter this winter, to give your skin what it needs!

Looking to tone those legs in one month? Try doing interval cycling for 30-minute daily

Cycling is an all-time classic, when it comes to losing weight. This time, try it with a twist.

You must be thinking that you know all about cycling right? Well, we are here to tell you about a new cycling technique, yes there's a twist. And yes, you can burn fat right away, because it's not just cycling - it's interval cycling.

Interval cycling is next in line in our interval weight loss series. Here also, we have devised a few uncommon ways to cycle our way towards weight loss. And that's not all - apart from weight loss, cycling has a lot to do with muscle strengthening and endurance.

So, without any further ado, let's make you paddle in a way that you end up burning more than you usually do.

THREE WAYS YOU CAN DO INTERVAL CYCLING:

The first thing that you need to pay attention to is the knob that's there on your cycle. This knob helps you tighten the paddle belt



to help you increase the number of calories you burn in less time. So, adjust it accordingly.

Now, pick any form of interval cycling that you like:

1. SITTING INTERVAL CYCLING

In this case, you need to sit and cycle it out. If your knob is less tight, then at least cycle for 45 minutes. But, if you have tightened it to the max, then 20 minutes of cycling is a great way

to burn all that stubborn fat.

This is how you have to do it - for a minute, you have to paddle at a normal pace, and for the next two minutes, you have to paddle the cycle as fast as you can. Do this alternatively.

2. STANDING INTERVAL CYCLING

Here, you have to cycle while you're standing. But, here your posture matters a lot. So, this is

how you have to do it - stand on the paddles, put your elbows in front of the handle (don't hunch), put your butt out, look forward, and paddle.

You have to paddle at normal speed for a minute, and for the next two-minutes, you have to paddle it out in full swing. Keep repeating for at least 30-minutes. Ensure that your feet are flat on the paddle, otherwise you will

feel the pain.

3. SITTING AND STANDING INTERVAL CYCLING

Now, this is a combination of both forms, but there's a little twist here. So, this is how you have to do it - keep an eye on the timer, and tighten your paddle the way you like. So, for 30 seconds cycle sitting on the saddle, and then stand and paddle for a minute. Then, sit again and cycle for 30-seconds, then stand and repeat it for 30 minutes.

You can devise your own timeline, when it comes to intervals. To be honest, this is the best way to lose weight.

HERE ARE EIGHT BENEFITS OF INTERVAL CYCLING:

1. Interval cycling helps you with major weight loss, just like every other interval training circuit. You put your body in constant shock by changing the speed and even the position. 2. If you do sitting interval cycling, then it can help in toning your thighs and butt by reducing cellulite. Plus, it will tighten your muscles.

Mookuthi Amman movie review:

RJ Balaji, Nayanthara join hands for a perfect Diwali entertainer

Mookuthi Amman movie review: Director-actor RJ Balaji turns blind faith in god and god men on its head and raises hardly controversial questions in the most light-hearted manner.

Mookuthi Amman

Cast: RJ Balaji, Nayanthara, Urvashi, Ajay Ghosh and Mouli Director: RJ Balaji and NJ Saravanan

When you're making a film about religious politics, fake god men and blind faith, you need to walk a tightrope in the way you address the subject because we live in a country where people take offence very easily. Most people think it's their birthright to get offended, especially if their belief system (involving god) is questioned. What RJ Balaji, as writer and director of Mookuthi Amman, does is that he turns blind faith in god and god men on its head and raises pertinent (rarely controversial) questions in the most light-hearted (without

insulting sentiments) manner.

RJ Balaji plays Engles Ramasamy, a local TV reporter and the sole breadwinner of his family. He lives with his mom (Urvashi), grandfather and three sisters, and struggles to make ends meet. As an intrepid reporter, he's after a big story involving a godman Bagavathy Baba (Ajay Ghosh), who has illegally occupied many acres of public land and wants to build Panchavanam, which he promotes as the spiritual capital of the world. To help Ramaswamy stop Bagavathy Baba from usurping the land of the public, goddess Amman (Nayanthara) comes to the rescue. How Ramaswamy's family, with the help of Mookuthi Amman, try to stop Bagavathy Baba forms the

story.

One of the reasons why Mookuthi Amman works wholesomely is because it isn't a devotional film. It's an out-and-out entertainer that never gets preachy to make its point. It takes the less controversial route to make its point on religious politics and fake god men while keeping the narrative as funny as possible. Unlike OMG: Oh My God or PK, Mookuthi Amman never gets too serious about its commentary on our blind faith in god and god men. There's a lovely scene about one of the characters who studies in a Christian school and is slowly turning into a Christian. The subsequent scene questions those who forcefully convert people but the tone is not offensive. This approach is what



makes it less controversial and RJ Balaji and his team of writers deserve praise for this effort.

Nayanthara enters the frame half an hour into the film. As much as her presence adds a lot of weightage to the film, it's Urvashi who steals the show with her effortless screen presence. As the mother of the family, her comic timing is flawless and she gets some of the film's best moments. Nayanthara, as usual, is her

effervescent self and is instantly likable as a goddess. RJ Balaji, as the actor, brings in a slightly over-the-top performance but it suits his character and never sticks out like a sore thumb. Ajay Ghosh as Bagavathy Baba is the most animated character you could see in Tamil cinema in recent years. You get a slightly exaggerated performance from him but it really goes well with his character.

Amitabh Bachchan decks up in wedding finery as he shoots with wife Jaya and daughter Shweta, says 'family at work'



Amitabh Bachchan, Jaya Bachchan and Shweta Bachchan Nanda recently came together for a shoot and pictures from the same show them dressed in ethnic wedding wear. Amitabh has shared several candid pictures

from the shoot as they shot with all precautions amid coronavirus pandemic. Sharing a picture of the trio on Instagram, the 78-year-old actor wrote, "Family at work." He can be seen in a yellow kurta and a beige turban,

smiling for the camera as he captures wife Jaya, who's in a dark pink sari, and Shweta, in a beige sari. Both the ladies are seen wearing masks in between breaks. The Bachchans underwent costume change for another

scene in which Amitabh decked up in a white kurta-pyjama paired with a khaki jacket and a cap while Jaya changed to a green silk sari and gajra in her hair and Shweta switched to a cream salwar-suit. The senior actor

wrote about the eventful day on his blog later. Sharing more pictures, he wrote, "...the family works together .. and there is a sense of togetherness and camaraderie .. and sharing and suggesting and .. well just being there .." One of the behind-the-scene pictures shows the three of them being busy on their respective cellphones as they take a break. He also shared a solo picture of himself in which he could be seen lost in thought. Talking about what he was thinking about, he wrote, "... in the thoughts of those .. that suffer from pain and loss .. but work goes on and in the interim .. there is still uniformity ... this is the calling of the next .. the privatisation of the singular form in the entity of the smart ... we are such in different shape and forms .. and that be our entity .. good night .. and prayers for the loss of one , so dear .." Meanwhile, Amitabh is seen as host on quiz show Kaun Banega Crorepati 12. He had resumed shoot just a few days after recovering from Covid-19 and went to shoot for up to 17 hours a day.

Kangana Ranaut, sister granted interim protection from arrest in sedition case

The interim protection was granted after Ranaut and her sister filed a petition, seeking to quash the FIR and the October order passed by the magistrate. The petition was heard by a division bench of Justices SS Shinde and MS Karnik.

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday granted interim protection from arrest to actor Kangana Ranaut and her sister Rangoli Chandel in connection to a sedition case. An FIR had been registered against them under sedition and other charges earlier.

The Bombay HC has directed them to appear before Mumbai Police on January 8. The FIR was regifted after orders passed by the Bandra magistrate's court. The order directed the police to carry out an inquiry against Ranaut and her sister, following a



complaint lodged against them for "trying to create hatred and communal tension" through posts on social media.

The interim protection was granted after Ranaut and her sister filed a petition, seeking to quash the FIR and the October order passed by the

magistrate. The petition was heard by a division bench of Justices SS Shinde and MS Karnik.

The court, however, reprimanded the sisters for not honouring summons sent to them by cops. They said that the summons must be

honoured.

The lawyer representing Kangana Ranaut and Rangoli Chandel, Rizwan Siddiquee, quickly assured the court that the sisters shall appear before the Bandra police in Mumbai on January 8 from 12 pm to 2 pm for recording their

statements. The Bombay High Court has accepted the lawyer's appeal.

"We are of the prima facie opinion that interim protection till the matter is heard at length deserves to be granted. The police shall not take any coercive action including arrest against the applicants (Ranaut and Chandel)," the court said.

The court also inquired why sedition charges had been invoked in the case. "Why is the sedition section invoked? Why are we treating citizens of our country like this?" Justice Shinde said.

The Bombay HC will now take up the plea for the further hearing on January 11. It may be noted that the police had filed an FIR against Ranaut and her sis under IPC sections 153-A, 124-A, and 34.

Bigg Boss 14 evicted contestant Sara Gural takes a dig at show: 'No one listens to the audience'



Punjabi actor-singer Sara Gural, who was the first contestant to be evicted from Bigg Boss 14, has taken a jibe at the popular reality show. She said that voting for one's favourite contestant is meaningless as the audience votes are not going to make a difference anyway. Sara wrote on Twitter, "#bigboss Mei vote Kia ya na Kia ho ! Fark thodi pdta hai ! Konsa audience ki koi sunta hai lol (Whether you vote for someone or not in Bigg Boss, it does not matter. It is not like anyone listens to the audience)." The first three evictions on the show - Sara, Shehzad Deol and Nishant Singh Malkhani - were not on the basis of audience votes. While Sara

was voted out by 'seniors' Sidharth Shukla, Hina Khan and Gauahar Khan, Shehzad and Nishant were evicted on the basis of other contestants' votes. In the past, Sara had called her eviction 'unfair' and blamed Sidharth for her exit from Bigg Boss 14. She was eliminated from the race after just one week in the Bigg Boss house.

Talking to Hindustan Times, Sara had said, "As soon as I came out of the Bigg Boss house, the kind of response I got from people, they knew that I was quite deserving to be in the house. Everybody saw what happened when they were discussing who should stay and who should not.

Pooja Bedi remembers a time when jokes were not offensive, feels political correctness has made everyone 'intolerant'



As political correctness is forcing people to think twice before making a joke and delicately tip-toe around sensitive subjects, Pooja Bedi reminded everyone of a time when a joke was just that. She said that the need to be politically correct has made everyone 'intolerant' and 'overly sensitive' to every little thing. Pooja shared a quote which read, "It's called a joke. We used to tell them before people became offended by everything." In the accompanying tweet, she

wrote, "Sigh!!!! How many of you feel that 'political correctness' is turning us into an intolerant, stiff, overly sensitive bunch of people who are easily offended by every little thing???" Recently, Pooja defended Milind Soman over his nude beach photo and said that there was 'absolutely nothing obscene' about it. She took to Twitter to juxtapose the picture of him with those of naked Naga sadhus and said that 'smearing ash' cannot make nudity acceptable. "Absolutely nothing obscene about @milindrunning aesthetic pic. The obscenity lies

in the minds of a viewer imagining more! His crime is being good looking, famous & setting bench marks! If nudity is a crime all naga babas should be arrested. Smearing ash can't make it acceptable!," she tweeted. Pooja, who made her Bollywood debut with Vishkanya in 1991, has acted in a number of films including Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar and Lootere. She was also a part of several reality shows including Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa, Nach Baliye, Bigg Boss and Maa Exchange.



The secretive consulting firm that's become Biden's Cabinet in waiting

(SAI Bureau)-The website for WestExec Advisors includes a map depicting West Executive Avenue, the secure road on the White House grounds between the West Wing and the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, as a way to show what the consulting firm can do for its clients.

"It is, quite literally, the road to the Situation Room, and it is the road everyone associated with WestExec Advisors has crossed many times en route to meetings of the highest national security consequences," the firm says. And staffers are poised to cross it again — en masse.

The firm, which now looks like a government-in-waiting for the next administration, was founded in 2017 by Tony Blinken, President-elect Joe Biden's choice for secretary of State, and Michèle Flournoy, a top contender for secretary of Defense. And one of its former principals, Avril Haines, is Biden's pick for director of national intelligence. But



little is known about WestExec's client list. Because its staffers aren't lobbyists, they are not required to disclose who they work for. They also aren't bound by the Biden transition's

restrictions on hiring people who have lobbied in the past year. Such high-powered Washington consulting firms are "the unintended consequence" of greater disclosure requirements for registered lobbyists, said Mandy Smithberger, director of the Center for Defense Information at the Project on Government Oversight.

By not directly advocating for federal dollars on behalf of their clients, they don't have to publicly divulge who is paying them and for what activities, such as the connections they make with government agencies, she said. But it is also impossible to assess the influence they have on federal expenditures. **(Contd on page 31)**

Trump strips Biden's options to boost the economy



(SAI Bureau)- Joe Biden is entering the White House with big hopes of juicing the economy with new spending and a Federal Reserve ready to unleash its arsenal of lending programs to prevent the country from slipping back into a recession. He might get none of it. A rare public spat between the Trump administration and the Fed last week exposed the stark reality of the economic policy ammunition Biden will inherit: a stick rather than a bazooka. With Biden's Democrats in danger of failing to win the Senate and a new era of

(Contd on page 30)

To challenge the BJP, the Congress needs a massive surgery



(SAI Bureau)- Almost two years back, during a dinner at a minister's home in Lutyens' Delhi, I found myself sitting next to a former Congress chief minister (CM) who migrated to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Asked how he liked the BJP, the former CM said: "[The] Congress knows how to govern, but nothing like an organisation exists there. The organisation is strong here, but the skill of running the government is yet to come." He is a dynast. He got his post in the Congress due to his perceived loyalty. The Congress leadership is unable to accept that in politics, there is no enduring legacy of loyalty. This explains the many turncoats in the Congress. The Congress, as an organisation, was once present in every district. An uninterrupted stint in power and the resulting dynastic stranglehold

(Contd on page 31)

Trump pardons former national security adviser Flynn

(SAI Bureau)- Outgoing President Donald Trump pardoned his former national security adviser Michael Flynn on Wednesday for lying to FBI agents investigating Russian interference in the 2016 election.

"It is my Great Honor to announce that General Michael T. Flynn has been granted a Full Pardon," the president tweeted. "Congratulations to @GenFlynn and his wonderful family, I know you will now have a truly fantastic Thanksgiving!"

Trump's move is an extraordinary intervention on behalf of an ally who pleaded guilty in 2017 and has spent the last two years fighting to overturn his original plea. It was not immediately clear whether Trump's pardon also included Flynn's failure to register as an agent of Turkey in 2016, a crime to



which he admitted as part of his plea agreement. Before reversing course, Flynn initially cooperated with special counsel Robert Mueller for nearly two years, including by providing evidence of potential obstruction of justice by the president. He sat for 19 interviews with prosecutors. Trump had long been expected to pardon Flynn, pummeling prosecutors and the FBI for their handling of the case, part of a concerted attack on the investigations against him. Trump has falsely accused the FBI and Justice Department of mounting a "coup" against him in the years after his election. Trump also repeatedly attacked prosecutors and FBI officials involved in the Flynn case, even though he fired Flynn for lying to both the bureau and Vice President Mike Pence in early 2017. Though the pardon was long in the making, Trump allowed Flynn's legal drama to play out for more than three years,

(Contd on page 30)

