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Is this the end of the Gandhi dynasty?

Congress faces uncertainty after Rahul Gandhi's exit as party chief



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Tirloak Malik Launches Happy Life Yoga, A New Educational Platform

(Our Staff Reporter) In honor of International Yoga Day 2019, HAPPY LIFE YOGA launched on June 29th. In a packed auditorium at the Goddard Riverside's Bernie Wohl Center, the curtain raiser event

York Emmy Nominated Filmmaker, and a proud Upper Westsider. He has promoted Ayurveda on the Upper West Side for the last 20 years and now he and the team bring you the gifts of India through HAPPY LIFE YOGA. This intriguing, interactive, and entertaining experience included a panel discussion on topics such as how to use Ayurveda in every day life, the place of Western Medicine in holistic wellness, and the benefits of Yoga. Speakers included the esteemed Dr. Bhupendra Patel, M.D., Ayurvedic Dr. Bhaswati Bhattacharya, and Long Island yoga teacher Ranju Narang. HAPPY LIFE YOGA is the yoga of life. This educational platform offers a unique holistic approach to health and happiness using tools from Ayurveda, Indian Philosophy, and



for this educational platform was inaugurated by New York Deputy Consul General of India Shatrughna Sinha. Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer, who was the Chief Guest, participated in the workshop and spoke in support of the initiative. Many other VIPs were in attendance as well. The event was hosted by The Indian Panorama and Indian American Forum. HAPPY LIFE YOGA is the creation of Tirloak Malik and the Ayurveda Cafe team. Tirloak Malik is a restaurateur, happy lifestyle speaker, New

Yoga to help better manage modern day challenges such as work, finances, relationships, family and other social pressures and ultimately guides you towards a happier life. Tirloak Malik believes India has always been a spiritual teacher of the world and that Indian Philosophy provides the blueprint of how to live a happy life. Indian Philosophy teaches that we must practice balance in all four aims of human life: Artha, Dharma, Kama and Moksha. These philosophical concepts can be applied to all cultures.

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The greatest show on Earth

U.S. celebrates Fourth of July with spectacular fireworks as nation marks 236 years of independence

(News Agencies)- Americans welcomed 236 years of independence in spectacular style on Wednesday with dazzling displays of fireworks held across the country.

Though many of the festivities were cancelled or scaled down due to weather-related power outages and wildfire concerns, it was business as usual in New York as the Manhattan skyline was lit up to the delight of the thousands who lined the streets and millions watching at home.

Despite a day-long heat warning, thousands of revellers flocked to Manhattan's west side to view the incredible Macy's fireworks display, where a feat of pyrotechnics erupted over the Hudson River.

Meanwhile, millions at home watched Katy Perry give a star-spangled performance in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, donning her uniform of a purple ponytail and an American flag mini-dress and singing the aptly named hit Firework. Country music sensation Kenny Chesney also performed.

Both performances were pre-recorded so as to avoid any snafus with inclement weather. The night's events were MC'd by none other than Regis Philbin, who has been in retirement from Live With Regis and Kelly. Crowds lined up early in the day along FDR Drive on

Manhattan's west side, despite a heat advisory and the promise of thunderstorms. But the weather held fast, and by sundown, temperatures were down to a cooler 86 degrees.

Viewers along 12th Avenue witnessed as 40,000 fireworks in 15 dazzling colours and 30 separate shapes filled the sky in the half-hour spectacular. But the storms had to go somewhere, and headed north to Boston. According to CBS Boston, the Esplanade was evacuated during the annual Boston Pops Fireworks Spectacular due to severe thunderstorms. Jennifer Hudson was among those performing. The station notes that people were evacuated right before the 1812 Overture.

Hundreds of thousands from the Midwest to the Mid-Atlantic are spending the Fourth of July like America's founders did in 1776: Without the conveniences of electricity and air conditioning, fireworks on the National Mall in Washington are planned to go forward, and in New York City, huge crowds lined the Hudson River to view the 36th annual Macy's fireworks show.

In the nation's capital, fireworks began shortly after 9pm on the West Lawn. Entertainment was provided by Matthew Broderick, who performed two songs from the Broadway musical Nice Work If You Can Get It with Tony-

nominated actress Keli O'Hara. It was a mix of pop and classical in Washington, as the National Symphony Orchestra entertained with American classics like Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture with live cannon fire. In Philadelphia, a dazzling fireworks show followed a 5,000-participant parade.

Singer Lauryn Hill performed days after pleading guilty to tax evasion, and the Roots also gave a rousing performance. Also performing were Queen Latifah, Common, and Joe Jonas of the Jonas Brothers. Following the performances, fireworks were launched over the Philadelphia Museum of Art. President Obama marked the Fourth of July by thanking service members and their families, who he said 'represent what is best in America.' The president, accompanied by first lady Michelle Obama, hosted a barbecue and concert Wednesday for the families on the White House South Lawn. Mr Obama saluted 'this generation of heroes' for their service and sacrifice to defend American freedoms, specifically thanking them for bringing Osama bin Laden to justice and working to get out of Afghanistan. He said

the nation 'will always be there for you, just as you've been there for us.' He said it was his promise, and America's promise.

Afterward, the Obamas shook hands and posed for pictures with eager visitors. The U.S. Marine Band and country singer Brad Paisley performed. Presumptive GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney has spent most of the week off the campaign trail with his family in in Wolfeboro, New Hampshire, but took time Wednesday to march in the town's Fourth of July parade. He was joined by his wife Ann; the two of them were seen participating in the parade, riding in trolleys, and greeting the crowds. The former Massachusetts governor has been on vacation at his lake house -estimated to be worth over \$10million - for the better part of the week.



Is this the end of the Gandhi dynasty?

Congress faces uncertainty after Rahul Gandhi's exit as party chief

With assembly elections approaching many in the party feel the Congress has been thrust in a "blind spot" due to the leadership crisis
The Congress party's future would be chalked out at the meeting of the Congress Working Committee which is likely to meet early next week



were expecting a much closer race.

Mr Gandhi was also the face of Congress when it suffered its worst defeat in 2014, winning just 44 of India's 543 seats. This year it did marginally better with 52 seats, but many still called it a "humiliating performance".

Mr Gandhi also lost his own seat in his family constituency of Amethi in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, though he is still a MP because he won a second seat in the southern state of Kerala. Since it came to power, the BJP has been accused of targeting minorities and weakening state institutions under Mr Modi's powerful leadership. It has consistently dismissed such allegations.

Mr Gandhi's letter has made headlines across the country and #RahulGandhi has begun trending on Twitter in India.

The tweets range from sadness and anger at his decision to outright mockery. Others have begun wondering what this could mean for the future of the Congress party.

"The Congress faces an existential crisis in the absence of clear leadership and such a situation does not bode well for the party which faces assembly elections in three states just a few months later," said a party leader. Another veteran Congress leader said the party can remain united only under the Gandhi family umbrella and if anyone outside the family leads the party, it would increase dissensions.

Political commentator Sushila Ramaswamy, who teaches in Delhi University, said the Congress party should come out of the Gandhi family's shadow.

"To think that without the Gandhi family, the party cannot hold ground is unacceptable. Everyone has the right to go to the top and it seemed that the Congress was currently under monarchic rule. All this is bad and does not augur well for the oldest political party in the country," she said.

Director Sanjay Kumar of CSDS said it is not fair to think that the Congress will face a crisis if the party president is not from the Gandhi family.

"The party might get a new form with his resignation. He

should continue to remain active in the party, which will help him emerge as a popular leader in future.

"It is hoped that the Congress accepts the new leader who might give new shape to the party's future," he said.

However, Ramaswamy said the entire Gandhi family should step aside and bring in new leadership.

"People get fed up of seeing the same faces in a democracy and alternatives need to be given just as in other evolved democracies in the world," she said.

She also lauded Rahul Gandhi for taking the initiative and allowing the party to reinvent itself.

"Nothing lasts forever, let it reinvent itself. It is not acceptable in a true democratic set up. The party will have to invent itself if it has to come up as an alternative.

"They should realise that coalitions have been rejected by the electorate in the country and a party should have a clear vision and leadership for it to emerge as a credible alternative to the ruling party. This will also help to keep the ruling party in check," Ramaswamy said.

She said the Congress should show that it is better than the ruling party to emerge as a credible alternative.

"In fact, even Sonia Gandhi should step down as leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party and pave the space for somebody else to take over. The entire Gandhi family should step aside and bring in new leadership," she said.

The political analyst said the Congress party should have reinvented itself periodically, but it has not happened.

It is late, but should be done, she said and added Rahul Gandhi should be given credit by the party that he has "seen the writing on the wall and stepped aside".

Rahul Gandhi: Is this the end of the Gandhi dynasty?

On Thursday when Indian PM Narendra Modi won a landslide victory in the Indian elections, Rahul Gandhi, the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty and leader of India's Congress party, emerged at the

other end, battered and mauled.

He is the primary heir to the ultimate political dynasty. His great-grandfather, Jawaharlal Nehru, was the first and longest-serving prime minister of India. His grandmother, Indira Gandhi, was the first female prime minister of the country, and his father was India's youngest prime minister.

If the 2014 election was Congress' worst political showing ever, Thursday's poll delivered a double blow to Mr Gandhi. Congress won just over 50 seats against the 300 plus that Mr Modi's BJP got; and if that was not bad enough, he lost his own seat in the family bastion of Amethi in Uttar Pradesh.

He will still sit in the parliament though because this time he contested from a second seat - Wayanad in Kerala - which he won.

However, Amethi was a prestige battle. It was the seat from where both his parents - Sonia and Rajiv Gandhi - had contested and won and he himself had held it for the past 15 years. Even an emotional letter delivered to every house in Amethi - addressed to "Mera Amethi Parivar" - was not enough to spare him a ballot box humiliation at the hands of the BJP's Smriti Irani, a high profile actress-turned-politician.

It sits in the heart of Uttar Pradesh - India's most populous state - which is considered the ground zero of politics. It's generally believed that whoever wins the state rules the country.

Eight of 14 Indian prime ministers - including Mr Gandhi's great grandfather, grandmother and father - were from the state, which elects the largest number of MPs - 80 out of a 545-member lower house. Even Narendra Modi, who is originally from Gujarat, chose Uttar Pradesh to make his debut as an MP in 2014 when he contested from the ancient city of Varanasi.

Not many were expecting an outright win for the Congress, but they were definitely expected to do better than 2014. That's why Thursday's results have stunned many inside and outside the party. Congress may limp on in parliament, but

(SAI Bureau) New Delhi: Uncertainty stares at the Congress with Rahul Gandhi quitting as president of the party which is struggling to get back on its feet following two successive Lok Sabha election defeats.

With assembly elections to states like Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Delhi approaching, many in the party feel the Congress has been thrust in a "blind spot" due to the leadership crisis.

Political commentators, however, say the step will augur well for the grand old party that needs to reinvent itself and present a clear vision before the public to again emerge as a credible alternative.

The Congress party's future would be chalked out at the meeting of the Congress Working Committee, the highest decision making body of the party, which is likely to meet early next week.

The names of senior Congress leaders Sushilkumar Shinde, Mallikarjun Kharge, Ashok Gehlot and Motilal Vora were doing the rounds as possible candidates for the party president's post, but a decision would be made only after the meeting of the CWC.

Rahul Gandhi has resigned as leader of India's main opposition Congress party, ending weeks of speculation.

In his resignation letter, which he tweeted on Wednesday, he took responsibility for the party's defeat in the recent general election.

He had already announced his intention to resign, but party leaders had hoped to change his mind.

Mr Gandhi's father, grandmother and great grandfather were all former prime ministers.

In the letter he added that while he had no "hatred or anger" towards India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), "every living cell in my body instinctively resists their idea of India" which he said was based on differences and hatred.

He also called the impartiality of the election into question, saying that "we didn't fight a political party... we fought the entire machinery of the Indian state".

The BJP led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi stormed to victory in the election, winning a massive mandate.

The scale of victory stunned the opposition and pundits, who



the question many people are asking is if this means the Gandhi era is over - or whether it should be ended to revive the party's fortunes.

On Thursday evening, Mr Gandhi addressed a press conference in Delhi where he conceded the election to Mr Modi, saying the people had given their mandate and chosen the BJP. He also took full responsibility for the Congress party's defeat.

And even though counting was not over in Amethi with more than 300,000 votes yet to be counted, he conceded the constituency to Smriti Irani.

"I want to congratulate her. She has won, it's a democracy and I respect the decision of people," he said.

Refusing to give further details about the Congress performance or what would come next, Mr Gandhi said it would all be discussed in the meeting of the Congress Working Committee, the party's top decision-making body.

He also told the Congress workers, the ones who lost and the ones who won, not to lose hope. "There is no need to be afraid. We will continue to work hard and we will eventually win."

But at the Congress office in Lucknow, the future victory that Mr Gandhi promised seemed like a distant dream to the handful of despondent party workers, glued to a TV screen, watching the bloodbath unfold as several party veterans lost their seats.

"Our credibility is very low. People have no faith in our promises. They are not trusting what we are saying," one party official who didn't want to be named told me.

"Mr Modi failed to fulfil the commitments he made, but people still believe him."

I ask him why?

"Even we can't understand why!" he says.

The dismal performance of the Congress is bound to raise questions over Mr Gandhi's leadership and many analysts are already calling for a change, demanding that he step down from the top party post. But all such

calls, like in the past, have come from outside the party and are likely to be rejected by its leadership.

As rumors swirled around Delhi that Mr Gandhi had offered to quit, Congress politician Mani Shankar Aiyar told BBC Hindi that "Congress will not question its leadership and [will] not accept Mr Gandhi's resignation were he to offer it".

He added that the leadership was not the reason for the party's resounding defeat. "It's the other reasons we need to work on," he said.

A local party spokesman in Lucknow, Brijendra Kumar Singh, explained that, in their view, the problem was not with Gandhi power, but with party infighting and poor campaign choices.

"There are weaknesses in the party structure, there's infighting within the ranks, we were late getting off the ground with our campaign, and our attempts - though unsuccessful - to join the alliance of regional parties in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were a bad idea."

Congress leadership is - so far - not laying this defeat at the feet of Mr Gandhi, but in the organisation and campaign strategy of the party as a whole.

Many Congress analysts might privately admit that Rahul Gandhi was on the losing side of an unwinnable personality contest. The biggest roadblock in their way, everyone agrees, was "Brand Modi".

"Even though the prime minister failed to fulfil the promises he made in the last election, he's still able to convince people about the policies of his government," Mr Singh says.

This is not the first time Mr Gandhi has received such a battering at Mr Modi's hands - he was all but written off after the party's worst ever performance in the 2014 elections when they won only 44 seats.

Subsequently, the party also lost several state elections and Mr Gandhi was criticized for being "remote and inaccessible" and was ridiculed on social media as a bumbling, clueless leader prone to gaffes.

He was also criticized by many for his dynastic links to the Nehru-Gandhi family and PM Modi, who comes from a humble background, has repeatedly said that Mr Gandhi had risen to the top not on merit, but because of family connections.

In private conversations, party workers describe Mr Gandhi as a "simple" man who lacks the "wiliness and cunning of his rival". So is this seen as a failure of the man or the Gandhi brand?

The illustrious family name has lost some sheen in recent years, especially with urban voters and the aspirational youth for whom the contributions of Nehru and Indira are things that happened in the distant past, and are no longer relevant to them.

Their reference point is more recent - the 10 years of the Congress rule from 2004 to 2014 when the government was mired in controversies and corruption. Thursday's mauling shows that voter confidence in Congress is still low and Mr Gandhi failed to sell his vision to them.

Gandhi's reborn

But the party machinery does not blame him or his name for their loss. One party worker suggested what Mr Gandhi needs is an "Amit Shah" - a reference to the BJP party president who's helped craft Mr Modi's winning strategy and has been given credit for the party's victory - first in Gujarat and now in Delhi.

It's unlikely that they will blame Mr Gandhi - at least openly - for the debacle. If the past is any indication, they will rally behind him.

In the past two years Mr Gandhi's career graph had also begun to improve: he'd emerged from the shadows and was wearing his political skin with more ease. His social media campaigns became smarter and he began arguing convincingly about the government's controversial currency ban, a lack of employment opportunities, growing intolerance in the country and the slowdown in the economy.

He was increasingly seen as setting the agenda with a combative campaign and in December when he led the Congress to victory in important state elections in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, many said he had brought the party back into the reckoning. And then in February, when his charismatic sister Priyanka Gandhi joined him in Uttar Pradesh, it seemed like the Gandhis were on to something.

There has long been a school of thought among some Congress enthusiasts that Priyanka might be the Gandhi to save the political dynasty. For whatever reason, she has been reluctant to take on that mantle. The siblings are believed to be close and it is unlikely she will be part of any plan that would see him pushed out. But she may well take on a bigger role in working with and supporting him.

In the end, this is being seen in Congress as a broad failure of party vision, an inability to connect with an India that Mr Modi has both defined and taken the pulse of.

"If you look at our manifesto, it's the best. The policies we had announced, the promises we made were top notch. But what we had hoped for from the voters, the support we had hoped for, that didn't happen," says state party official Virendra Madan.

Mr Madan says the party leadership in Delhi - as well as the state level - will hold meetings in the next few days to figure out what went wrong. "It's time for soul searching. To assess where we went wrong."

But, he says, that no matter how decisive the election result, there's no question of the party not standing by its leadership.

"It's not just Mr Gandhi who has lost. Lots of other leaders also did not win. And elections come and go, you win some and you lose some. Remember in 1984, BJP was down to just two seats? Didn't they make a comeback? We will also come back," he says.

Pay heed to the PM's message

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to the newly-elected Members of Parliament from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday, he sent out a stern message. Just last week, Akash Vijayvargiya -- a MLA in Madhya Pradesh, and the son of the influential party general secretary and West Bengal in-charge, Kailash Vijayvargiya -- was captured on camera hitting an Indore municipal official with a bat. He was unrepentant, and supporters lauded him as a hero. But the PM was not happy. And he made it clear at the parliamentary party meeting, linking the incident to the larger issues of party discipline, civil behaviour, and the need to meet responsibilities.

Mr Modi made three categorical points. On the Indore incident itself, he said this kind of behaviour was unacceptable; it deserved the harshest condemnation, and the lineage of the person committing the act did not matter. He even hinted at disciplinary action. Two, Mr Modi had a message for the party workers who cheered Mr Vijayvargiya on. The PM emphasised that if a mistake had been made, it needed to be accompanied with regret rather than jubilation. Three, Mr Modi went beyond the incident to remind the MPs of their own duties. During the first session of the 17th Lok Sabha, many party MPs skipped parliamentary proceedings -- this, Modi said, pained him

deeply. And he told them that this kind of behaviour would be counter productive, for ministerial selection is done on the basis of merit, where performance in parliament is a parameter.

Mr Modi's speech must be seen along with his first address to parliamentarians of the National Democratic Alliance when he was elected the leader of the coalition soon after the results. Then, he highlighted the need for responsible behaviour, warned against brash utterances, and told the MPs to avoid getting enmeshed with murky power dealings in Delhi. Put together, it is clear that the PM does not want a repeat of some of the mistakes committed by the party rank and file during his first term in office. Given the huge mandate the BJP has won this time, there is a real danger of arrogance seeping in. The election was won on Mr Modi's name. And he is acutely aware that any misbehaviour will reflect poorly on his leadership. The fact that he is investing political capital in instilling a sense of discipline in the party is laudable. But warnings themselves are not enough. Modi must walk the talk and ensure action when redlines are crossed -- be it in cases of violent behaviour or provocative speech -- for that will be the big deterrent.

Gandhi departs but uncertainty in the Congress persists

Rahul Gandhi formally announced his resignation publicly as the president of the Congress on Wednesday. In a farewell note, posted on Twitter, Mr Gandhi said that he is stepping down, taking responsibility for the party's loss in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. He had, soon after the polls, told the Congress Working Committee of his intent to resign. But the CWC passed a resolution urging him to stay on. Other Congress leaders have tried hard to persuade him to change his mind, but Mr Gandhi has stayed firm.

Opting out of party presidency is Mr Gandhi's call. But what is disturbing



in the note is a reluctance to introspect, candidly, about the reasons for the electoral loss. He seems to suggest that victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is a result of (only) misuse of institutions and tremendous financial resources. This newspaper has been critical of the Election Commission's conduct during the polls. But it is hard to deny that the election outcome reflected the deep faith a large section of the

electorate had in Narendra Modi; the success of his welfare schemes and narrative of nationalism; the inability of the opposition to mount a counter narrative that resonated with citizens and its organisational hollowness and outmoded categories of politics. These are the areas the Congress will have to work on if it wants to mount a challenge.

A wrong diagnosis will not lead to the correct prescription.

Mr Gandhi can have his assessment of what he sees as the dangers of the BJP's rule - but then should he not have led from the front? It is also not clear what Mr

Gandhi's role will be in the future party set up. He makes it clear that he will continue to fight for his idea of India as a soldier of the Congress. But given his pre-eminent status - even without a formal office - will it not result in the emergence of multiple power centres in the party? The resignation may have ended one phase in Congress' turbulent politics, but the next phase may well be more challenging.

Blue State Blues: Trump's Fourth of July Speech Was Patriotism over Politics

President Donald Trump did more than defy his critics with his memorable Fourth of July address from the Lincoln Memorial on Thursday evening.

He likely established what will become an annual tradition - one later presidents, decades from now, will continue to observe. And he gave the American people the tribute that we have long deserved, but which we have somehow been unable, until now, to give ourselves, too afraid to pass along to the next generation. The president's opponents said that his revamped Fourth of July celebrations smacked of authoritarianism. They said that the ceremonial use of tanks in a parade, as well as the flyovers from every branch of the U.S. armed forces, were somehow un-American - even though they had certainly been used before.

They said it was the height of narcissism for Trump to deliver a speech on Independence Day, that he would be turning the day into campaign commercial. Former vice president Joe Biden said, prior to the speech, that the event had been "designed more to stroke Trump's ego than celebrate American ideals." (This from a politician who served under Barack Obama, who not only made virtually every speech about himself, but dared to re-design the presidential seal in his own image.) Biden could not have been more wrong. Trump's speech was all about the country - its heroes, its people, and its democratic ideals. Trump, in the rain, addressed the nation and re-told the heroic story of its founding. "With a

single sheet of parchment, and 56 signatures, America began the greatest political journey in human history," Trump said, recalling the battles that followed to secure the freedom for which the Founders had fought. He went on to tell the story of American success - not just in politics and war, but also in science, medicine, technology, industry, exploration, culture, and civil rights. Trump boldly spoke the truths that have been suppressed in our media and on our campuses. His speech was not only moving, but necessary. The history he related, and the achievements he celebrated, are unknown to a generation raised to see our country as flawed, if not evil. The New York Times declares today that America is not the "greatest," but "just OK"; Vice tells readers America "has always been bad." That is the new poisonous orthodoxy; Trump provided the antidote. More than that, Trump celebrated the ordinary people who constantly renew our country's potential. He acknowledged Tina "Angel" Belcher, who "turns her tiny kitchen into a disaster relief center" for hurricane victims; he thanked Sister Deidre Byrne for aiding the wounded on September 11, 2001; he honored Clarence Henderson, who led the historic sit-in at the Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960; he also praised the suffragette movement.



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Trump and Kim have opened a door on North Korea

And they need to keep it ajar for enough time for a real road map to be drafted

The roller coaster that passes for the diplomatic negotiations between the United States and North Korea is moving again. President Donald Trump and his North Korean counterpart, Kim Jong-un, agreed to restart negotiations. Summitry with President Trump has a large similarity to quantum uncertainty. The meeting of the two in Singapore went well; their last meeting in Hanoi was a disaster. Mr Trump has kicked off this round, becoming the first serving US president to set foot on North Korean soil.

Mr Trump deserves some credit for his unorthodox

diplomacy. The traditional process of protracted negotiations and involving four other countries had accomplished nothing for years. Mr Kim, on the other hand, was not prepared to accept the status quo. His provocations during the spring of last year - personally abusing Mr Trump, threatening to fire missiles at the US - led many in Northeast Asia to believe war was imminent. But the North Korean leader's out-of-the-box ways seem to have converged with Mr Trump's dislike for the established way of doing things and confidence in his own

personal charm.

The Hanoi summit failed because Mr Trump demanded North Korea commit to denuclearisation before the US would lift sanctions. Mr Kim, unsurprisingly, rejected the offer. Presumably, the two sides will now move towards making calibrated sets of concessions, though the fundamental difference over what a "denuclearised" North Korea remains. This is not dissimilar to what conventional negotiations would have looked like. But this remains diplomacy from the top and both leaders should be careful to not let the process



become hostage to their personal concerns. Mr Trump, for example, is impatient for a success because of his approaching re-election. The stakes are high. The Korean peninsula

is a real nuclear flashpoint and its primary destabiliser, North Korea, is not prepared to let things lie. If the present talks fail, Mr Kim will return to firing missiles and detonating

nuclear bombs. The two leaders have opened a door that wasn't there before; they need to keep it ajar for enough time for a real road map to be drafted.

Amit Shah brings a new perspective on Kashmir

But the state needs a combination of development and justice

Over the past week, both houses of Parliament have witnessed a spirited, robust debate on Jammu and Kashmir. The context was the decision to extend President's Rule in the state by six more months (which needed legislative sanction) and the extension of reservations to citizens living near the international border in the state. But this became an opportunity for a wider debate on the particular situation in Jammu and Kashmir - its history; its relationship with the Indian Union; violence and terrorism; the role of Pakistan; New Delhi's mistakes; the alienation in the valley; the diversity within the state; and democratic practice in the state.

The most important intervention came from home minister Amit Shah. Irrespective of whether one agreed or disagreed, there was little doubt that Mr Shah spoke with utmost clarity and conviction, and

laid out the Centre's thinking on Jammu and Kashmir. He reiterated that the state was an integral part of India, a position everyone in both houses agreed with. He articulated a tough line on terror and said that the Centre would not spare any element which sought to engineer violence in Kashmir, including by going across the border if necessary. This was in line with the approach of the Narendra Modi government in its first term. He then expanded the definition of democracy, and said that by holding elections at the panchayat level, the Centre had empowered the grassroots. He also sought to assuage apprehensions that the extension of President's Rule was a plot to rule the state, without polls.

But it was the larger ideological approach that distinguished Mr Shah. Unlike the Congress and certain other political parties, which are comfortable with treating

Jammu and Kashmir as a special case, the Bharatiya Janata Party has always pushed for a more integrationist approach that entails treating it as just another state of the Union. This is why it is against special provisions, which Mr Shah reiterated were "temporary". The second distinction is that Mr Shah held the Congress responsible for the situation in the Valley, including the reluctance to push across what is now the Line of Control back in 1948 and accepting a ceasefire,



going to the United Nations and rigging elections. Each of Mr Shah's points can invite a counter. A tough policy must not mean a licence to security forces to commit human rights violations. The call to take

power away from "three families" must not undermine the National Conference and Peoples Democratic Party, both of which have spoken for India at a difficult time. The focus on only development cannot be a

substitute to the issues of justice. But it is clear that Mr Shah will remain deeply invested in the state, and finding a lasting solution to the Kashmir issue may well be a part of what he sees as his legacy.

With tanks and jets, Donald Trump celebrates US Independence Day

US President Donald Trump on Thursday celebrated America's Independence Day with an unprecedented display of country's military might at a parade in the national capital. Trump became the first US President in over 70 years to deliver an Independence Day address which the Opposition Democratic leaders criticised for what they

alleged politicisation of the country's declaration of independence from Britain on July 4, 1776. Joined by First Lady Melania Trump, Vice President Mike Pence, his cabinet colleagues and top military leadership, Trump in his address to thousands of people said this was an occasion to salute the US soldiers and generals. "Today we come together as one nation. With this very

special salute to America. We celebrate our history by people, and the heroes who proudly defend our flag, the brave men and women of the United States military," said the US President. In his 'Salute to America' address, Trump said the same American spirit that emboldened country's founders has kept its people strong throughout its history. "To this day that

spirit runs through the veins of every American patriot. It lives on in each and every one of you here today. It is the spirit, daring and defiance, excellence and adventure, courage and confidence, loyalty and love that built this country into the most exceptional nation in the history of the world, and our nation is stronger today than it ever was before.

Gandhi departs but uncertainty in the Congress persists

Rahul Gandhi formally announced his resignation publicly as the president of the Congress on Wednesday. In a farewell note, posted on Twitter, Mr Gandhi said that he is stepping down, taking responsibility for the party's loss in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. He had, soon after the polls, told the Congress Working Committee of his intent to resign. But the CWC passed a resolution urging him to stay on. Other Congress leaders have tried hard to persuade him to change his mind, but Mr Gandhi has stayed firm. Opting out of party

presidency is Mr Gandhi's call. But what is disturbing in the note is a reluctance to introspect, candidly, about the reasons for the electoral loss. He seems to suggest that victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is a result of (only) misuse of institutions and tremendous financial resources. This newspaper has been critical of the Election Commission's conduct during the polls. But it is hard to deny that the election outcome reflected the deep faith a large section of the electorate had in Narendra Modi; the success of his welfare schemes

and narrative of nationalism; the inability of the opposition to mount a counter narrative that resonated with citizens and its organisational hollowness and outmoded categories of politics. These are the areas the Congress will have to work on if it wants to mount a challenge. A wrong diagnosis will not lead to the correct prescription.

Mr Gandhi can have his assessment of what he sees as the dangers of the BJP's rule - but then should he not have led from the front? It is also not clear what Mr Gandhi's role will be in the future party set up. He makes



it clear that he will continue to fight for his idea of India as a soldier of the Congress. But given his pre-eminent status - even without a formal office - will it not result in the emergence of

multiple power centres in the party? The resignation may have ended one phase in Congress' turbulent politics, but the next phase may well be more challenging.

What India must do to promote national security

With the din of elections over and India having a new government, there could not be a more opportune time for the new dispensation to ensure that important pointers from transborder actions like Balakot do not get obliterated but are acted upon - after all, they give an even handed political heft to all. It could indeed serve as an outline of a blueprint for the future.

First, while it was heartening to see everyone praise the Indian Air Force after Balakot, the bitter war of chest-thumping and credit capturing between political parties that followed, with some even questioning whether the strike had taken place at all, was most unfortunate. Such events do propel security dialogue to the forefront, but military operations remain the preserve of the

government for ordering them and the armed forces for carrying them out. They cannot be politicised by any political party claiming ownership to garner votes or worse, glorification of personalities. This has grave ramifications. It distorts the apolitical fibre of our armed forces and is a dangerous portent for national security. Let our political brethren not forget that apolitical armed forces are the strongest support to the edifice of democracy.

Second, while the government's decision to strike and effectively combat Pakistan retaliation was the right one, between 2015 and 2018, Gurdaspur, Pathankot, Nagrota and Sunjuwan terror attacks went without a response and?accountability. Is there an institutionalised decision making mechanism in place at all? India

is perhaps the only major democracy where the armed forces headquarters are outside the apex governmental structure and, therefore, not institutionally part of the decision making process. It is imperative that we have an Act of Parliament which mandates the creation of a permanent Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), thereby making the armed forces a part of the decision making mechanism for cogent single point military advice to the government. It must be underlined that the Defence Planning Committee recently created under the chairmanship of National Security Adviser (NSA) has been established through an administrative order and thus remains unaccountable to Parliament. But it cannot replace the idea of a permanent CDS created by statute.



Third, the climate of elections pushed national security to the fore as an electoral issue, if rhetoric and party manifestos were anything to go by. Political parties need to take note that having spelt out big ticket plans and promises, public discourse is going to get sharper and better informed.

If their manifestos offer to "speed up purchase of outstanding defence equipment and weapons or ensure defence spending is increased to meet the requirement of the armed forces," then questions regarding the time plot for implementation and budgetary support cannot be faulted.

Modi must walk the talk on water conservation

In the first Mann Ki Baat programme after assuming office in his second term, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday spoke on one of the biggest challenges facing India today: an acute water crisis. There are three key points to take away from his speech. One, people must help the government in its water conservation efforts. Second, experts should share the knowledge of traditional methods of water conservation. And third, there is no one-size-fits-all method for conserving water. The PM

added that he has written to all gram pradhans (village chiefs) on the importance of water conservation and how to take steps to create awareness on the subject across rural India. The PM's speech was perfectly timed. India is facing a grave water crisis and the situation may deteriorate if the monsoon is inadequate. This is an appropriate time to impress upon our citizens the need to conserve water. According to the India Meteorological Department, the country had its driest June in five years because the monsoon rains

were delayed. The impact of a bad monsoon will be disastrous. About 55% of India's arable land is rain-fed, and agriculture makes up about 15% of Asia's third-largest economy. Farmers had planted crops on 14.7 million hectares as on June 28, down almost 10% from the previous year, the farm ministry's data showed. This crisis, however, is not new; it has been brewing for years: According to a 2018 NITI Aayog report, 600 million Indians already face high to extreme water stress and about 200,000 people die every year because of inadequate access to safe water. By 2030,



the country's water demand is projected to be twice the available supply, implying severe water scarcity for millions and an eventual 6% loss in the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

While the Centre has announced the creation of a new ministry (Jal Shakti ministry) to streamline water-related issues, it must act on two other projects without delay to tackle the crisis:

What the US-Iran tensions mean for India

The recent spike in tensions between the United States (US) and Iran has a familiar ring to it. But that does not reduce the risks for the two parties as well as the other countries in the region and beyond it. Hydrocarbon flows through the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian or Arabian Gulf have been a permanent cause of worry when the US-Iran relations have moved into the high-tension zone. The US accusation that Iran had caused or inspired attacks on oil tankers, its announcement of additional naval deployment, and the shooting down of a US pilotless aircraft by Iran make the situation far more tense than it has ever been in the recent past.

The recent round of jousting between the US and Iran is the latest in the chain of events that began with Washington's withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Programme of Action (JCPOA), an agreement that Iran had reached with the

P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, United States and Germany) on July 14, 2015. The agreement was the high point of US-Iran efforts to repair their historically flawed relationship. Under the JCPOA, Iran had committed to limit its nuclear programme and related activities. The US, in turn, eased sanctions. Moderates in both capitals prevailed over the hardliners. But this changed with the election of President Donald Trump. His decision to withdraw from the JCPOA and the reinstate sanctions on Iran in May 2018 marked the end of that process. For the US and its allies in the region - particularly Saudi Arabia and Israel - containment of Iran is the key to regional stability. For Iran's leadership, the current situation is only a replay of the pressures they have faced since 1979 with regional and non-regional players acting together to roll back the gains of the Iranian revolution.

To the US and its allies, the consolidation of the Hizbullah in

Lebanon, the emergence of the first major Shia State in the Arab world in almost a millennium (Iraq), Syria's resistance (with Russian help) to ward off the pressure for a regime change, and Saudi Arabia's longest-ever military engagement in Yemen exemplify Iran's expanding influence in the Arab world. Each of these Iranian geopolitical gains has been achieved in the face of determined opposition and also as a consequence of policy failures or misjudgments by the US and its allies.

In Trump's worldview, the JCPOA was a flawed effort and Iran's capacity to harness technology for its nuclear weapons programme will give to the Tehran-led Shia crescent an unstoppable momentum and power.

For Iran, the issues are equally generic: the intrinsic hegemonism of the US in West and South West Asia and Iran's traditional enemies using this to settle regional scores. In Tehran's worldview, Washington's



unwillingness to accept the revolution of 1979 is the fundamental cause of the latest and also the earlier crisis concerning Iran. The fact that US?unilaterally has walked out of the nuclear agreement has also hardened attitudes in Iran. And the US sanctions do hurt, particularly Washington's recent decision to impose sanctions on countries that import Iranian crude oil.

The central question for India is how to navigate through these

countervailing demands and protect its own interests. Maintaining good relations with Iran and prioritising our energy security is one pole. The other is balancing this with our vital stakes with the Arabian Gulf states and the US. The current situation reflects the dilemmas India faces in the absence of a larger cooperative framework among the countries in the Arabian Sea littoral, which is home to so many of our vital interests.

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India should aim for a digital non-alignment

Countries like India should explore the combination of a geopolitical approach of digital non-alignment, with a practical one of diligently promoting open digital value chains. Digital non-alignment implies deliberate economic and political investments to avoid getting too closely hooked to either of the digital superpower's digital products and services

(News Agencies)--The United States' blacklisting of the Chinese company Huawei - since reversed - represents an important milestone as the world splits digitally around its two digital superpowers, the US and China. Last year, the US disallowed Alibaba's takeover of Moneygram and later embargoed US supplies to the mobile company ZTE. Amazon and Google recently affirmed their loyalty to the US military. China's corporations in any case closely follow the State's directions.

The digital world's centre is mostly taken to be the US. But according to a leaked US government document, if China dominates telecommunication globally - and Huawei indeed tops in 5G technology, it "will win politically, economically, and militarily". China is also closing in on the Artificial Intelligence (AI) gap, as reports emerge that not only China produces more AI research, its quality is also set

to soon surpass that of the US's. Not just geopolitical rivals, even big digital corporations try to avoid depending on another company for crucial digital supplies. Global digital value chains are therefore getting vertically consolidated, as AI companies begin to even make their own chips.

Global digital offerings would increasingly organise, and split, around the two global digital poles of US and China. They are also becoming more integrated right from computing chips, network equipment and user devices to software, applications and AI. Every other country will have to choose between the two digital superpowers as its primary digital supplier, and get increasingly locked into it.

It is scary to imagine such a digitally split world. Countries will face acute digital dependencies on their respective digital overlord (US or China), as the latter controls data-driven digital intelligence running their various sectors. With the outlook being

so dismal, countries like India should explore the combination of a geopolitical approach of digital non-alignment, with a practical one of diligently promoting open digital value chains.

Digital non-alignment implies deliberate economic and political investments to avoid getting too closely hooked to either of the digital superpower's digital products and services. Its technical, policy-legal and business model complement is to establish open digital value chains.

Vertical integrations must be checked through open technical standards, strong competition regulation, and other policies like mandating data sharing. This will require close cooperation among the digitally non-aligned countries, including, hopefully, European ones.

But most importantly, India needs a strong domestic digital industry in most, if not all, key links of the digital value chain.



We are increasingly being left with digital economy's physical elements - cars, drivers, logistics, manufacturing, hospitals, schools, and so on. The data driven digital brain at the top of the digital value chain in every sector is either in the US (largely) or China. Just think of the Uber application extracting our data, using it to control interactions between our car drivers and commuters, and making a neat 25% cut on all payments, without actually even having to be in India. Similar

will be repeated in every single sector. Our much vaunted IT or digital strength is contributory - and up for sale - and not controlling, whether as software coders or digital start-ups eager for US or Chinese buyouts.

What is required is a strong and clear-headed digital industrial policy, which aims foremost at the layer of highest value: data. After all, the most important data needed to manage various sectors in India is local - arising from us and about us.

Time to defuse US-Iran tensions

(News Agencies)-The United States and Iran appear to be recalibrating their positions after edging closer to the brink over the past few weeks and stoking fears of a conflict that would only exacerbate the already fraught situation in West Asia. Following the attacks on six tankers in regional waters and the shooting down of a US drone, President Donald Trump ramped up the pressure with sanctions while Iran threatened to begin enriching more uranium than it is allowed under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the 2015 nuclear deal. Clearly, Mr Trump's recent revelation that he decided against ordering military strikes on Iran is an indication that the US is evaluating its options for pressuring Iran to return to the table to negotiate a new nuclear deal. There are also indications that Iran may not immediately go ahead with its threat to breach the limits on uranium enrichment following efforts by China and European powers to bypass the US sanctions which have

crippled the Iranian economy. But in a reflection of the lingering tensions, the US last week deployed F-22 stealth jets to Qatar for the first time as part of the build-up of its forces in the Persian Gulf. As part of efforts to address Iran's economic problems, the European Union has said that INSTEX, its mechanism for financial transactions, which will bypass the US sanctions, is operational but it remains to be seen whether this will make companies confident enough to do business again with Iran. More importantly, Iran and its European interlocutors have been unable to find a way to address Tehran's demand for oil exports to be resumed. India has been among the countries that have been calling on the US and Iran to de-escalate tensions. New Delhi has compelling reasons for its stance; any conflict in the Persian Gulf could affect the more than eight million expatriates in the region and curtail or disrupt energy supplies at a time when the Indian economy cannot afford any shocks.

How a social justice tool became a means to grab land in India's forests

(News Agencies)- The Forest Rights Act (FRA) was originally meant to redress historical injustice to genuine forest dwellers by conferring rights to traditionally occupied forest land. Following a multi-tier verification process, individual and community rights to approximately 72,000 sq km of forest land have been granted to claimants since 2008. However, the process has also unearthed about 19 lakh ineligible or bogus claims, clearly showing that the Act has been used as a Trojan horse by opportunistic land grabbers. Thanks to high-resolution satellite imagery, such encroachments can now be easily exposed. On February 13, in response to a Public Interest Litigation by three wildlife conservation organisations, the Supreme Court directed state governments to recover all forest land occupied illegally since the FRA was enacted. Subsequently, the court directed

that evictions be put "on hold" till details on procedure of rejections are examined. While the forest rights bill originally envisaged only the protection of Scheduled



Tribes, the goal posts were subsequently shifted to include a huge number of undefined claimants characterised as Other Traditional Forest Dwellers. Secondly, the cutoff date for eligibility was arbitrarily shifted from October 25, 1980, to December 13, 2005, opening the door to lakhs of new claimants. Thirdly, the bill's original intent to only provide provisional rights to people living within national parks and sanctuaries, with a five-year

time frame to resettle them outside with due compensation, never made it into the Act. National parks and sanctuaries are the only safe refuges for a host of critically endangered species that cannot survive in the face of relentless hunting by local people, commercial exploitation of forest products, and livestock grazing. In a concession to this ecological reality, the FRA provides for the declaration of Critical Wildlife Habitats: safe havens where animals can live free of conflict with humans. Sadly, however, not one sq km has been declared as a Critical Wildlife Habitat. While there can be no argument that economic development has played a major role in deforestation, government data reveals that whereas forest land diverted for development from 1980 to 2016 totals 6.33 lakh hectares, forest land granted as individual rights under the FRA between 2008 and 2018 adds up to about 19 lakh hectares.

West Bengal renaming: Mamata writes to PM after Centre denies proposal

Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai in a written response to a question from MP Ritabrata Banerjee said the Centre has not cleared the name 'Bangla' for West Bengal.

(News Agencies) - The Centre Wednesday informed Rajya Sabha that it has not yet given its nod to change the name of West Bengal to 'Bangla' as proposed by the state government following which Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee dashed off a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for expediting the matter.

Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai in a written response to a question from MP Ritabrata Banerjee said the Centre has not cleared the name 'Bangla' for West Bengal. Changing a state's name requires constitutional amendment and it is done after taking into consideration all relevant factors, he said.

On July 26 last year, the West Bengal assembly had passed a resolution unanimously to change the name of the state to 'Bangla' in the three most-

spoken languages -- Bengali, Hindi and English -- and had sent the proposal to the Home Ministry.

It suggested 'Paschimbanga' in



2011, but it was turned down by the central government.

In 2016, it proposed 'Bengal' in English, 'Bangla' in Bengali and 'Bangaal' in Hindi, which was also turned down. Finally, it proposed the name 'Bangla'.

When the earlier proposals were received, there was objection

from the central government that suggested the name 'Bangla' had similarity to Bangladesh and it would be difficult to differentiate the two at international forums, a senior official privy to the developments said.

The 2018 proposal was also referred to the Ministry of External Affairs for its view.

The move to rename is aimed at climbing the alphabetical sequence of state names in which West Bengal appears last in the list now.

A senior state official said Banerjee requested the prime minister to do the needful to change the state's name to 'Bangla'. The last time the name of a state was changed was in 2011, when Orissa became Odisha.

Bombay was renamed Mumbai in 1995, Madras as Chennai in 1996 and Calcutta as Kolkata in 2011.

Sedition law will not be repealed, says Amit Shah's ministry



(News Agencies) - The Union Home Ministry clarified on Wednesday that the contentious sedition law will not be scrapped. The Minister of State for Home, Nityanand Rai told the Parliament that there was "need to retain the provisions to effectively combat anti-national, secessionist and terrorist elements." Section 124 A of the Indian Penal Code, popularly known as the sedition law, has been at the centre of political debate due to its alleged misuse to curb essential freedoms enjoyed by citizens--like freedom of speech--under the

constitution. The Congress party had made scrapping the law, a central piece of its poll manifesto and was attacked by the rival BJP for taking an alleged anti-national stance. The Prime Minister had in his election campaign questioned Congress' intention in opposing the law which the government sees as an effective instrument against alleged anti-national elements. The sedition law, which provides for a minimum 3-years jail and a maximum life term, has been invoked several times.

New commercial arm to boost Isro in industry

The role of the organisation will be similar to that of the existing Antrix Corporation, which develops satellites and provides commercial launches.



A public sector enterprise called New Space India Limited (NSIL) will be set up in Bengaluru "to tap the benefits of research and development" carried out by the Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro), finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said presenting the Union Budget 2019-20 on Friday.

The role of the organisation will be similar to that of the existing Antrix Corporation, which

develops satellites and provides commercial launches. NSIL, which will be wholly owned by the department of space, will coordinate with the industry for production and transfer of technologies developed by Isro. "India has emerged as a major space power with the technology and ability to launch satellites and other space products. Time has come to harness this ability commercially. NSIL has been

incorporated as the new commercial arm of the department of space to tap the benefits of the research and development carried out by Isro. The company will spearhead the commercialisation, transfer of technologies, and marketing of space products," Sitharaman said. The announcement comes at a time when India is aiming to set up its own space station by 2030.

While the company was allotted an initial budgetary support of Rs 10 crore, there will be a total outlay of Rs 100 crore for it, said Suma Devakiram, chairman and managing director of NSIL.

The focus would be on commercialisation of India's workhorse rocket Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), Small Satellite Launch Vehicle, and small satellites for now. It will also be responsible for commercial launches for other countries and private organisations.

"Isro is a research organisation and cannot market its own products. With the increasing pace of activity, there was a need for the company to commercialise products developed by Isro," said Devakiram.

The government will also set up a National Research Foundation to consolidate research funding from across ministries. "We propose to establish NRF to assimilate the research grants being given by the various ministries. NRF will ensure

that the overall research ecosystem in the country is strengthened, with focus on our national priorities and basic science without duplication of efforts and expenditure," Sitharaman said.

Officials say the move is aimed at consolidating research funding. "This is a positive step, which will consolidate research funding and encourage more collaborative research," said Ashutosh Sharma, secretary, department of science.

Scientists fear that a single agency would limit the funding options. "...The current ecosystem allows a scientist to approach a different funding agency if the project is not approved by one. There have been several instances where groundbreaking research was not published by a particular journal and the researcher went to another one; funding is also similar," said Soumitra Banerjee, general secretary of Breakthrough Science Society and professor at Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research, Kolkata.

'At times I stood alone': Rahul Gandhi also takes a swipe at Cong leaders

Rahul Gandhi, after May 25, had limited interactions with party colleagues and in all his meetings remained adamant on stepping down.

(News Agencies)- Congress president Rahul Gandhi took a sharp dig at his party colleagues for the party's rout in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, saying he at times stood completely alone in the fight against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS).

"I personally fought the Prime Minister, the RSS and the institutions they have captured with all my being. I fought because I love India. And I fought to defend the ideals India was built upon. At times, I stood completely alone and am extremely proud of it," he wrote in his four-page farewell note.

"I have learned so much from the spirit and dedication of our workers and party members, men and women who have taught me about love and decency," Gandhi added. Upset over the party's dismal performance in the general elections managing to win just 52 seats compared to 303 seats for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Gandhi had offered to resign at the Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting on May 25.

He had also asked the CWC to appoint a new chief but the party's highest decision making body rejected the offer and passed a resolution, authorising him to revamp the organisation. It was in that fractious CWC meeting that Gandhi slammed the veterans for "placing the interests" of their sons above the party. Gandhi also mentioned that some leaders had even lost



the election from their strongholds even as he criticised a section of the GenNext for hankering for posts.

After May 25, Gandhi had limited interactions with party colleagues and in all his meetings remained adamant on stepping down.

Even party's five chief ministers Captain Amarinder Singh (Punjab), Ashok Gehlot (Rajasthan), Kamal Nath

(Madhya Pradesh), Bhupesh Baghel (Chhattisgarh) and V Narayanasamy (Puducherry) failed to persuade Gandhi to reconsider his decision during their nearly two-hour long meeting on Monday. Several Congress functionaries too submitted their resignations to put pressure on him to change his mind but Rahul Gandhi remained firm.

Tribal woman gang-raped in moving truck in Bhopal; 3 held

(Agencies)- A tribal woman was allegedly gangraped by three men in a moving truck in Madhya Pradesh's Bhopal late on Monday, police said. A first information report (FIR) was registered on Tuesday and all the accused have been arrested, said police. The men have been identified as residents of Kolukhedi area in Bhopal. Khajuri police station in-charge Upendra Bhati said the woman was returning to her village in Sehore district with her husband late on Monday night. The couple took a lift in a truck in Khajuri area, Bhati said. "The truck was being driven by Shubham. The other two

accused Bittu and Akash were also present in the truck. When they started sexually harassing the woman and her husband objected the accused stopped the truck and threw him out of the truck. Later, they raped the woman and dropped her in Bairagarh area of Bhopal," Bhati said. The woman reached her home on Tuesday morning and later registered a complaint with the police. "The woman's husband took the help of the police to search for his wife. When he didn't find her, he returned home where he found his wife injured and badly. Later, a formal FIR was lodged," he added.

Waterlogging outside Uddhav Thackeray's Mumbai residence 'Matoshree'



(Agencies)- In an embarrassment for the Shiv Sena which controls the Mumbai civic body, waterlogging was witnessed outside party chief Uddhav Thackeray's residence overnight. The road outside 'Matoshree', Thackeray's bungalow in Kalanagar colony in suburban Bandra, was under knee-deep water. The Sena has been ruling in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the country's richest civic body, for over two decades. But as rains threw the life in the megapolis out of gear, crippling rail, road and air

traffic, the civic body and the Sena came in for flak, especially because the BMC officials had assured that there would be no waterlogging this monsoon. NCP leader Nawab Malik took a jibe at the Sena after his own residence in nearby Kurla area got flooded.

Sharing images of the inside of his house on LBS Road with he himself standing in knee-deep water, the NCP leader tweeted, "Karun Dakhavla (We did it (what has been promised))," tagging Uddhav Thackeray, the office of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and the BMC. "Karun Dakhavla" was the Sena's campaign slogan before a civic election a few years ago. According to the India Meteorological Department, the city witnessed the highest rainfall -- 375.2 mm -- in the 24- hour period before 8.30 am Tuesday since the July 26, 2005, deluge.

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Centre asks parched states to finish drought proofing

The Union rural development ministry has written to all states with water stressed blocks and asked them to finish incomplete drought proofing and water management related works, an official familiar with the matter said.

(By our staff reporter)- The ministry of rural development has written to all states with water stressed blocks to finish incomplete drought proofing and water management related works and prioritise new works to recharge groundwater this monsoon.

This follows a Jal Shakti Ministry circular that identified 1,592 water stressed blocks out of which 1,160 are rural blocks that immediately need to take up water conservation activities. MGNREGA works have been identified to be the main mode of intervention for these blocks.

Tamil Nadu is the most water stressed with 541 blocks in the category followed by 218 in Rajasthan, 139 in Uttar Pradesh, 137 in Telangana and 111 in Punjab as per data collated by the Central Ground Water Board put out by Jal Ministry.

Jal Ministry launched the Jal Shakti Abhiyan on Monday

following widespread reports of water stress in peninsular and central India but experts say preparatory works should have started way in advance to tide-over the crisis this year.

There is a massive backlog of water conservation and drought proofing works according to data with MoRD. For example, 6.9 lakh water harvesting works taken up in the past few years costing about Rs 5111 crore are either incomplete or suspended while about 53,000 are ready to be utilised.

About 1.4 lakh renovation works of traditional water harvesting structures are ongoing or suspended while only about 7,600 are complete. Similarly, 8.19 lakh drought proofing works are incomplete or suspended while only about 75,000 are ready. "We have asked all states to focus on the blocks identified and complete water related works yet to be completed. We

have also underlined that focus should be only on natural resource management works which includes water related works this year," said Kamran Rizvi, joint secretary, ministry of rural development.

But the renewed effort to capture monsoon water is late. Most works were delayed partly because of Lok Sabha elections in April and May. Despite deficiency in pre-monsoon rains and drought like conditions carried over since last year, the person days generated upto June are much lower than in previous years. "This is mainly because of elections during that period," Rizvi added. "A water campaign is very different from say a Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. Water conservation structures cannot be built when monsoon has already arrived. The government should have planned to complete the works before keeping ongoing water



crisis in mind. Labour will also be busy with agricultural works now," said Rajendra Singh, environmentalist and Jal Biradari founder. "I would recommend that the government come up with a comprehensive law for water security. MGNREGA can be utilized very well for water conservation. The idea of the scheme was to ensure self reliance of villages," he added. In the last couple of years, the focus of MGNREGA was on individual asset creation through Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana projects. Nearly 80% of the individual asset creation works under MGNREGA were PMAY projects where beneficiaries were

paid to build their houses, a senior official at MoRD said. In 2018 when monsoon was below normal at only 91% of long period average the demand for MGNREGA works was the highest compared to previous five years. It was mainly due to rural distress associated with weak monsoon, officials at MoRD said. This year too they are expecting a peaking of demand for MGNREGA works later this year. Standard Precipitation Index (SPI) data from June 2018 to May 2019 released by India Meteorological Department, Pune shows large parts of the country have been severe or extremely dry for more than a year.

Kashmir mosques that blared 'azadi' slogans will now launch war on drugs

Alarmed at the spike in figures and the easy availability of heroin, the Mirwaiz has called for a meeting of non governmental organisations, Imams and doctors next week.



(By our staff reporter)- Mosques across the Kashmir Valley, which blared slogans for "azadi" (independence) in the early nineties, amplifying a separatist movement, will soon be using their loudspeakers to spread a message against the use of drugs, rapidly becoming a huge problem in the state of Jammu & Kashmir.

"The problem has reached alarming proportions and we are

considering excommunicating and ostracising drug peddlers," Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, religious head and chief of the Hurriyat Conference said.

Drug consumption has seen a surge among adolescents and young adults in the state. Official records at the Shri Maharaja Hari Singh (SMHS) Hospital's de-addiction centre point to a worrying spiral: of 342 people admitted for substance abuse

from January 1 to June 20, as many as 309, or 90 percent, were using heroin.

Dr Yasir H Rather, who has been in charge of the de-addiction centre since 2012, is concerned that Kashmir's youth are switching from solvents and soft drugs such as cannabis to hardcore drugs such as heroin and brown sugar. In 2016, only 15% of those admitted were heroin addicts. The proportion jumped to 46% in 2018.

"Continuous conflict and easy availability of drugs has led to a surge. Socio-political instability is impacting mental health. Earlier, the unemployed would turn to drugs but now anyone and everyone is at risk. I know from my patients that heroin is being sold openly in our society," Dr

Rather said.

As many as 20-30% of patients coming to the de-addiction centre are seeking help after "a near death experience", according to Dr Rather. Several others are coming because they have seen their friends dying due to an overdose, he added.

Alarmed at the spike in figures and the easy availability of heroin, the Mirwaiz has called for a meeting of non governmental organisations, Imams and doctors next week. "We need to address this at a war footing. Drug peddlers should be excommunicated. We have mosques in every mohalla and through them, we can access our community. A lot of imams are approaching me regarding the problem. We will put our heads together and come out with a plan."

SMHS's de-addiction centre has run training programmes for teachers and college professors and has also held a workshop with officers of the J&K Police's crime branch. Information elicited from

patients on where they buy their drugs from is being passed on to the police. According to Dr Rather, "Some drug users have progressed to become drug peddlers. Each gram (of heroin) costs approximately Rs 3000 and patients tell us that they steal family money, gadgets and jewellery to buy their supplies, which they also start selling."

A police officer, who did not want to be identified, said heroin was coming in from across the border, from Pakistan and added that supplies into the state have increased because neighbouring Punjab has tightened its law enforcement. "We can't afford to see our young dying. Heroin is ruining their lives," says Dr Rather, who believes stringent law enforcement and social awareness against the menace is the way forward. The Mirwaiz's plan to use Friday sermons to spread awareness is a step forward in that direction.

PIB plans a fact-checking unit to counter fake news

(By our staff reporter) - Countering fake news has been high on the government's agenda; in 2016; the MIB suggested expanding its analytics wing to monitor social media and set up an early warning system for possible flashpoints that the government may be unprepared for.



The Press Information Bureau (PIB), the government's nodal agency for dissemination of information, has decided to set up of a fact checking unit to identify and counter any fake news about the government and its policies circulating on social media platforms. According to a senior functionary aware of the development, the ministry of information and broadcasting (MIB), under which PIB is a unit has approved a plan to counter fake news in real-time. No deadline has been set so far for the project to take

off, but it is expected to pick pace over the coming weeks. Details of how the tracking will be done, and the kind of accounts that will be tracked, weren't immediately available. The fact check unit will have officials from the PIB as well as employees hired on contract to monitor platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Youtube to flag news that is fake and has the potential for creating social unrest. "We will monitor and detect anything related to the government that is blatantly wrong, and put out correct information to ensure that

people do not fall for wrong news," the functionary quoted above said on condition of anonymity. He added that the possibility of penal action against those accounts found circulating fake news has not been discussed. "We had a training session with a Hyderabad-based organisation, which does work in fact checking and putting out data that is meant for the public. Their experts helped us brainstorm on how to proceed with it," the official said. Countering fake news has been high on the government's agenda; in

2016; the MIB suggested expanding its analytics wing to monitor social media and set up an early warning system for possible flashpoints that the government may be unprepared for. The social media analytics wing of the ministry, which is now defunct, scrutinized posts on social media platforms to generate reports for the Prime Minister's Office, the National Security Advisor's Office and various intelligence bureaus, aside from ministries including home affairs, external affairs and defence. In 2018, the ministry constituted a committee to frame rules to regulate news portals and media websites. During the recently concluded Lok Sabha election, the election commission also worked with social media platforms to identify and pull down posts that were fake and could lead to vitiating the elections.

ISRO teams up with Russian company to train Indian astronauts for Gaganyaan

(By our staff reporter) - The Indian Space Research Organisation has signed a contract with a Russian company for selection support, medical examination and space training of Indian astronauts for the country's proposed maiden manned space mission 'Gaganyaan'. The contract was signed by Glavkosmos' first Deputy Director General Natalia Lokteva and Director of Human Space Flight Centre (HSFC) of ISRO S Unnikrishnan Nair on June 27. Glavkosmos is a Russian launch service provider and a subsidiary of the state corporation Roscosmos. In a statement on its website, Glavkosmos said it would render to HSFC services on consulting support of selection of candidates for the Indian astronauts, providing medical

examination and space flight related training for the astronauts selected. "The work will be provided with support of the Federal State Budget Organisation- U A Gagarin Research & Test Cosmonaut Training Center and Institute of Biomedical Problems of the Russian Academy of Sciences," it said. Gearing up for the mission, announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the ISRO has set up a Human Space Flight Centre to facilitate the manned voyage involving a three-member crew. 'Gaganyaan' is set for December 2021 launch and is likely to include a woman astronaut, ISRO Chairman K Sivan had said earlier. The initial training would be in the country but advanced training might be abroad, maybe in Russia, he said.

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गुरुवार को मोदी सरकार ने बड़ा कदम उठाते हुए पाकिस्तान को अपने हिस्से के पानी को वापस लेने का फैसला किया है। इसके साथ ही हम अपने को जम्मू और कश्मीर और पंजाब को वापस लेने का फैसला भी कर चुके हैं। मोदी सरकार ने विश्व के अग्रणी देशों को अपने हिस्से के पानी को वापस लेने का फैसला किया है। इससे पहले विश्व में अनेक देशों ने ऐसा किया है। मोदी सरकार ने अपने हिस्से के पानी को वापस लेने का फैसला किया है। इससे पहले विश्व में अनेक देशों ने ऐसा किया है।

के बाद भारत और पाकिस्तान को तीन-तीन नदियों के पानी को वापस लेने का फैसला किया है। इस समझौते के अनुसार भारत को जम्मू और कश्मीर का पानी और पाक को पंजाब का पानी मिलेगा। इससे पहले विश्व में अनेक देशों ने ऐसा किया है। मोदी सरकार ने अपने हिस्से के पानी को वापस लेने का फैसला किया है। इससे पहले विश्व में अनेक देशों ने ऐसा किया है।

भारतीय-अमेरिकन कम्युनिटी द्वारा घोर निंदा

अमेरिका ने एंट्री देने से किया इंकार

वॉशिंगटन ■ हम हिंदुस्तानी
अमेरिका में भारतीय-अमेरिकन कम्युनिटी ने अमेरिका को भारत में एंट्री देने से इंकार करने का फैसला किया है। इससे पहले विश्व में अनेक देशों ने ऐसा किया है। मोदी सरकार ने अपने हिस्से के पानी को वापस लेने का फैसला किया है। इससे पहले विश्व में अनेक देशों ने ऐसा किया है।

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Looming El-Nino threatens monsoon in India

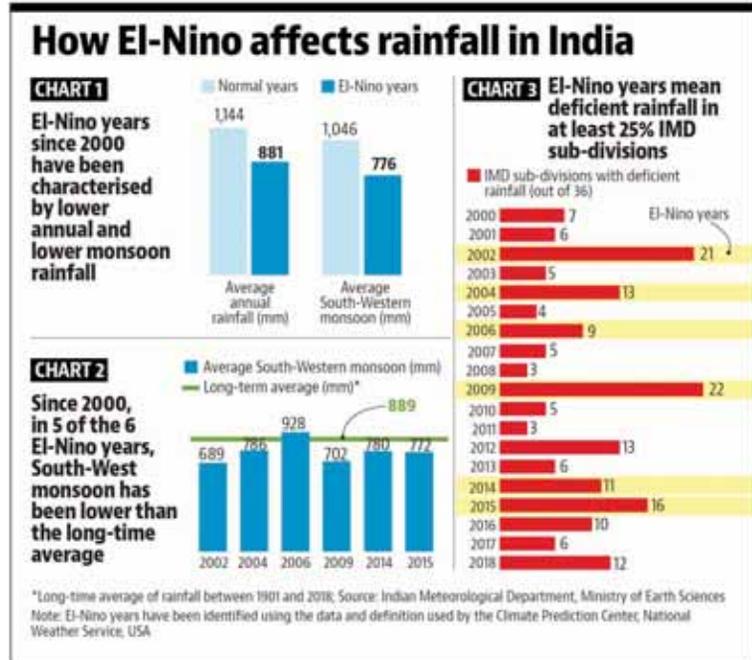
(By our staff reporter) - September) as compared to 2019 has been termed an El-Nino year, and the impact of this abnormal ocean warming phenomenon on the Indian monsoon makes for grim reading. The six years identified as El-Nino years this century have seen an average shortfall of 14% in the South-Western Monsoon rainfall (June to

September) as compared to normal years. While large parts of the country are reeling under heat-wave conditions, the sluggish progress of the South-Western Monsoon, the lifeline for farmers throughout the country, is alarming. According to the India Meteorological Department, June ended with a 33% deficit in monsoon rainfall. While a host of

meteorological factors have contributed to the sluggish monsoon, one of the most significant remains the prevalence of the El-Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO). The ENSO is an abnormal warming of the tropical Pacific Ocean that disrupts global atmospheric circulation, which, in turn, influences temperature and precipitation across the globe. With the ENSO phenomenon being observed since the beginning of 2019, there are fears that this might lead to a deficient monsoon. Various scientific studies have linked the prevalence of ENSO to a weak monsoon. Although a direct correlation between the two has not been established, rainfall data from 2000 onwards shows that monsoon rainfall is heavily impacted in the El-Nino years. In five of these six El-Nino years, the monsoon rainfall was lower than the long-term average by 12% to 23%. This shortfall is observed not only in aggregate but also across regions. The India



Meteorological Department divides the country into 36 sub-divisions. In all El-Nino years since 2000, at least a quarter of 36 IMD sub-divisions have received deficient rainfall, with 2009 (22 deficient sub-divisions) and 2002 (21 deficient sub-divisions) being particularly bad. A further breakdown of this data at the district level shows that regional and temporal variations appear to be increasing, even in a normal monsoon year. For example, in 2017, at an all-India level, monsoon rains amounted to 95% of the 50-year average. But in each of the four monsoon months (June to September), the percentage of districts that received normal rainfall (-19% to 19% deviation over their 50-year average) was less than a third. Deficient rainfall in June is devastating for farmers in large reaches of the country who have sown in expectation of rains. Unless there is a sharp revival of the monsoon, there will be a further blow to the already stressed Indian farmer, as well as a decline in agricultural productivity.



219 Rakhine Buddhist refugees living in Mizoram sent to Myanmar



(News Agencies)- More than 200 Rakhine Buddhist refugees living near a border village in Mizoram since 2017 have been sent back to Myanmar despite non-cooperation from the authorities in the neighbouring country, officials have said. In November 2017, more than 1,500 Rakhine Buddhists crossed over to Mizoram as fighting raged between the Arakan Army and the Myanmar military. Arakan Army, an insurgent outfit, is fighting for a confederate status for Rakhine state. The refugees, who mostly came in boats, took shelter in four border villages in Mizoram's Lawngtlai

district - Laitlang, H m a w n g b u c h h u a , Zochachhua, and Dumzautlang. "The push back of 219 persons has been completed today (Tuesday). They were sent back in Maruti Gypsy vehicles and on foot. Their houses have been destroyed," deputy commissioner of Lawngtlai Shashanka Ala said. Lawngtlai is a district in south Mizoram, which shares a border with both Myanmar and Bangladesh. Ala said Myanmar authorities had promised to provide boats to take them back through the Sekulh Lui river in a flag meeting held on June 30. However, they backed off at 6am on Tuesday and conveyed they would not

extend any support. Subsequently, the officials said they had to fall back on 'Plan B' and the refugees were sent back through Laitlang in Mizoram to Varang in Myanmar. Most of the refugees belong to Varang and nearby villages in Myanmar's Chin state, the officials said. An official, who was present during the push back, said the refugees were crying and trying to convey that they should be allowed to stay back. Mizoram government employees and Assam Rifles personnel were involved in Tuesday's operation. The official claimed they did not have to use force to send them back. Rations for 15 days were given to refugees who were sent back. Most of the 1,500 Rakhine refugees were sent back in phases and officials said that more than 200 people had stayed behind and sent back on Tuesday.

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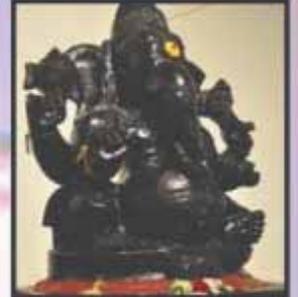
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The new narrative: Good governance is good politics



(News Agencies)- "It's the economy, stupid", a phrase coined by campaign strategist James Carville during Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign, was never synonymous with the Indian elections until 2019. For developed countries, the economy has always been the fulcrum of politics. In India, "voters do not cast their vote, but they vote their caste" is a popular saying. The 2019 elections have introduced a new narrative - good economics is good politics through social empowerment. Putting the citizen first is the guiding principle of good

governance. It is this ideology that brings stakeholders, the government and the citizens closer to each other. Good governance is the key to a country's prosperity and progress. For this to happen, it is important that the citizens become active participants in governance. Swachh Bharat is a textbook example. The redressal of public grievances assures the citizens that their vote has not gone wasted. Technology is an important tool for good governance as it ensures transparency and accountability which result in the betterment and welfare of all citizens. It also

leads to the simplification of processes. The best example is the self-certification of startups introduced by the Narendra Modi government, exhibiting trust in their citizens. Digital India ensures that government services are available to the citizen with little human interference. These features of good governance were the hallmark of the Modi-led National Democratic Alliance-I government. Social empowerment, which came through good economics, is now good politics. Voters choose a stable government with a strong, decisive leadership. Now, development has become the buzzword. With the coming of age of social media, people can make more informed choices in many areas. Understanding this, Modi has mastered the skill of optimising social media as a tool to connect with the people. For the first time, we are seeing a government that is determined to improve the socioeconomic status of the people.

How 'one nation, one election' could alter our political system, writes Karan Thapar



(News Agencies)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's phrase, "one nation, one election", sounds beguiling and perhaps that's why many people think they've understood it. But it's neither as simple nor as straightforward as it sounds. The more closely you examine it, the more complex it becomes. Only then can you discern how it will alter our political system. First, it will have two positive outcomes. Simultaneous elections will be considerably cheaper than separate state and national polls. No one disputes that. However, cost ought not to be a prime consideration in determining how and when elections are held.

More importantly, simultaneous elections would reduce the time the paralysing Model Code of Conduct is in operation. When elections are held separately, it seems one or other part of India is almost permanently covered by it. But, again, the fact that this impedes good governance could be tackled by revising the code and reducing the long duration of elections. It doesn't necessarily call for changing the character of elections. I would identify one other positive outcome. Former Chief Election Commissioner S Y Quraishi says it's during elections that communalism, casteism and corruption peak.

PM Modi to launch BJP's nationwide membership drive in Varanasi today

(News Agencies)- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate a nationwide membership drive of the Bharatiya Janata Party from Varanasi on Saturday. He will also launch a membership drive



helpline from Kashi. Kashi region BJP spokesperson Navratan Rathi said that soon after landing here, Modi will unveil a statue of former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri at the Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport. He will then hand out plants to school children as tree guardians in a school at Harahua and launch a plantation drive by planting saplings in Anand Kanan Vatika.

Ahead of his visit, Modi also tweeted about the membership drive. Under the plantation drive, UP government led by Yogi Adityanath has set a target to plant 22 crore saplings across the state and Varanasi district administration has decided to plant more than 27 lakh saplings in the district. Modi will launch the BJP's nationwide

membership drive from the Deendayal Upadhyay Trade Facilitation Centre and Museum. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the nationwide membership drive and will also launch a helpline number here today," Rathi said. "The nationwide membership drive of the BJP will remain continue till August 11." He will welcome of 11 people from different sections of society to the party to mark the beginning of the membership drive and will address around 5,000 BJP members. Thereafter, PM Modi will visit virtual experiential museum at Man Mandir Mahal adjacent to Dashashwamedh Ghat here. The virtual museum based on first floor of Maan Mandir Mahal famous for its observatory. The virtual museum gives glimpses of rich heritage of Kashi.

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Spectacular fall of India's 'dosa king': Saravana Bhavan's P Rajagopal due for life sentence

The winning formula was, and remains, that the southern Indian vegetarian delights on offer -- dosa pancakes, deep-fried vadas and idli rice cakes -- taste homemade, and are affordable. "If a lower middle class family wanted an outing, a good treat, a place to celebrate something, Saravana Bhavan was the choice," G.C. Shekhar, a journalist in Chennai, told AFP. "This man sort of democratized restaurants." The concept spread beyond India, with around

80 outlets abroad today catering mostly to the homesick Indian diaspora in the United States, the Gulf, Europe and Australia.

He also treats his staff generously, giving even the lowest-ranking employees benefits like health insurance. In return, they adoringly call him "annachi" ("elder brother").

- Fateful advice -

Alongside Hindu gods, the restaurants invariably have two pictures of him on the wall: one with his sons, who now run the

business -- and one with his trusted spiritual guru.

But his beliefs, by no means unusual in India, proved to be his undoing.

In the early 2000s, Rajagopal reportedly took an astrologer's advice to make a fateful decision -- to take as his third wife the daughter of an employee he had his eye on. "He was obsessed with her," D. Suresh Kumar, another local journalist, told AFP. The young woman in question was already married

and rejected his advances, but Rajagopal is not a man used to taking no for an answer.

Threats, beatings and exorcisms directed at the woman, her husband and her family over months all failed, and in 2001 -- after one failed attempt -- the husband was murdered on Rajagopal's orders.

In 2004, he was found guilty and sentenced to 10 years. On appeal, he was convicted of murder and the sentence increased to life, a decision then

upheld by the Supreme Court in March.

He is meant to surrender by July 7 and spend the rest of his life behind bars.

"Rajagopal is an example of how you can really come up in the society through hard work and thinking out of the box," said Shekhar.

"What led to his downfall was his weakness for women and his belief that he was so powerful that he could get somebody murdered and get away with it.

Biden plummets, Harris vaults to second in major poll

The largest drop came from Biden. He was at 32 percent in the May poll, 10 points ahead of where he polled now. Sanders slipped slightly by 4 points, which is within the poll's margin of error.

The drop is steep from the top four candidates to South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg, who is in a distant fifth place at 4 percent. Sen. Cory Booker and former Rep. Beto O'Rourke each have 3 percent, and Sen. Amy Klobuchar has 2 percent, the last candidate above that mark.

Biden is still the leader among black voters, 36 percent to 24 percent for Harris, but his advantage with what had been his strongest cohort is

diminished. Among white voters, the top four candidates are essentially tied: 20 percent for Biden, 17 percent for Harris, 16 percent for Warren and 15 percent for Sanders.

Biden is particularly hurt in the horse race polling with young voters. Just 13 percent of voters under 45 pick him as their choice to be the nominee. Sanders leads with voters under 45 with 21 percent, followed by Harris' 18 percent and Warren's 17 percent. Among older voters, Biden is still on top. For voters 45 and older, Biden is at 29 percent, followed by Harris' 17 percent, Warren's 13 percent and Sanders' 8 percent.

Harris' rise comes after a strong debate performance last week in

Miami, where she confronted Biden over his record on racial issues, including his comments about segregationist Senate colleagues and past opposition to federally mandated busing.

But despite the strong ratings for the debate, a majority of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents say they did not watch the debate. Forty-two percent said they watched either "all or most" of both or one debate, while 57 percent said they did not tune in for either. Of the nonwatchers, 36 percent did say they paid close attention to news stories after the debate.

Americans are divided on health care, as well. When all adults

were asked if the government should provide a national health insurance program "for all Americans, even if this would require higher taxes" a majority - 56 percent - support it, with 40 percent disapproving of the idea. But of that 56 percent, more say it should not completely replace private health insurance, 32 percent, with 21 percent saying it should. On stage, Sanders and Harris both raised their hand when asked who would

abolish private health insurance in favor of a government-only plan, only for Harris to backtrack, saying she misunderstood the question.

This poll counts to qualify candidates for both the second round of Democratic debates at the end of this month and the third round of debates in September. Currently, 21 candidates qualify for the second debate - the 20 candidates who debated last week, plus Montana Gov. Steve Bullock.

'Dawood's top henchman' fights extradition to US after being duped by FBI agents

On the first day of his three-day extradition trial on Monday, John Hardy QC, representing the US government, revealed that as part of an FBI investigation of D-Company, which is based in Pakistan, India and the UAE, at least three FBI "confidential sources" had met and spoken to Motiwala "who made it clear to them he was with the D-Company".

"The head is Dawood Ibrahim, an Indian Muslim in exile in Pakistan. He and his brother have been fugitives from India since 1993 and over the past 10 years D-Company operatives have conducted operations in the US. The FBI investigation revealed that Motiwala reports directly to Dawood and that extortion, debt collection and money laundering are his main job and he travels extensively and conducts meetings on behalf of Dawood who cannot travel," Hardy said. Motiwala,

who lives in Karachi and has a 10-year visa to the UK, appeared in the dock at Westminster magistrates' court and kept his eyes cast on the ground. One of the FBI informants, a Pakistan-born US citizen, attempting to facilitate criminal dealings with the D-Company, met Motiwala, a "top lieutenant in the Dawood empire", in the US in 2011, and in Pakistan in 2011 and 2012, Hardy said. Motiwala introduced the source to a co-conspirator who is the lead money launderer for D-Company, he said. The US agent then laundered more than \$1 billion of narcotics proceeds from D-Company and made cash deposits in the US, making them appear to come from legitimate transactions, Hardy said. "During the meetings in Pakistan in 2011 the FBI source and Motiwala discussed debt collection and extortion by D-Company in the US and abroad

and how D-Company uses its reputation for violence and the ability to reach family members in Pakistan and India to resolve business disputes and pressure them to pay up. On one occasion, \$80,000 was collected from two lower level D-Company associates in New Jersey and Motiwala demanded 40% of the payment for having helped collect the debt.

"The D-Company collects fees of up to 50% for collecting the money in a dispute," Hardy added. The court heard that on the US agent's first trip to Pakistan, in September 2011, he inquired about importing heroin and was introduced by Motiwala's co-conspirator to a heroin and hash supplier. In 2014 a 4-kg sample of heroin was shipped from Pakistan to New York via Toronto where it was seized.

Former NYPD cop sentenced for heading up gambling and prostitution ring in city and Hempstead, Queens DA says



Ryan said in a news release that Paz "used his insight and knowledge of NYPD operations to run lucrative prostitution and gambling rings."

"Furthering his criminal actions, the defendant used his connections with active duty officers to corrupt them into participating in his illegal ventures," Ryan said in the release.

which charged \$40 for 15 minutes and \$160 for one hour, raked in more than \$2 million between August 2016 and September 2017, authorities said.

"These operations are out of business now and the defendant is going to prison," Acting Queens District Attorney John Ryan said. "We will continue to combat this kind of corruption - even when the perpetrators are those entrusted to enforce the law." Paz, who retired from the department in 2010, has been in custody since September 2018. He pleaded guilty to two counts of attempted enterprise corruption and one count of third-degree promoting prostitution in May. His wife pleaded guilty to two counts of attempted enterprise corruption in May. She was sentenced to 364 days in jail.

Seven NYPD officers were charged last September with enterprise corruption, misconduct and other violations for their role in the activity, including Brooklyn-based Det. Rene Samaniego. Ryan said Samaniego pleaded guilty to two counts of attempted enterprise corruption in May. He is scheduled to be sentenced July 24. Authorities began investigating a possible prostitution and gambling ring in April 2015 after an anonymous tipster told NYPD's Internal Affairs Bureau that active and retired personnel were involved in illegal activities.

Biden's Iowa support crumbles in new poll

(News Agencies)-

As Joe Biden lands in Iowa for two days of events, he's confronting signs of crumbling support in the first-in-the-nation caucus state: A new survey shows he's plummeted 20 percentage points since September.

A Focus on Rural America poll released Wednesday suggests the ground has shifted significantly over the past several months, with Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris and Biden currently clustered together at the top: Warren had 20 percent, Harris at 18 percent and Biden 17 percent.

Bernie Sanders came in fourth at 12 percent. In September, in the same

poll, Biden was walloping the field; with 37 percent support, he led Sanders, his next closest competitor, by 25 points.

In the months since then, however, the former vice president has lagged behind other top-tier rivals in assembling an organization. Leading Iowa Democrats have complained Biden has failed to offer Iowans the kind of dotting retail politics to which they're accustomed.

Focus on Rural America Chair Patty Judge, also a former lieutenant governor in Iowa, said the results are the latest sign that Biden has to "step up his game" if he wants to compete in

Iowa.

"He has not been campaigning in Iowa. He has not had a presence here," Judge said. "Couple that with the debate - in which Kamala Harris certainly took a piece of his hide. I think it has caught up to him."

The new survey showed Warren making the most marked gains, with a 12-percentage-point jump since March. It's a sign the Massachusetts senator's heavy investment in staffing and organization in the state might be paying off.

"[Warren] is definitely seeing some of the fruits of all of the hard work done by her campaign in Iowa. She's doing well because



she's been here," Judge said. "She is growing here in name ID and popularity, she's camped out here a good deal of the time. She has an incredible field operation going."

Harris, too, saw a sizable bump, gaining 9 percentage points since March. Biden, meanwhile, dropped 8 percentage points since the March

survey, when he led with 25 percent. The latest poll was in the field the weekend after the first presidential debates, when Harris seized headlines after a lengthy takedown of Biden over race-related questions. The survey was conducted by David Binder Research, who also serves as Harris' main pollster.

But Harris stood at just 7 percent in December and 9 percent in March in the same poll.

The new poll is the latest sign of trouble for the 76-year-old Biden, who is attempting to regain his footing after his roundly panned first debate performance raised questions about the durability of his candidacy.

The former vice president has been buffeted in the days after the debate with questions about his record on civil rights and his recent comments about his relationship with segregationist senators.

Biden has had one high-profile donor abandon him and has seen his standing decline in several national polls taken after the debate. His campaign, however, has committed to plowing more resources into early state infrastructure, including in Iowa, where 50 new staffers are rushing to catch up to already established organizations of Warren and others who began laying the groundwork as early as January.

Teen accused of rape deserves leniency because of his 'good family', judge says

(News Agencies)-A judge suggested that a teenage boy accused of raping a drunk girl at a party should be treated leniently because he came from "a good family", and cast doubt on whether such an attack amounted to rape at all. Judge James Troiano in New Jersey made the remarks while ruling that the boy, who was identified only as "GMC", should not face trial as an adult for allegedly raping a 16-year-old girl while recording the incident on his mobile phone. "This young man comes from a good family

who put him into an excellent school where he was doing extremely well," Troiano said. "He is clearly a candidate for not just college but probably for a good college. His scores for college entry were very high." Troiano, 69, also noted that the boy was an Eagle Scout.

Investigators said GMC sent a clip of the alleged rape to seven of his friends, and later sent a text adding: "When your first time having sex is rape." Yet Troiano suggested that, in his view, the alleged incident was a sexual assault rather than a rape.

Troiano's remarks, which he delivered at a family court hearing in July 2018, were highlighted this week in a sharply worded overturning of his decision by an appeals court. Prosecutors told NJ1015.com they would now seek an indictment from a grand jury so they may prosecute GMC as an adult.

Prosecutors had alleged that GMC's attack had been "sophisticated and predatory" and that he showed "calculated and cruel" behaviour by filming the incident, sharing the footage and then lying

about it.

Adult cases are heard by a jury and typically involve harsher punishments for those convicted. Records of juvenile cases are largely kept secret from the public.

But Troiano refused, pointing to GMC's background and saying that, in his view, a "traditional case of rape" involved more than one attacker using a weapon to take advantage of a victim in a remote location.

The judge also cast doubt on allegations GMC's victim was too drunk to understand what was



happening, asserting that she "walked hand-in-hand" with GMC to a basement area where the alleged rape took place.

And he dismissed the significance of GMC's boastful text messages, describing this as "just a 16-year-old kid saying

stupid crap to his friends". The appeals court panel said Troiano had exceeded his role and "decided the case for himself" rather than properly reviewing the application by prosecutors to try GMC as an adult.

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Trump accuses New York of harassing his businesses



(News Agencies)- US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday he was "not talking boots on the ground" should military action be necessary against Iran, and said any conflict would not last long. Asked if a war was brewing, Trump told Fox Business Network: "I hope we don't but we're in a very strong position if something should happen." "I'm not talking boots on the ground," Trump said. "I'm just saying if something

would happen, it wouldn't last very long." The comments come just days after Trump cancelled air strikes minutes before impact, with allies warning that the increase in tensions since the United States pulled out of a nuclear pact with Iran last year could accidentally lead to war. Iran suggested it was just one day from breaching a threshold in the agreement that limited its stockpile of uranium, a move that would put

pressure on European countries that have tried to remain neutral to pick sides. The fate of the 2015 nuclear deal, under which Iran agreed to curbs on its nuclear programme in return for access to international trade, has been at the heart of the dispute which has escalated and taken on a military dimension in recent weeks. Washington sharply

tightened sanctions last month, aiming to bar all international sales of Iranian oil. It accuses Iran of being behind bomb attacks on ships in the Gulf, which it denies. Last week, Iran shot down a U.S. drone it said was in its air space, which Washington denied. Trump ordered retaliatory air strikes but called them off at the last

minute, later saying too many people would have died. Obliteration Although the United States and Iran both say they do not want war, last week's aborted U.S. strikes have been followed by menacing rhetoric on both sides. On Tuesday Trump threatened the "obliteration" of parts of Iran if it struck U.S.

interests. President Hassan Rouhani, who normally presents Tehran's mild-mannered face, called White House policy "mentally retarded". The standoff creates a challenge for Washington which, after quitting the nuclear deal against the advice of European allies, is now seeking their support to force Iran to comply with it.

Trump team weighs giving China a get-out-of-jail free card on Iran

(News Agencies)- The State Department is seriously considering using an Obama-era loophole to allow China to import oil from Iran, violating the Trump administration's pledge to bring Iranian oil exports to zero. Only last week, the senior State Department official handling Iran said the U.S. would "sanction any imports of Iranian crude oil."

But according to three U.S. officials, the department's Iran czar, Brian Hook, and his team of negotiators have discussed granting China a waiver to a 2012 law intended to kneecap the Iranian oil industry. The alternative is allowing China, which recently welcomed a shipment of approximately a million barrels of Iranian oil, openly to defy U.S.

sanctions. The Trump team has kept the details of its deliberations closely held as news reports of the Chinese oil imports have proliferated in recent days - and hawks on Capitol Hill have begun to ask questions. It is the latest in a series of dust-ups between the administration and Congress on an Iran policy that has often appeared inconsistent,

careening between threats of military action and offers to talk with Iranian leaders. The 2012 Iran Freedom and Counterproliferation Act targeted the Iranian shipping, shipbuilding and energy sectors, requiring states or companies that wish to import Iranian oil and conduct business with the U.S. to obtain waivers from the U.S. government.

Schumer calls for firing of Border Patrol leadership over 'toxic' culture

(News Agencies)- Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer on Wednesday called for the firing of top leadership at Customs and Border Protection, saying the conditions at detention facilities and a secret Facebook group featuring lewd posts from border agents highlight the agency's "toxic" culture.

"Internal investigations aren't enough because the leadership at CBP, particularly Acting Commissioner Mark Morgan, are too callous about the way in which children and their families are treated, which is why we need untainted professionals to be brought in from outside the CBP structure immediately," Schumer said.

The New York Democrat's remarks come one day after the Office of the Inspector General released a report describing "dangerous" overcrowding and "prolonged detention of children" at migrant detention centers. The inspector general called for the Department of Homeland Security to intervene immediately to improve conditions.



Meanwhile, Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), Kamala Harris (D-Calif.) and Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), all 2020 presidential hopefuls, demanded Wednesday that the Office of Refugee Resettlement "ensure that the custody and processing of [unaccompanied alien children] is meeting the minimum standards required by domestic and international law."

In response to the inspector general report, Democrats on the House Oversight Committee have summoned Morgan and Kevin McAleenan, the acting head of DHS, to testify before the panel on July 12.

The controversy over the condition of detention centers comes days after the House passed the Senate's version of an emergency border aid bill, which many House Democrats viewed as a concession to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.). Progressive and Hispanic caucus members are still privately fuming at Schumer, who they put the blame on for the bill's passage last week.

Trump hails US military in 4th of July address

President Donald Trump has hailed the "brave men and women" of the US military during a speech at a controversial Independence Day event. "We celebrate our history, our people, and the heroes who proudly defend our flag," he told a crowd at a rain-soaked Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC. The "Salute to America" event featured military flyovers and fireworks. Opponents accused Mr Trump of wasting money and politicising the holiday ahead of his re-election campaign. The Pentagon has not revealed the cost of the extravaganza, which many believe was inspired by Mr Trump's visit to a Bastille Day parade hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron in 2017. Some reports say the National Park Service diverted nearly \$2.5m (£2m) to cover the cost. What happened? Addressing a crowd that had braved torrential rain and high temperatures, Mr Trump paid homage to the military before introducing separate flyovers for each branch. He spoke about America's battle for

independence and praised the "extraordinary heritage" of the country. "Together we are part of one of the greatest stories ever told, the story of America," Mr Trump said at the event. Chants of "USA, USA" broke out sporadically as he spoke. "It is the chronicle of brave citizens who never give up on the dream of a better and brighter future," he continued. "As long as we never stop fighting for a better future... there will be nothing that America cannot do." The stage at the Lincoln Memorial was draped in flags and there were military vehicles on display nearby. Two 70-tonne Abrams tanks had to stay on a side road as they were too heavy for the memorial's surrounding areas. The event was open to the public free of charge, apart from a ticketed area for VIPs in front of the memorial. The musical playlist included the Star Wars theme, Hail to the Chief and God bless the USA. It went ahead largely without incident, although there were minor scuffles outside the White

House earlier on Thursday after a flag-burning protest. Following Mr Trump's speech, many people headed to a scheduled concert on the lawn of the Capitol Building where a fireworks display went ahead despite the rainy conditions. "Who doesn't love America's birthday?" Andrea Stanford [second from right] beams. The 58-year-old is one of the "Women 4 Trump" group who travelled for 15 hours from Florida with her friends. All of whom, she revealed, are wearing red, white and blue underwear. Why? "Donald Trump is redefining the presidency and the commitment to freedom and liberty," she says. "He's the first president who's kept his promises - economically and militarily," she added, referring to the recent meeting at the DMZ with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. Alongside the reflecting pool, where rain drops have been crashing down all afternoon, people from states across this country have filed in.

NRA meltdown has Trump campaign sweating

Republicans worry that the NRA and two other groups that have long formed the core of their electoral infrastructure will be effectively on the sidelines.

(News Agencies)- The National Rifle Association aired an avalanche of TV ads and pushed its 5 million-plus members to the polls for Donald Trump in 2016, propelling him in the Rust Belt states that delivered him the presidency.

Now, the gun rights group is in total meltdown - and senior Republicans and Trump 2020 officials are alarmed.

In recent weeks, the NRA has seen everything from a failed coup attempt to the departure of its longtime political architect to embarrassing tales of self-dealing by top leaders. The turmoil is fueling fears that the organization will be profoundly diminished heading into the election, leaving the Republican Party with a gaping hole in its political machinery.

With the Chamber of Commerce and Koch political network withdrawing from their once-dominant roles in electing conservatives, Republicans worry that three organizations

that have long formed the core of their electoral infrastructure will be effectively on the sidelines.

The predicament has so troubled some Republicans that they are calling on the famously secretive NRA to address its 2020 plans. Within the past week, senators have privately expressed concerns about the group to National Republican Senatorial Committee Chairman Todd Young.

"No organization has been more important to conservative voter education and engagement than the NRA. We all hope they're able to mount the kind of effort in the 2020 cycle they have in the past," said Gregg Keller, a former American Conservative Union executive director. "But in case they can't, given their current situation, I hope they're being forthright about that within the movement so others can pick up the slack."

"The situation," he added, "has folks nervous."

What makes the NRA such a

potent force for Republicans, party officials said, are its reach into battlegrounds - such as Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, North Carolina and Ohio - and the sway it holds with its members. The NRA's appeals play a critical role in turning out sportsmen, many of whom have paid dues to the organization for years and regard it as an important part of their lives.

Chris LaCivita, a national GOP strategist who's waged congressional and statewide campaigns in North Carolina, said he remains confident gun advocates will turn out to vote in 2020. But he said the NRA's problems could hobble its mobilization efforts.

"Infighting and accusations playing out almost daily in the national media regarding the NRA have not been helpful. Clearly it will have an impact in the NRA's ability to raise money, which would be used in elections to turn out its membership," LaCivita said. With the organization mired



in palace intrigue and confronting a daily barrage of negative publicity, some NRA officials are skeptical a 2020 plan will emerge. Many Republicans are convinced the job of turning out Second Amendment supporters will fall to the cash-flush Republican National Committee, which is constructing a massive get-out-the-vote and data machine devoted to turning out conservatives.

Jane Timken, chairwoman of the Ohio GOP, said her organization would work closely

with the RNC to microtarget firearm owners. The national party, Timken noted, has compiled extensive voter data through sources ranging from gun licenses to gun magazine subscriptions.

Concerns over the NRA intensified last week after the resignation of Chris Cox, who had been the head of its lobbying arm since 2002. Cox was well-liked by NRA staff and board members and had deep relationships with major donors and many of the party's top strategists.

Ocasio-Cortez defiant in face of criticism for opposing border \$\$ bill while decrying conditions

(News Agencies)- Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is firing back at accusations of hypocrisy for railing against conditions in migrant detention centers, after having voted against funding legislation for the humanitarian crisis at the border.

"People like AOC create the disaster, refuse to fix it, vote against funding to help people and then go down there to attack the people who are saying to her, 'we don't have enough money, we don't have enough facilities,'" former GOP House Speaker Newt Gingrich said on Fox News' "America's Newsroom," calling her "viciously dishonest."

The criticisms of Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., come after the freshman Democrat traveled to the border in El

Paso, Texas on Monday with almost a dozen members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, blasting border officials while claiming agents forced migrant women and children in cells to drink toilet water.

Ocasio-Cortez has battled with immigration officials ever since over the veracity of that claim. But she's also faced criticism over her "hell no" vote last week on a bipartisan bill that would provide \$4.6 billion in funding for the crisis, and for voting against an earlier Democrat-backed aid package. She was insisting that restrictions on immigration enforcement be included.

"How many migrant women did @AOC help by voting AGAINST the \$4.6 billion bipartisan humanitarian aid that is FOR THEM?"

Kellyanne Conway, counselor to President Trump, tweeted Tuesday in response to the lawmaker's accusations. "All talk, no dollars." Republican GOP Rep. Dan Crenshaw of Texas also pushed back. "What they're really doing is trying to stand on their moral high horse and sling arrows at everybody else while not offering a solution," Crenshaw said on Fox News' "The Story" Tuesday. "They fought us tooth and nail against that \$4.5 [billion] in humanitarian aid the president needed, that DHS needed." But Ocasio-Cortez fired back, saying it's "not" a funding problem, but a "deeper, systemic" one. She also claimed the border bill simply "funded abuse" and didn't fix the problem.

"Are CBP officers waking up women in the middle of sleep a 'funding' problem? Is calling migrants 'filthy' 'wh*res' a funding problem? Is threatening violence on members of Congress a 'funding' problem?" she tweeted. "No, it's not. It's a far deeper, systemic, more violent problem than that."

But amid the political fight, immigration officials maintain that they are resource-starved in the face of a migration surge. A DHS official told Fox News that CBP agents are "not equipped for the sheer volume of people" in facilities.

"HHS is backed up with children, so there is a real backlog at the CBP facilities there," the official explained. "It's a real problem. The supplemental funding will help, but it's a



band-aid on a much bigger problem."

A U.S. Customs and Border Protection spokesman told Fox News in a statement that during Ocasio-Cortez's visit to the border with other members of Congress Monday, "local leadership highlighted investments in additional restroom and shower facilities, hygiene products, increased medical support and expanded transportation capabilities," and said officials are doing the best

they can with limited funding and resources. Even with these investments, El Paso officials emphasized to members of Congress that USBP facilities were not designed for long-term holding," the CBP spokesman said in a statement. "Officials also explained the critical challenges to USBP operations when ICE/ERO and HHS/ORR are unable to move those in custody as quickly as they are processed."

Unhappy With Their 2016 Coronation, the Democrats Start a 2020 Circus

After the maelstrom in Miami, the presidential candidates and their campaign staffs are talking openly about a long, divisive primary.

Marianne Williamson narrowed her eyes and gazed into my soul, channeling some of the same telekinetic life force she'd used minutes earlier to cast a spell on Donald Trump in her closing statement of Thursday's Democratic presidential debate. Inside a sweaty spin room, with swarms of reporters enfolding Kamala Harris and Bernie Sanders and Kirsten Gillibrand, the author and self-help spiritualist drifted through the madness with a mien of Zen-like satisfaction. It was only when I asked her a question-what does she say to people who don't think she belonged on that debate stage?-that Williamson's sorcerous intensity returned. "This is a democracy, that's what I say to them," she replied, her hypnotic voice anchored by an accent perfected at Rick's Café. "There's this political class, and media class, that thinks they get to tell people who becomes president. This is what's wrong

with America. We don't do aristocracy here. We do democracy." For better and worse. In 2016, Hillary Clinton was served the Democratic presidential nomination on a silver platter. With a monopoly on the left's biggest donors and top strategists, with the implicit backing of the incumbent president, with the consensus support of the party's most prominent officials, and with only four challengers standing in her way-the most viable of whom had spent the past quarter-century wandering the halls of Congress alone muttering under his breath-Clinton couldn't lose. The ascendant talents on the left knew better than to interfere. She had already been denied her turn once before; daring to disrupt the party's line of succession would be career suicide. This coronation yielded one of the weakest general-election nominees in modern American

history-someone disliked and distrusted by more than half of the electorate, someone guided by a sense of entitlement rather than a sense of urgency, someone incapable of mobilizing the party's base to defeat the most polarizing and unpopular Republican nominee in our lifetimes. Democrats don't have to worry about another coronation. Instead, with two dozen candidates battling for the right to challenge Trump next November, they are dealing with the opposite problem: a circus. Three days after the maelstrom in Miami, top Democratic officials insist there's no sense of panic. They say everything is under control. They tell anyone who will listen that by virtue of the rules and debate qualification requirements they've implemented, this mammoth primary field will soon shrink in half, which should limit the internecine destruction and



hasten the selection of a standard-bearer. But based on conversations with candidates and campaign operatives, it might be too late for that. The unifying objective of defeating Trump in 2020 likely won't be sufficient to ward off what everyone now believes will be a long, divisive primary. First impressions are everything in politics. And it was understood by those candidates and campaign officials departing Miami that what America was introduced to this week-more than a year before the Democrats will choose their nominee at the 2020 convention-was a party searching not only for a leader but for an identity, for a vision, for a coherent

argument about how voters would benefit from a change in leadership. "I don't think there's a sense among the American people of what the national Democratic Party stands for. And I think there's actually more confusion about that now," Michael Bennet, the Colorado senator and presidential candidate, told me after participating in Thursday night's forum. Some confusion is inevitable when 20 candidates, many of them unfamiliar to a national audience, are allotted five to seven minutes to explain why they are qualified to lead the free world. Yet the perception in the eyes of the political class-and the feeling on the ground was something closer to chaos.

Why can companies still silence us with mandatory arbitration?



When it was revealed in October that Andy Rubin received a \$90m exit package after being forced to resign over a credible sexual harassment claim, Google employees around the world walked out in protest. They were disgusted at what appeared to be a reward for bad behavior, and they wanted more accountability for members of management. But they were also angry at the strategy that the company used to keep harassment claims a secret: forced arbitration. Google employees, like their counterparts at a ballooning

number of American companies, were subject to forced arbitration - meaning that if they had a conflict with their employer, such as wage theft, race discrimination, or in this case, sexual harassment, they were not entitled to take that claim to court. Instead, they would be forced into an alternative justice system called arbitration. Arbitration is a system of private courts. They operate using different rules than civil courts - there is no judge or jury, for instance, but an "arbitrator" who is chosen by the parties, and paid by the employer, to decide the case. It

is strictly confidential. Since the 1920s, arbitration has been legally binding: once parties agree to settle a dispute in arbitration, they give up their right to go to court. The practice has been around for centuries, functioning as a quicker, cheaper alternative to the formal justice system, and it was originally developed to settle disputes between businesses. But starting in the mid-1980s, the US supreme court issued a series of rulings saying that arbitration could be used for other kinds of conflicts - including conflicts between employees and employers over things such as discrimination. According to the Economic Policy Institute, more than 55% of the American workforce is now subject to mandatory arbitration - up from just 2% in 1992. Most of those workers don't know that they have forfeited their right to sue. Employers slip mandatory arbitration clauses into their employee contracts - those big stacks of confusingly worded hiring documents that employees are asked to sign, but usually don't read.

'Wolf of Wall Street' producer charged with 1MDB money laundering in Malaysia

Malaysia on Friday charged one of the "Wolf of Wall Street" film producers, and stepson of former prime minister Najib Razak, with money laundering, alleging he misappropriated \$248 million linked to state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB). Riza Aziz, a co-founder of Hollywood production firm Red Granite Pictures that was behind the Oscar-nominated film "The Wolf of Wall Street," was charged with five counts of money laundering. Prosecutors alleged Riza received a total of \$248 million as a result of misappropriation of 1MDB funds. Riza pleaded not guilty to all the charges. Each charge carries a financial penalty of up to five million ringgit (\$1.21 million), a maximum jail term of five years, or both. The court granted Riza bail at one million ringgit and asked him to surrender his passports. After unexpectedly losing an election to Mahathir

Mohamad in May last year, Najib has been slapped with a series of corruption charges, mostly tied to losses at now-defunct 1MDB. Najib, who founded 1MDB in 2009, faces 42 criminal charges related to huge losses at the fund and other state entities. He has pleaded not guilty and has consistently denied wrongdoing. The U.S. Justice Department has estimated that a total of \$4.5 billion was misappropriated by high-level officials at 1MDB and their associates between 2009 and 2014. 1MDB is being investigated in at least six countries for alleged money laundering and graft. U.S. prosecutors have said Red Granite had financed three films using funds they suspect were stolen from 1MDB. Red Granite paid the U.S. government \$60 million in September 2017 to settle a civil forfeiture claim over the rights to "The Wolf of Wall Street".



Trump's foreign luxury resorts collide with his South Korea diplomacy

As Trump traveled to South Korea, a business deal was expanding between the Trump family business and a company partly owned by the Korean government.

While visiting South Korea over the weekend, President Donald Trump tried to strike a deal with President Moon Jae-in to get more companies to invest in the United States.

But even as he pushed American interests, a partner of Trump's namesake company is aggressively expanding plans to build luxury Trump-branded resorts in Indonesia - and the project involves a construction company partly owned by the South Korean government.

It's not clear whether Trump brought up the Indonesia projects during his talks with Moon. But the meeting represented the latest example of the blurred lines between Trump's official diplomatic work and his business interests.

The expansion of the project that now has the South Korean government attached to it seems to run afoul - at least in spirit - of

Trump's pledge that the Trump Organization will not enter into any new foreign deals while in office.

The project in question got more complicated, ethics-wise, when the developer of a Trump luxury resort signed a previously unreported \$120 million contract last September with a construction company - partly owned by the South Korean government - to build a six-star hotel, an 18-hole golf course and theme park that has been compared to Disney World. A company statement announcing the contract with Posco said financing would come from KEB Bank and IBK Securities, a state-owned bank of Korea.

The developer, MNC Land, inked an agreement with Posco E&C Indonesia to build what is being billed as "Trump Community" in Lido City, Indonesia. Posco also

expects to build a second Trump resort in Bali, Indonesia, a company official said in a previously reported statement.

"In addition to the new town development project in Lido, we expect to receive orders for the Bali Trump Resort Project," a Posco E&C official said in the statement.

In a little-noticed company update in February, MNC wrote that an "aggressive global expansion" of the Trump international portfolio was underway with "numerous projects in the pipeline." The document doesn't provide details of the projects.

Trump's ongoing business deals have spurred questions about whether his actions as president are based on what's best for the country or what's best for his company's bottom line.



In a break from his predecessors, Trump refused to fully separate from his company despite repeated calls for him to do so. Instead, he put his holdings in a trust - though he can receive money at any time and revoke the trust at any time.

"It is impossible to tell where the Trump Organization ends and the Trump administration begins," said Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-Va.), a member of the House Oversight Committee. "This is why the founders included the emoluments clause in the

Constitution expressly forbidding a president from profiting in and from his office."

The latest agreement with Posco could violate the Constitution - which bars officials from accepting money or gifts from foreign governments, according to lawmakers and ethics experts. Trump already faces several lawsuits, including one filed by Connolly and other Democratic members of Congress, that he is violating the emoluments clause.

Facebook, Instagram and other platforms back online after experiencing issues worldwide



Social media platforms were back online Wednesday evening after experiencing a bit of a meltdown earlier in the day.

Facebook (FB), Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter had all experienced various issues. But a Facebook spokesperson said Wednesday evening that its problems were fixed.

"Earlier today, some people and businesses experienced trouble uploading or sending images, videos and other files on our apps," the spokesperson said in a statement to CNN Business. "The issue has since been resolved and we should be back at 100% for everyone."

Facebook-owned Instagram said its issues were also fixed.

"We're back!" Instagram said in a tweet. "The issue has been resolved and we should be back at 100% for everyone. We're sorry for any inconvenience."

Twitter, meanwhile, tweeted via its support account that it was "almost at 100% resolved. There may be some residual effects for a small group of people, but overall your DMs should be working properly now. We appreciate your patience!"

Users reported bugs, such as images not loading on Instagram and problems with Twitter direct messages, including the app showing notifications for unread DMs that weren't there when users checked their inbox.

Brandon Judd: Ocasio-Cortez's attacks on Border Patrol are outrageous and based on lies

As the president of the National Border Patrol Council, the union representing 16,000 Border Patrol agents, I am personally and professionally offended by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's outrageous, inflammatory and false claims about the dedicated law enforcement officers I represent. Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., once again tweeted Tuesday to describe our detention facilities for illegal immigrants as "concentration camps" - absurdly comparing these facilities to the death camps run by the Nazis who murdered 6 million Jews and millions of others during World War II. This is a horrible insult to the memories of the innocent men, women and children slaughtered by the Nazis, and to our Border Patrol agents - implying that our agents are no different from the Nazi butchers. The outrageousness of this vicious slander is breathtaking - especially coming from a member of Congress.

I am disgusted by Ocasio-Cortez's lies and her determination to needlessly and



dangerously inflame public sentiment regarding the crisis on our southern border by abandoning facts and making wild and unsupported accusations. The congresswoman is clearly using phrases designed to enrage the uninformed and to pander to a base that wants open borders and unlimited illegal immigration. Ocasio-Cortez made an outrageous claim this week about a woman being told to drink toilet water in a detention facility. This false claim is easily disproven with actual video. Ocasio-Cortez is basing her claim on a single female detainee who reportedly told the congresswoman that an agent told her to "drink toilet water."

That's it. The congresswoman is clearly not on a "fact-finding" mission - she is on a propaganda mission. She made up her mind long before visiting a detention facility in Texas that Border Patrol agents are bad people. And she obviously believes that all illegal immigrants are innocent victims, and that photo ops and lies can help her spread her propaganda to an uninformed public. Ocasio-Cortez plays off people's emotions. She is on record as saying facts don't matter as long as she is "morally right." Enough said. I don't use the word "propaganda" lightly. But it is widely understood to mean spreading information that is not true, but rather used to influence people and further an agenda while appealing to emotions. That is exactly what Ocasio-Cortez does. I prefer using facts. The facts do not support Ocasio-Cortez. Detainees have never been told to drink toilet water. And Border Patrol agents are doing everything in their power to treat the illegal immigrants as humanely as possible under overcrowded conditions.

Is bomber jacket the new cult piece?

Season-less, embellished and patch-worked - the varsity jacket shows no signs of fading out.

With the all-pervading influence of athleisure or sporty chic aesthetic in fashion came the resurgence of the varsity bomber jacket. And even after its undisputed runway reign over the last seven to eight years, the closet essential is far from going out of style. Instead, it has been catapulted to the stature of a cult classic. One look at Spring Summer 2020 collections and

every major brand has toyed with the utilitarian bomber in their handwriting - be it in luscious satin, boho patchwork or glam rock embroidery. Saint Laurent, Dries Van Noten, Celine and Etro's take-charge bombers prove that this piece is here to stay. "It's a memorabilia and immediately links you with the past - for instance, the sport league you were part of in school

or the college you went to. For instance, a university T-shirt is something you'll wear or treasure forever. One's varsity jacket has a direct reference to one's childhood. However, in today's style context, it's the antithesis of how you would have worn it with brands celebrating that shape in new ways. It's great for flight and also serves as a cool cover-up," says designer Nimish Shah. A veritable closet essential

If you have 10 jackets in your closet, then the souvenir jacket has to be one of them as it's something which will stay with you forever irrespective of the trends or seasons. Designer Arpita Mehta says, "I see it becoming a modern-day classic or an essential which is often cropped or recontextualised like Moncler did bomber gowns last



season. Utility-wise too, it's also great, as it's apt for skiing, summer and winter." Designer Anand Bhushan seconds that. "The bomber jacket has become an equivalent to the shift dress," says Anand.

Suits everyone

Today breaking sartorial rules is the new rule as merchandise on

racks offer customers a chance to play dress up and own every look they pick out. Designer Nachiket Barve says, "The bomber variations suit most personality types - it could be in florals or sequins. Today, it's not so much about following a trend, but an individual expression of it," says Barve.



Eccentric prints are enabling millennials to portray their true personality: Shivan & Narresh

Designer duo Shivan Bhatiya and Narresh Kukreja of label Shivan & Narresh talk about their latest collection and collaboration, eccentric prints and what really works for millennials' fashion and more.

Summer has finally arrived in fashion with the Summer Solstice on June 22 and ace-designers Shivan & Narresh, also known for being swimwear sartorialists, are out with their new collection that's well-suited for your summer holiday destination, what to pack and how to style it. The capsule collection in collaboration with e-tailer Koovs, is a unique streetwear interpretation to holiday dressing. The Shivan & Narresh X Koovs collection is a mix of multiple inspirations. From incorporating activewear,

athleisure-inspired coordinates and evening wear. The collection captures elements from the vibrant tropics and delves deep into the dynamic summer of the Indian geography. Envisaged for the millennial on a tropical getaway, the collection features exclusive Shivan & Narresh prints of the season, namely Summer Night, Sweet Magnolia, Rose Magnolia and Lush Vineyard, immersed in the rosy cool hues of Desert Rose, Sky Blue, Red Dahlia and Mauve Glow. The collection for both men and

women includes athleisure, bomber jackets, footwear, bags and more. In an exclusive interview, the designer duo talk about the inspiration, designs, millennial fashion and the one trend they are loving right now. With the onset of maximalist tones in dressing, eccentric prints are enabling millennials to portray their true personality. Print-on-print will make a unique comeback this year for menswear. Glamorous mixing and matching of prints will be observed featuring botanical patterns as well as rustic tribal motifs with applique, beadwork and power buckles and straps. Twinning will continue to be a prominent way of expression - from day brunching to celebratory soirees - creating a perfect canvas for Insta-worthy moments. This is an exciting collaboration with Koovs as it enables us to understand and cater to a younger and wider demographic. The collection explores the aesthetic of holiday



& travel and marries it with the demands of a younger millennial, who is an admirer of street style and a cheerleader of athleisure & sport. Each print dedicates itself to the rich terrestrial botany, thus breaking the mundane with 4 spirited prints, namely Summer Night, Lush Vineyard, Sweet Magnolia, Rose Magnolia. As an afterthought of carrying a distinct summer mood in each of the ensembles, the distinctive categories of Street, Sport, Athleisure & Cocktail Wear range for women and men is rendered in vibrant shades of Desert Rose, Sky Blue, Red Dahlia and Mauveglow. The relatively young

millennial demographic: 15 - 25 years. Fashion has been undergoing an interesting transformation over a couple of years, along with certain trends returning. What is the most notable style trend you have observed during this phase for both men and women? In the age of a fast-paced social media culture, where trends and styles keep changing with every passing day, the one trend that has stuck and will continue to thrive is: twinning. The idea of women and men dressing alike and opting for similar styles and prints for soirees, holidays or honeymoons, is here to stay for long.



Friends with benefits

Dogs are good for our well-being. For doubters, here's scientific evidence

Anuko is all of five and he is a star on Instagram. The gorgeous Husky is an ambassador for special dogs and is a free-of-cost mood elevator for those who follow him on social media. In an emotional post on Instagram couple of months ago, Jasmine Milton, her owner who suffers from bipolar disorder, wrote about how she had almost given up on life, but was saved, thanks to Anuko's love. For those who doubt the powers of dogs, here's some solid scientific evidence. According to a Swedish study published in the prestigious journal, Nature, canine ownership reduces cardiovascular risk in their owners by providing social support and motivation for physical activity.

The study of 3.4 million Swedish adults between the ages of 40 and 80 years over a period of 12 years found that having a dog was associated with a 23% reduction in death from heart diseases and a 20% lower risk of dying from any cause. Previous studies such as the one by the American

Heart Association in 2013 suggested dogs relieve social isolation and depression - both linked to an increased risk of heart disease and early death. Dog lovers also confirm their healing powers. Recently, Congress spokesperson Sanjay Jha lost his "cute little ball of fur" Oliver, aka Ola, Olsy, Oga, Olly, a Lhasa Apso. In a moving tribute in dailyO, Jha wrote: "We got Oliver after we lost our earlier dog, Amadeus... At core, he [Oliver] was a small fragile bundle of joy, and within days of coming home, we were experiencing sunshine all over again, lifting the morose darkness that had momentarily enveloped us all" (italics mine). In response to an email from Hindustan Times, he gave another example: "I was feeling gutted on May 23 (election results day). I reached home past midnight, emotionally drained. But for my dogs none of that mattered. I was their Superman hero. It was like the Congress had just won 543 seats".

And why just talk only about dogs that are lucky to have a loving and caring home? Are they only capable of spreading positive energy? What about the strays that stay in the harshest possible conditions and are often brutalised by human beings?

"Despite such bad experiences, I have always found them positive and loving... when they come to the dog shelter, we realise that their capacity to give love has not decreased at all... Even though they live in worst of conditions, they teach us understanding, hope and compassion, and strengthens us in many ways," says Dorothy Ghosh, who runs Kalyani Animal Welfare Foundation in Delhi. "Micky, a senior dog, was abandoned by his family and sent to my shelter. He lived with us for a year and a half before he died, proving that his ability to trust and love humans was intact... in fact, I think stray dogs should be treated as community pets. They are great stress busters and can teach children



a lot about caring and sharing". Pet Insurance The Indian pet care industry is booming. According to India Pet Care Market report listed on Research and Markets, the sector has advanced with a compound annual growth rate of 23% between 2012 and 2017. It's not surprising then that insurance firms have come up with plans for dogs too.

1. Pet Insurance schemes in India cover veterinary expenses incurred for the treatment of a pet. Some plans also cover death or loss of an insured pet.
2. According to bankbazaar.com, New India Insurance, United India Insurance and Oriental Insurance offer pet insurance schemes

3. Pet insurance covers: Death due to accident, illness contracted while the policy is in effect, treatment expenses, accident while in transit (via rail, air or road), loss/ theft of the pet; incapacitation; accidental poisoning; third Party liability
4. Pet insurance Exclusions: Willful or malicious injury to the pet; injury or illness arising out of neglect or unskillful handling of the pet; loss or injury due to war, foreign hostility, revolution, rebellion, military upheaval, etc; death due to rabies, distemper, Viral Hepatitis, Viral Enteritis, Leptospirosis; illness that has been contracted prior to taking the policy.

Depend on sleep trackers? It might be bad for you

How many hours of sleep are you getting in a day? Are you constantly worried about not getting enough shut-eye and thus, depending on a fitness tracker or a sleep device to correct your sleep deficiency? Think again! The same sleep gadget you think is helping you get good sleep is leading to sleep disturbance or even risking insomnia.

Considering how gadget-friendly our lifestyle is, we are all dependent on one or the other gadget to correct our daily habits and that includes sleep. Even if it is a simple app installed on your phone or a wearable watch, they are advertised as a device to measure your sleep patterns and analyze the same. Sometimes, they also work as a reminder to keep the phone away and actually sleep. However, as experts have observed, these small sleep gadgets are working against the purpose and making

us more addicted to them. This way, out of stress, it might also be triggering your insomnia.

This is why

The primary reason this happens is that with all its reminders, sleep gadgets tend to make you more anxious and worry about not sleeping well and thereby, make it even harder to get good sleep. Once you get into the habit of tracking your sleep, it can also make you obsessed with your sleep cycle, which is a real problem called 'orthosomnia'.

People suffering from this problem constantly worry about not sleeping well and in the lack of it, suffer from anxiety and may make you a victim of insomnia. The same was observed by a group of scientists at Northwestern University's School of Medicine. Amongst the people observed, while sleep trackers did end up correcting their bad habits, the participants tended to rely on



the data too much. Even if they were sleeping well, the devices forced them to think they weren't.

Several studies conducted over the year have also suggested that the number of hours sleeping differ for everyone. The conventional 8 hours does not do the job for all. Even 6-7 hours spent in

bed were fine.

There was also another side effect the study observed. Being obsessed with their sleeping patterns sometimes made people lay in bed for longer, just to clock in more hours and correct the number on the device.

What to do instead:

Instead of relying on sleep

devices, at the end of the day, you should really be depending on your body's signals. When you are tired, your body has a way of telling you the same. Also, as a rule, disconnect from any devices and screens a good 30-45 minutes before you go to bed. This will detox you and ensure you get good, trouble-free sleep.

5 tips for building healthy relationships with people

Relationships can be tricky, but with the right advice, you can help create positive relationships with your friends and family.

We are social animals, but we all struggle to maintain our relationships with others. Humans spend most of their time with other humans, then why do we have to make those relationships complicated? Wouldn't it be nice to be surrounded by people who truly appreciate and support you?

This would only happen if you put in a little bit of your efforts and try to build positive relationships. It might sound like a lot of work, but it's actually not that difficult. You just need to follow these tips and see the changes for yourself.

1) Differences don't create differences: People are often heard saying that their friends or loved ones just don't understand them. Well, that's because everyone has their own perception and way of processing things. In relationships major problems arise when two people

are different, but it's not the differences which create problems. It is the lack of understanding which create these differences. You need to be able to see things from other's perspective and understand that everyone does not think the same way. Learn to appreciate the differences.

2) Listen effectively: This has been stressed a lot of times but, it is worth mentioning every single time. You can make a person feel valued and supported by just listening patiently to what they have to say. Communication isn't complete unless you listen and understand others. Remember, don't just pretend to listen but actually listen. In active listening you listen to the person speaking with interest and make conscious effort to understand them. After reflecting on their message, you



verify and give your feedback which makes the communication effective.

3) Take out some time for people: In this fast paced world, giving people time has become the hardest thing to do. If you do manage to give your time, you are busy on your phone texting or scrolling through social media. Being present in the moment is very crucial for building meaningful relationships with people. Don't worry about the

past or future when you are with someone just enjoy their company.

4) Empathy is the key: Develop empathy towards others. When people share their thoughts, they want you to understand how they feel. Empathy doesn't mean you need to fix their problems or give them solutions. It means that you are able to understand others without belittling and criticizing them. Empathy also helps in

developing meaningful relationships with others.

5) Feedback is also important: We don't always like when someone gives feedback, but it is really important for your progress. Constructive feedback helps you grow as a person, though it might not always be what you want to hear but it's useful. So, don't let feedbacks bring you down because they are just free information for you to take or reject.

Virat, Shikhar are now aam: Cricket fever grips mango growers back home

At the upcoming 31st Mango Festival in Delhi, there will be mangoes dedicated to Indian cricketers such as Virat Kohli and Shikhar Dhawan.

It's the 31st year when mango growers from across the country will gather under one roof with their choicest produce, to compete for the top slots that offer cash prizes to the best mango varieties. But, it's the first time ever that they have let the

cricket fever take over them, and named some of the new varieties of mangoes after Indian cricketers. Well, looks like the World Cup fever has caught on. So, when you visit this year's Mango Festival at Dilli Haat, Janak Puri, that begins July 5,

you will be able to taste Virat Kohli, ahem, the mango called Virat Kohli. In the past years, some varieties of mangoes have been named Yogi aam and Modi aam.

Tariq Mustafa, a mango grower from UP's Muzaffarnagar, says, "I've been participating in this festival for about 16-17 years, and every year bring around 300 varieties of mangoes. Every time we grow a new mango, we look for an appropriate name for it, and this time we have got a variety that we have named after cricketer Virat Kohli. This Virat mango is a bit whitish in colour, has a length of more than six inches, and in taste we feel that it's as powerful as the sixers of the Indian captain!"

Another mango grower, Ramveer Singh Chauhan, from Saharanpur, UP, says he plans to name a mango after Shikhar Dhawan. "When people come to the mango festival this year, they will see Shikhar Aam, which will showcase the strength and



endurance of the cricketer's performance in this World Cup... I have also named a new variety of mango after Shaheed Udham Singh, and strongly feel that like he avenged Jallianwala Bagh massacre by assassinating General Dwyer in England, this mango will make everyone speechless in England."

The organisers of the festival validate that it's the first time that cricket fever has gripped the mango growers. "Over the years, the Mango Festival has become one of the most-awaited events of the season. It will have around

500 varieties on display. Some fun-filled activities including a mango-eating competition is lined up for this three-day event. Mango growers also put their best foot forward to showcase the different varieties by giving some interesting names to their fresh produce through this platform. As the World Cup fever grips India, the growers are dedicating this year's new variety to famous Indian cricketers, which should create interest among the mango lovers," says Sudhir Sobti, chief manager, PR and events, Delhi Tourism.

Mango delight



Article 15 movie review

Ayushmann Khurrana hunts for inconvenient truths in an essential film

Article 15 movie review: Anubhav Sinha and Ayushmann Khurrana's film has the stench of honesty. It asks you questions you already know but don't ask yourselves enough. Rating: 4.5 stars.

Article 15

Director: Anubhav Sinha

Cast: Ayushmann Khurrana, Manoj Pahwa, Kumud Mishra, Sushil Pandey, Sayani Gupta, Mohammad Zeeshan Ayyub

Rating: 4.5/5

The posting was a punishment. Ayan Ranjan, newly minted Indian Police Service officer, the tuck of his shirt crisp as a new banknote, readily admits the reason he's sentenced to the bleak badlands of Uttar Pradesh. Ranjan had agreed with a senior officer without sounding officious enough - he had said "Cool, sir", a yes-man forgetting his only line - and the perceived insubordination was enough to land him in a world where half the people don't touch the other half.

Article 15, Anubhav Sinha's searing film about the indignities endorsed by the caste-system in modern day India, does not

play it cool. Inspired by the real-life Badaun killings - and a stirring tribute to Alan Parker's 1988 procedural thriller Mississippi Burning - this film features policemen hushing up the murder and gangrape of three 15-year-old girls because they belong to a lowered caste. Us, and Them. It is a grim, unrelenting and essential film, one throwing up truths we choose to forget.

"Welcome to Page 7 India," says Ranjan's wife, when he calls and texts her, his eyes wide with newly discovered outrage at the plight of the Dalits and the downtrodden in middle India. Reports about these atrocities are relegated to the little-read middle of the paper, far from the front and sport pages. Ayan, a young Brahmin who likes his single malt, and walks around with a holster suavely sticking out from underneath a well-cut blazer, feels as much a stranger to that

locale as an Englishman. The policemen below him are keen to make sure he isn't some young fool out to change the system after watching too many renegade cop movies starring Ajay Devgn. 'They get transferred,' grunt old cops in the know, 'while we get killed.' Us, and Them.

Written by Gaurav Solanki and Sinha, the film has the stench of honesty. It is hauntingly shot by Ewan Mulligan, who slides through the shadows to zero in on acute specifics: the breakfast prepared before a murder, the everyday banality of a crime scene, and - most unforgettably - a man cleaning a filthy black drain. He cleans our world because we won't do it ourselves.

As policemen plod through a marsh, Ranjan asks about politics, and the men good-humouredly state why they vote



for the Elephant one year and the Cycle the next, and for the parties their mothers told them to always vote for. Rebels use Whatsapp, while cops keep tabs on activism by seeing what messages are being forwarded. The filmmakers cannily use texting to educate the leading man, the messages from his level-headed wife becoming the voice in his head. We do not need a hero, she insists. We just need people to stop waiting for a hero. Ayushmann Khurrana plays Ranjan with inevitable entitlement. His elitist indignation while barking orders

gets things done, but also distances him from the policemen answering to him. In one remarkable scene he matter-of-factly asks the cops about their places - and his own, for he is privileged enough not to know - in the caste hierarchy, and the distinctions between caste-and-Kayastha are maddening. One of them says he is a Jaat, and was 'normal,' but has now been granted Other Backward Class status, while Jaats in other states have not. This is illegal. Ranjan asking them their caste, I mean. Not the division, but the pronouncement of it.

House Owner movie review

Moving story of unconditional love in the time of calamity

House Owner movie review: With her latest film, House Owner, Lakshmy Ramakrishnan weaves a heartfelt ode to unconditional love and it's devastatingly beautiful.

Film: House Owner

Director: Lakshmy Ramakrishnan

Cast: Kishore, Sriranjani, Lovelyn Chandrasekhar and Kishore

Rating: 4/5

Lakshmy Ramakrishnan is one among the few Tamil filmmakers who has truly evolved - both in style and storytelling - with each film she's made so far and that's one of the primary reasons why her films which may not have struck gold at the box-office but deserve to be celebrated. With House Owner, her latest film, Lakshmy weaves a heartfelt ode to unconditional love and it's devastatingly beautiful. No other mainstream Tamil filmmaker - at least in recent years - has handled love as beautifully as Lakshmy in House Owner which

unfolds against the backdrop of 2015 Chennai floods.

House Owner is centred around Radha and Vasudevan and we see them get married early on in the film. It's a Brahmin wedding and the seriousness with which the rituals are performed is proof to the sanctity of marriage and its relevance even today. Cut to some 40 plus years later, we see the older version of Radha and Vasu and not much has changed between them except that Vasu (a retired army man) now has Alzheimer's and it's Radha's responsibility (which she wholeheartedly accepts) to look after him. While she's looking after him in their house, a calamity is in the making (2015 Chennai floods) outside and they have nowhere to go, simply because Vasu won't step out of

his house.

As we see Radha literally look after Vasu like he's a child, we also see him have fleeting shots of memories of their past. Every time he comes across something in the house, say some object, there's a flash of memory that reminds him of a special moment many years ago. This is when the story takes us back in time and introduces us to young Radha and Vasu. We see a young and shy Radha, who sees the world through her husband's eyes. He teaches her English, to play carrom board and dance in front of his friends. He tells her to be herself when she asks if he regrets marrying someone who isn't as smart as him. As the story shifts back to 2015, we see the roles are reversed and it's now Radha



looking after Vasu, trying to remind him that she's his wife. The idea of staying united gets magnificently conveyed in House Owner, which makes us realize the importance in the institute of marriage at a time when it is losing its significance. As we hear Radha repeat the same instruction over and over again to her husband, it does get slightly boring, but it is heartening to see Radha not give up because her love is unconditional. The film is a grave reminder of the bitter truth that

life can get very lonely when we become old and the only person that matters the most is our spouse. As a young couple, we see Radha and Vasu surrounded by friends, family and relatives. But in the scenes featuring the older couple, we don't see anyone else but only hear voices of family members through phones and of neighbours through the window. Lakshmy Ramakrishnan continues to narrate stories from the perspective of women.

Alia Bhatt may sing for, feature in her own music video



Bollywood actor Alia Bhatt, who has crooned a few songs in her movies, may soon release and feature in her own music video, reports suggest. Pinkvilla and Mumbai Mirror claimed that Alia may sing a song and feature in the music video, which will be released on her recently announced YouTube channel. Announcing her channel, Alia had said in a video, "I have done the Instagram world, the Twitter world and now I am trying to get on to the Youtube world. You will get to see a lot me just being. Totally unadulterated." "What she posts on her Twitter and Instagram handles is the final result. Her channel will showcase how she works with her team behind the scenes.

Saaho song Psycho Saiyaan

Shraddha Kapoor brings the glamour to this Prabhas starrer

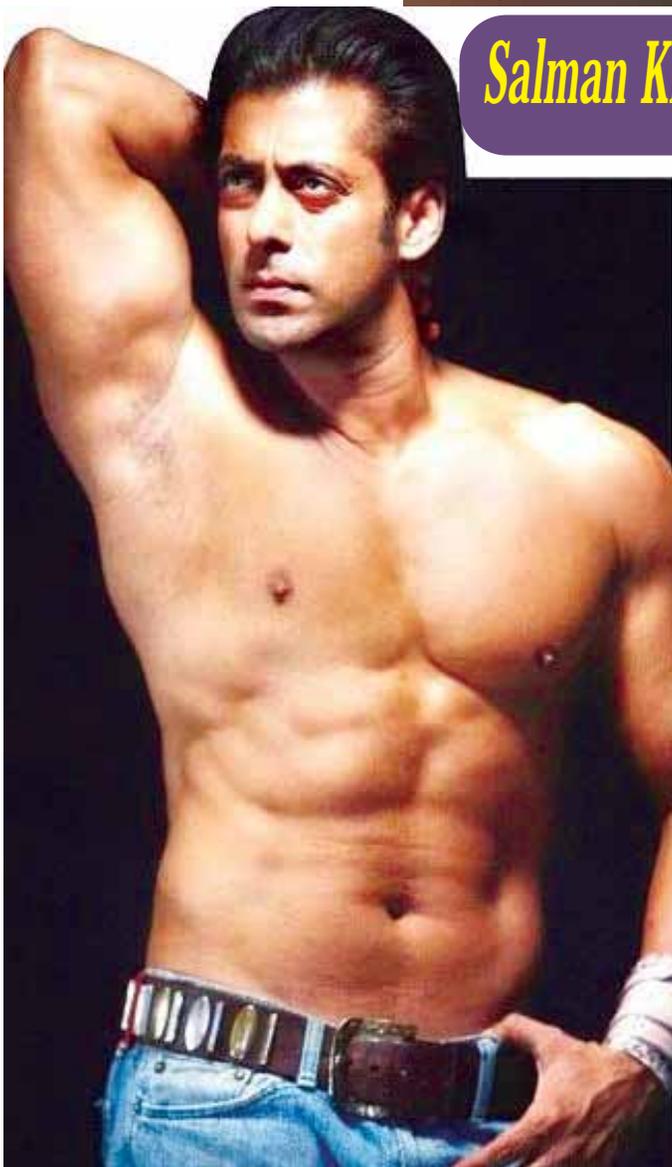


Shraddha Kapoor might be the big hit of the season. Check out the pic: brings a tonne of glamour to Saaho's first song titled Psycho Saiyaan. The first pictures from the song show her in a little black dress, ready to hit the dance floor. Saaho, starring Baahubali star Prabhas in the lead, is an action thriller. The first song from the film is expected to be a peppy club number that just

Jackie Shroff, Neil Nitin Mukesh, Murli Sharma, and Chunky Panday will also be seen in never-before-seen avatars. Shraddha and Prabhas will be seen sharing screen space for the first time in 'Saaho'. The film also marks her debut in the South Indian film industry. The movie has been shot in Telugu, Tamil, and Hindi simultaneously at a number of

stunning locations in and out of the country and is slated to hit the theatres on Independence Day, August 15, this year. Shraddha will also be seen in Chhichhore with Sushant Singh Rajput in dual roles of a college student as well as a middle-aged woman. She also stars opposite Varun Dhawan in Street Dancer. Shraddha also has Baaghi 3 in her kitty.

Salman Khan is a fitness icon, says Katrina Kaif, calls him an inspiration



Katrina Kaif is in awe of her Bharat co-star Salman Khan's workout discipline.

Fitness is important for actor Katrina Kaif and she wants everybody to incorporate it in their life, but is against the idea of people trying to get a physique like others. She says she doesn't believe in an 'ideal physique' or 'ideal way' that a woman should look.

The Bharat actor has long working hours and various work commitments, but she doesn't let them come in the way of her fitness. She spoke highly of her Bharat co-star and told Zoom, "Salman Khan is a fitness icon. It's so inspiring to see him passionately follow his physical targets. And he takes his fitness training very seriously. It's just

amazing how his passion for fitness is growing with every passing day." "It is very simple. There are 24 hours in a day. If you can't take out even 40 minutes in a day then I think it



are," Katrina told IANS in a telephonic interview.

"There are so many different types of training that one can do. The most important thing is to find the

type of training that works for you. Don't try to copy somebody else. I don't believe that there is any ideal physique or any ideal way a woman should look. Asked about her upcoming action film Sooryavanshi, she said: "I am not doing much of action in it. It's kind of just a more... regular look in my film." She told Zoom, "I think

is your choice or there is not a reason enough to do it. Maybe it's not working for you but if fitness is important to you, you can take out 45 minutes in a day wherever you Salman Khan and Akshay Kumar. They are so passionate about their fitness training and work really hard towards achieving their fitness training."

Kylie Jenner wows with sultry pose as the makeup mogul soaks up the summer sun in coral bikini

As a 'self-made' billionaire, she's no stranger to hard work.

And the effort was showing on Kylie Jenner on Wednesday, when the 21-year-old posted a photo of herself to Instagram while glistening in sweat. The reality TV star showed plenty of skin while wearing a skimpy coral colored bikini.

Jenner unveiled her new summer cosmetics collection with a series of bikini pictures on Tuesday. The entrepreneur posed on the beach wearing a huge hat, grey halterneck swimsuit and metallic cover-up skirt in the sultry images. Kylie has emerged as a titan in the beauty industry and has been hailed as a 'self-made billionaire' by Forbes magazine.

The star, who was spotted on a very rare make-up free outing in Beverly Hills last week, has leveraged her family's fame and her social media following into a lucrative empire.

Kylie snapped the pictures during her beach photoshoot on June 4 in Malibu, California.

She was seen writhing on the sand in two different looks with her photographer and team in tow.

Kylie rocked the ensemble seen in the snaps - a taupe crochet bikini top with a gold mini skirt, and large hat adding several gold bracelets, rings and earrings.

Kylie later donned a taupe colored crop top and a high-waisted skirt, revealing her cheeky bikini bottoms and her derriere.

The mother of one, who posed on a rock, sported long, dark brunette locks in waves with part of it half up, half down. Her latest range is called Under the Sea and will drop on July 10. She has been sharing sneak peeks of the products on her Instagram account, with many of the items made from 'new formulas'.

Kylie is unveiling two new formula glosses, Bikini Bod and Boss Bay, which are packaged in 'pearl white vials'. The new collection also features a 'high gloss' named You Are The Sun - which Kylie 'loves' - and three lipsticks, two matte and one metallic

topper, named Paradise Please, Beach Bum and Endless Summer.

Night Swim, Ocean Child,

Deep Sea Dreams,

and Aqua Mama

are four new

shimmer eye

g l a z e s .

K y l i e

promised

of the

products:

'You guys

will fall in

love with

this new

formula.'

There is

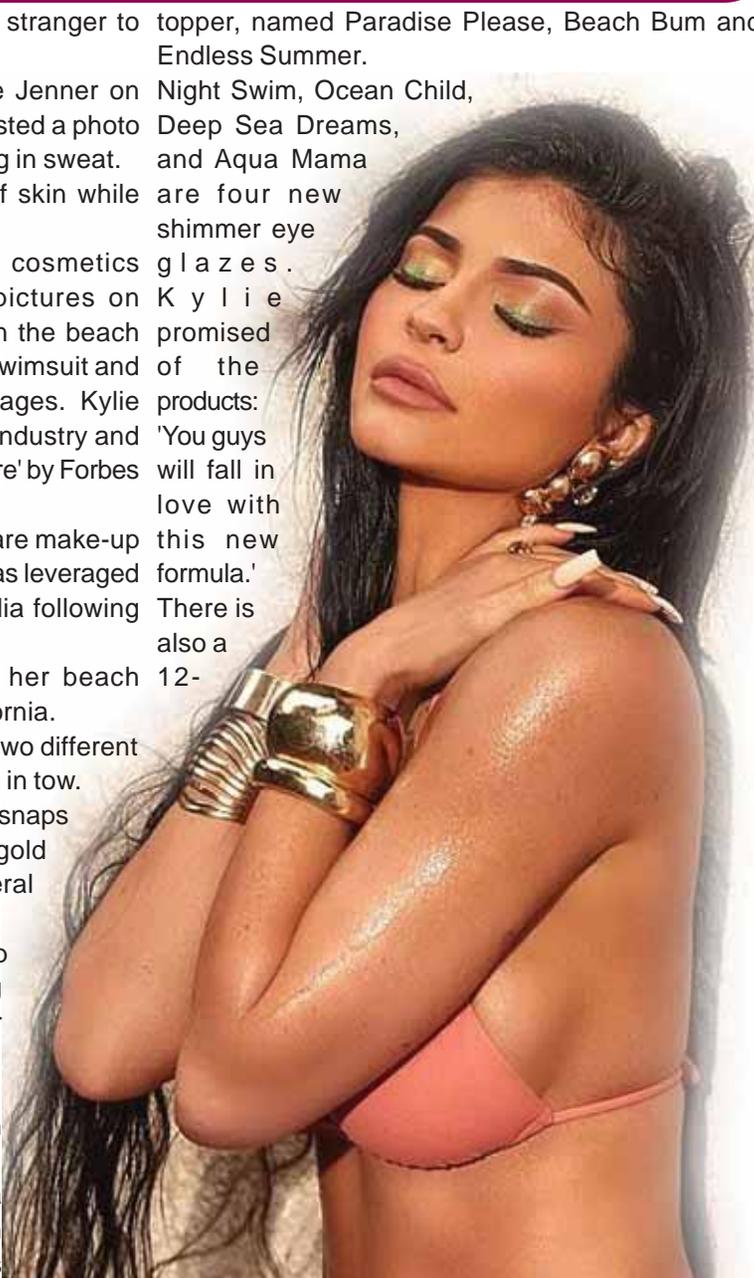
also a

12-

shadow palette and a set of all of the range's products

in a shell-shaped case.

Following the reveal, Kylie was inundated with positive feedback. She tweeted: 'Yay!!! So happy you guys love the summer collection!!! I can't wait for 7/10!!! @kyliecosmetics (sic)'



Kim Kardashian wins \$2.7MILLION in fast fashion lawsuit against company who she accused of profiting off of her likeness to peddle knockoff looks

Kim Kardashian landed a major victory against a fast fashion site who she accused of knocking off her looks.

The 38-year-old aspiring lawyer was awarded over \$2.7 million dollars in damages after she sued Missguided USA, according to TMZ on Tuesday.

In February, Kim filed suit against the brand for copying her trendsetting looks without her permission for a big profit.

The mogul will get an addition \$60K in attorneys' fees on top of the \$2.7 million in the award and Missguided is banned from using Kim's likeness, TMZ reported.

The court noted that the brand had pages dedicated to styles copied from Kim and even used her real life images which made it seem as if she was affiliated with the brand.

She had originally demanded \$10 million in damages but was awarded the nearly \$3 million after Missguided USA failed to respond to the court filing.

The Keeping Up With the Kardashians star cited several instances in the lawsuit 'where Missguided posted its own versions of outfits Kim was photographed wearing.' In the suit, the Keeping Up with the Kardashians star included photos of her own social media posts side-by-side with the company's posts, showing their similarities and misrepresentation.

In one particularly egregious instance, Kim shared a shot on social media from a fitting where she was dressed in a sizzling gold spandex dress that was designed by her husband Kanye.

The star implored fast fashion sites to 'wait until I wear this in real life before you knock it off.' Shortly after she posted the image, Missguided responded with a shot of their knockoff and even tagged Kim in their caption.



Diljit Dosanjh on Bollywood: Main industry mein true friends banane nahi aaya

He's steadily found his footing in Bollywood ever since he entered the industry with Udda Punjab (2016), alongside Kareena Kapoor Khan. And there's no slowing down Diljit Dosanjh. However, he hasn't ditched regional cinema, which propelled him to stardom. His latest Punjabi film, Shadaa, is doing well at the box office. He takes some time to open up, but the moment he calls you 'paaji' (brother) is when you know he's at ease. Excerpts from an interview:

Your recent Punjabi film Shadaa clashed with Kabir Singh at the box office. Did that play on your mind? Also,

doesn't it get hectic juggling two film industries and music?

It's an everyday exercise which we have to do. It's not as if you do one thing one day and forget it the next day. And please don't say 'clash'. Two films released on a single day, which is not a problem. I think we got good screens in Punjab. Thank God we got good screens in Delhi too. No doubt, we didn't get as many screens in Mumbai, we knew that. It would have been a problem if the theme would have been the same for both films.

But one was Punjabi film, the other a Hindi film. We are lucky that when our film releases in Punjab, people go and watch it.

How's Bollywood as a place? Have you been able to make true friends here?

It's a very good place. Kaam jahaan bhi mile bahut achhi jagah hai. Main true friends banane nahi aaya iss industry mein, mere true friends already hain. Lekin jinke saath main kaam karta hoon, unke saath mere achhe equations hain. It's always said that the film industry is a very cut-throat one...

That's okay, what's bad in that? There's a guy, whose one film doesn't work, second film doesn't work, the next one too doesn't work, so the producer will think that he should work with



someone else. But the actor will also think that let's try something else. Buri baat nahi hai yeh bolna. But paaji, woh toh aap kisi bhi field mein dekh lo. If you are an insurance policy person, you are

told 'go and sell these many policies first, then we will finalise your job!' Yeh sirf glamour ki wajah se news iski (films) uchhalti zyaada hai. Otherwise, the equations are the same in every industry.

Spectacular fall of India's 'dosa king': Saravana Bhavan's P Rajagopal due for life sentence



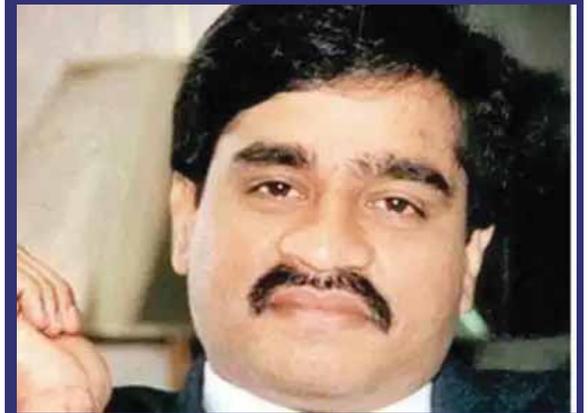
(News Agencies)- P. Rajagopal's story has it all: rags to riches, the visionary creator of a trailblazing Indian restaurant chain -- and having a romantic rival murdered after some fateful cosmic advice. On Sunday, the founder of Saravana Bhavan, the eatery found in India and

beyond -- from Leicester Square to Lexington Avenue via Singapore, Sydney and Stockholm -- is due to begin a life sentence. Rajagopal, 71, always dressed in white with a strip of sandalwood paste on his forehead, is the pious son of a low-caste onion trader from a village

in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. In 1981, having opened a grocer's shop in Chennai -- then known as Madras -- he took the brave step of opening his first restaurant at a time when eating out was unusual for most Indians.

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'Dawood's top henchman' fights extradition to US after being duped by FBI agents



(News Agencies)- Undercover FBI informants infiltrated the top ranks of Dawood Ibrahim's D-Company, trafficked heroin into the US and laundered more than \$1 billion of the proceeds of narcotics crime before seeking the arrest of his "top henchman", a court heard on Monday. Pakistani national Jabir Motiwala, who uses the surname Siddiq, is contesting extradition to the US where he is wanted to face trial for conspiracy to commit money laundering, blackmail and extortion and conspiracy to import heroin into the US.

The 52-year-old was arrested at the Hilton Hotel in Paddington here in August last year by the Metropolitan police's extradition unit on behalf of the US government and is now in Wandsworth prison, alongside Nirav Modi.

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Anil Ambani planning to sell Mumbai HQs to cut debt: Report



(News Agencies)- Businessman Anil Ambani is looking to sell or lease his group's headquarters in Mumbai, an effort aimed at reducing the debt the industrialist's companies are in. Anil Ambani would reportedly move back to his Ballard Estate office in South Mumbai, a property he had gained after he split with his elder brother Mukesh in 2005. According to business daily The Economic Times, Anil Ambani is looking to either sell the 700,000 sq ft property or put it on long-term lease. According to Times of India, the property is owned by Reliance Infrastructure and the idea behind selling or leasing it is to make the

company debt free. Anil Ambani has been facing a tough time in recent years. Almost of all of the Reliance Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group companies are in massive debt. In fact, Anil Ambani barely managed to avoid going to prison recently over unpaid debt of one of his erstwhile companies -- Reliance Communications. Earlier this year, the Supreme Court had ordered Anil Ambani to pay money owed to telecom equipment maker Ericsson or go to jail. Anil was saved from going to jail by his elder brother Mukesh who lent him the money he needed to pay Ericsson.

Former NYPD cop sentenced for heading up gambling and prostitution ring in city and Hempstead, Queens DA says



(News Agencies)- A retired NYPD vice detective has been sentenced to four to 12 years in prison for his role in operating a prostitution and gambling ring in Brooklyn, Queens and Hempstead, the Queens District Attorney's Office said Tuesday. Ludwig "Agua" Paz, 51, and his wife Arelis Peralta, 44, both of Queens, headed the gambling ring from a deli, two hair salons and other New York City locations, the district attorney's office said. The gambling ring included placing illegal bets on legal lotteries in those establishments, authorities said. The brothels operated on Front Street in Hempstead, on Liberty and Onderdonk avenues in Queens, and on Gates, Foster and Fourth avenues and 42nd Street in Brooklyn. The prostitution ring,

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Biden plummets, Harris vaults to second in major poll



(News Agencies)- Kamala Harris has rocketed into the top tier of the Democratic presidential primary, while Joe Biden's once double-digit lead has crumbled in a national poll taken after last week's debate. The CNN/SRSS poll, which was released on Monday and conducted entirely after the first two Democratic presidential primary debates last week, has Harris, the California senator in second place, among Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents who are registered to vote, at 17 percent. Harris' surge places her firmly within the top tier, which now consists of four candidates. Biden still sits at the top of the pack with 22 percent, but his once-commanding lead has eroded significantly. Sen. Elizabeth Warren is in third with 15 percent, followed by Sen. Bernie Sanders' 14 percent. Both Harris and Warren saw sizable jumps in their support over a previous CNN national poll, taken at the end of May. Harris went up 9 points, from 8 percent in May, and Warren rose by 8 points, from 7 percent in May.

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