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UN General Assembly rejects Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital



UN General Assembly rejected Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital

- India votes to challenge US decision
- Israel calls preposterous vote against Jerusalem at UN General Assembly

UNITED NATIONS (TIP): India joined 127 other countries, on December 20 to vote in the UN General Assembly in favor of a resolution opposing the recent decision of US President Donald Trump to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Nine countries voted against the resolution, while 35 countries abstained.

India's decision to vote against American recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital comes a day after Trump warned countries against opposing the US position. India did not speak on the floor of the Assembly in New York, but after Trump recognized the holy city of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, it had said that its

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2022 COMMONWEALTH GAMES TO BE HELD IN BIRMINGHAM



An artist's impression of Alexander Stadium in Birmingham, which is set to host events at the 2022 Commonwealth Games. Photo/Courtesy Birmingham City Council

LONDON (TIP): The Commonwealth Games Federation announced, December 21, that Birmingham has been chosen as the host for the 2022 Commonwealth Games. It has been a rocky road, with the second city facing competition from Liverpool and then having to wait for the announcement. After the South African city of Durban expressed its inability to host the 2022 Commonwealth

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UN owes India \$54.60 million for peacekeeping operations

NEW DELHI (TIP): The United Nations owes \$54.60 million to India for its peacekeeping operations, the government said on December 18.

In a written response to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State in the Defense Ministry Subhash Bhamre said the reimbursements due on on-going missions is \$41.93 million and \$12.67 million in case of closed missions.

India is an active participant in several UN peace-keeping missions.

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How Gujarat was won **Page 09**

Martyrdom of Sahibzadas **Page 20**

Christmas **Page 21**

Congress votes to avert shutdown, provide money for children's health insurance



WASHINGTON (TIP): To everybody's relief, Congress has once again averted a government shutdown - with a short-term funding measure through mid-January - and temporarily extended funding for health insurance for children from low-income families. The House voted 231-188 Thursday to approve a short-term spending bill that would fund most government programs at current levels through Jan. 19.

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AAPI-QLI hosts 22nd annual gala, honors 4 physicians for excellence



Nation first. US National Anthem was sung by Riti Sunshine Bhalla

MELVILLE, NY (TIP): AAPI-QLI (American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin of Queens and Long Island) hosted its 22nd Annual Convention at Huntington Hilton on Long Island, NY on December 16, under the leadership of its President Dr. Rakesh Dua. It was attended by Chief Guest Congressman from NY's 3rd district Honorable Tom Suozzi, Nassau County Executive elect Honorable Laura Curran, first deputy commissioner at department of health New York State Dr. Eugene Heslin, many dignitaries and more than 600 guests.

Four physicians, Dr. Mohinder Gupta; Dr. Devendra Mehta; Dr. P. Patrick Basu; and, Dr. Usha Krishnan were honored for their life time achievements and money was raised for many local and national charities. Dr. Ajay Lodha, immediate past president of national AAPI and Dr. Gautam Samadder, current president of national AAPI were recognized for their leadership and contributions to the physician community across the nation.

"We are here to celebrate our achievements tonight," Dr. Dua in his Presidential address. He stated that AAPI-QLI was registered in June 1995 as a Not-for-Profit Organization by Dr. Narendra Hadpawat to represent all Physicians of Indian Origin in Queens and Long Island, NY. The Inaugural dinner was held on June 3rd, 1995 at Leonard's of Great Neck, NY and with 150 physicians in attendance.

In his address, Tom Suozzi praised the contributions of Indian Americans to the larger American society. "In this room, you represent the future of New York And the USA. I see an immense pool of talents among you. We are very lucky to have you. You do so much for the nation," he said. Suozzi urged AAPI members "not to allow others to pull up the ladder from behind."

Echoing the sentiments, Dr. Gautam Samadder, President of AAPI, in his address, pointed out to the ongoing discrimination experienced by Indian American Doctors. He called upon the AAPI members to "stand united, in order to be able to fight for our rights," while pointing to the fact that Indian American Physicians service every 7th patient in the nation and contribute to the healthcare industry in the nation.

In his inaugural address as the incoming President, Dr. Jagdish Gupta, President-Elect of AAPI-QLI, announced the exciting new programs for the members in the year 2018 under his new leadership. "We want to continue to be the most vibrant, transformative and politically active Chapter among all AAPI chapters in the nation," he said.

The Mission of AAPI Queens and Long Island has been to represent the interests of all physicians of Indian Origin in the area



Nassau County Executive Elect Laura Curran (second from left) was a Guest of Honor. Besides the bouquet she is holding, she was presented a plaque. Others seen in the picture, from L to R: Dr. Jagdish Gupta, President Elect, Mrs. Asha Dua, Dr. Rakesh K Dua, President



Dr. Prachi Dua did a wonderful job as Master of Ceremonies



Honorees Dr. Mohinder Gupta, Prof. Davendra Mehta, Dr. P. Patrick Basu, Dr. Usha Krishnan with the Chief Guest Congressman Tom Suozzi and AAPI-QLI officials



President Dr. Rakesh K Dua presents a plaque to Congressman Tom Suozzi. Seen in the picture, from L to R: Dr. Ajay Lodha, Immediate Past President, National AAPI, Dr. Rakesh K Dua, Tom Suozzi, Dr. Jagdish Gupta, Dr. Sudhir Parikh, Dr. Abhay Malhotra, Convention Chair, Dr. Gautam Samadder, President, National AAPI
Photos / Vaaho Photographers

including providing Continuous Medical Education (CME) and engaging in charitable activities for the benefit of our community at large. Since its inception there was a strong alliance with and support from National AAPI.

AAPI-QLI grew rapidly in membership and was well accepted by all other local and national professional organizations. From the very beginning the leadership put heavy emphasis on transparency and the democratic process, which is the main ingredient for its enormous success. AAPI of Queens and Long Island currently represents 660 active physicians and donates more than \$60,000 annually for charitable purposes. It is also one of the largest chapters of National AAPI.

Indian -American Amritraj Singh Athwal to face death penalty for murder of Indian student



SACRAMENTO (TIP): Indian American Amritraj Singh Athwal who is serving jail term, is facing the death penalty after the Madera County district attorney slapped additional special charges against him for allegedly killing a 21-year-old Indian student in California on November 13.

According to a Times of India report, with the additional charges slapped by Madera County District Attorney David Linn, the accused may face penalties to life without the possibility of parole, or the death penalty. "We do not take capital cases lightly, however, based upon the facts that have been reported to us from law enforcement, we believe that either life without the possibility of parole, or the death penalty, is the appropriate sentence in this case," said a press release issued by Linn.

"Although prior election propositions and action by the State Legislature and Governor Brown have stripped law enforcement of effective tools to properly punish the defendant, my staff and I are fully committed to pursuing the most serious penalties available under existing California law," he added. Dharampreet Singh Jassar, a student from Punjab, who was studying accounting and criminal justice at Fresno State University, was killed by four armed robbers on November 13 while he was on duty at a grocery store next to a gas station in Fresno city in California. Athwal was among the gang who entered the store to steal cash and cigarette. Jassar was found dead by a customer next day morning. Athwal was arrested November 14, and arraigned on December 7. His cousin Savirant Singh Athwal was also arrested in connection with the incident on December 15, two days after the attack, and arraigned December 19. They are charged with murder, second-degree robbery, and a special allegation of murder while in the commission of a robbery. They are being held in Madera County Jail without bail.

Jassar was, reportedly, the only son of the Punjabi parents. Sukhi Chahal, chairman of the Punjab Foundation told The Times of India that drug was the root cause of such killings and such incidents bring shame to the Punjabi community. "We cannot deny that drug is the root cause of many of these killing among the Punjabis in North America which brings shame to the community. It is the responsibility of the community leaders to accept the hard reality and work together to find the solution of these problems," Chahal was quoted as saying by The Times of India. *(Source: Times of India)*

Indian- American Actress Mindy Kaling turns mom, names baby daughter Katherine

LOS ANGELES (TIP): Hollywood actress and The Mindy Project star Mindy Kaling reportedly gave birth to a baby girl on December 15. According to sources, the 38-year-old actress, who will next be seen in Ocean's 8, has named her baby Katherine Kaling, although the news is yet to be officially confirmed.



Meanwhile, speculations are rife about the father of the child as Mindy is not believed to be dating anyone. "She is not telling anyone, not even close friends, who the father is," a source told the publication. Mindy, who announced her pregnancy back in August, had earlier said, "I'm very, very pregnant. I've had a pretty great time of it so far, but I think I took a lot for granted before this, now that I'm in my current situation. Like, sitting, I'm obsessed with sitting and even when I was standing back there I was looking at this chair and I was like, 'Awww, can't wait to sit in that chair!'" *(Read full story on www.theindianpanorama.news)*

Indian-American Ajit Pai at center of US move to repeal net neutrality rules

WASHINGTON (TIP): Ajit Pai, a son of immigrant Indians, also the one who heads the US FCC is at the center of the debate ever since the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the telecom regulator of the United States of America, has repealed a landmark law the country passed in 2015 to ensure net neutrality in the US. Net neutrality, they say, ensures that no service provider will speed up or throttle a particular service because of its business interests.

Pai is a Republican and was made the FCC chief in January 2017, the same month the Trump administration took over the White House. Ajit Pai was appointed a commissioner in the FCC in 2012 by then president Barack Obama.

The move by Pai, whose FCC bio states that "consumers benefit most from competition, not pre-emptive regulation and regulators should be skeptical (sic) of pleas to regulate rivals", has sharply divided America with critics saying repealing the net neutrality law will kill the spirit of free internet.

Critics argue that the repeal plan will



Ajit Pai, the head of US FCC

benefit only few big telecom players who wield immense power over the flow of internet and telecommunication channels. Opponents of the repeal bill, named Restoring Internet Freedom Order, say it will effectively shut down or marginalize small players and will start a rush of predatory discriminating

practices where one telecom company will try all to disadvantage a rival company's data flowing through its cables.

And above all, internet users will be the ultimate losers with their freedom to get unrestrained access to all content and data gone, the critics add.

Indian Americans Celebrate 10th Hamara Desi Christmas

HOUSTON, TX (TIP): Houston's one and only Indian Christmas celebration was hosted last Saturday, December 16, at the Stafford Civic Center.

This year it was a sold-out event and as always, the auditorium was packed, and the audiences were treated to an awe-inspiring program by the Houston Indian Fellowship team.

The Houston Indian Fellowship (HIF), a group of Indians from across the metropolitan Houston area, conduct an annual Christmas Celebration to share with joy and cheer, the true meaning of Christmas to Houstonians from different walks of faith, religion, and social status. This year during the Christmas event HIF conducted spelling bee competition in addition to the usual painting competition.

The admission for the event was free, and it was followed by complimentary dinner for all the attendees. The dinner was catered by Amma's Kitchen.

HIF, by hosting events like these, strives to bring Christmas cheer to people from different faiths and regions of India.

The MCs Sharon Samuel and John Jeevarajan hosted this year's event with elegance. They were engaging, entertaining, and kept the audience feeling at home.

Dr. Robello Samuel, President of HIF kicked off this year's event with a welcome speech and spoke briefly about the history of Hamara Desi Christmas.

This year's celebration included a variety of dances from different parts of India, all presented professionally to an awestruck audience.

This year HIF also introduced their very own production 'The Birth of A



Savior' A screen and staged play retelling the life of Jesus, from His birth to resurrection.

The stage was overflowing with vibrant colors as costumes from different parts of India were used for the variety of dances enriching and bringing to life our very own culture several thousand miles away.

Deepak Israel, Secretary of Houston Indian Fellowship awarded the winners of the painting competition. Dr. Sushma of Spring Medical awarded the winners of Spelling bee competition. Tablets were given to the first prize winners in each category and the second prize winners were given a gift card.

Finally, the HIF children performed a Christmas Carol medley of Angels we have heard on high, Away in a manger, O come all ye faithful and Feliz Navi dad, as others in the audience joined Santa and the HIF team in wishing everyone a merry Christmas.

The audience was raving about the event. "Wow! This is the best organized Desi event I have been to in the Houston area! Well organized and well catered event. The programs were crisp, clear and very professional."

Sheena Reuben, one of the

coordinators of the event said "Christmas is the season of love, peace and Joy. Nothing gives us more joy than preparing for this Christmas event for the South Asian community in Houston. She further added that when we see that the audience thoroughly enjoy the show it gives us the reason to do better and more shows in the coming years."

Deepak Israel, of HIF proudly stated, "This event brings an opportunity to bring our own south Asian culture to be enjoyed thousands of miles away here in Houston. With the help of the many volunteers we plan on bringing more competitions and dances to the event. More importantly it is a free event accessible for everyone, so we can all share the Christmas spirit with joy!"

Dr. Robello Samuel, of HIF said "Seeing the spirit of Christmas freely shared with free food, dances, plays and competitions gives me great satisfaction as that is the whole idea behind the celebration!"

The University of Houston students along with several other families and friends helped behind the scenes activities- all of which helped make this celebration a memorable one. *(Source: indoamerican-news.com)*

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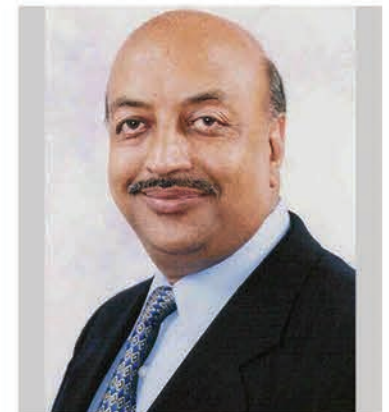
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BJP victory in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh Assembly Elections Celebrated



Jagdish Sewhani, president American India Public Affairs Committee said that people of Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh have out rightly rejected the politics of casteism, appeasement of minorities and corruption

HICKSVILLE, NY (TIP): Indian American Community organized a grand victory celebration in Hicksville, Long Island on December 19.

Jagdish Sewhani, president American India Public Affairs Committee said that people of Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh have out rightly rejected the politics of casteism, appeasement of minorities and corruption. They have endorsed good governance and voted for development. The



Women members of BJP celebrate victory of BJP in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh Assembly elections

proof is that the BJP has been re-elected for a record sixth time in Gujarat. In Himachal Pradesh they have totally rejected corrupt Congress government and gave BJP a 2/3rd majority.

Sharing his personal story, Sewhani said when he was growing up in Gujarat, long hours of power cut were norm of the day. Every year there were riots, and workers went on strike. Ever since BJP has come to power they have changed the face of Gujarat. It is the most developed and industrial State of the country. It has set a gold standard of development in the country. Gujarat now has surplus power. It is now riots and strikes free. There is internet even in villages.

Gujarat has reached this development because of a stable and powerful BJP

government for nearly last two decades.

This is the Gujarat Model we need to follow. If we want a developed and powerful India - which is peaceful and strong - the vision of New India that honorable Prime Minister has envisioned, we need a stable and strong government in Delhi for at least for the next three decades.

India is on its way to Congress Mukht Bharat. BJP/NDA is now in power in 19 states. The credit of victory goes to our dynamic Prime Minister Shri Narendrabhai Modiji, who in last 3 1/2 years has given clean government, set a standard for good governance. India is now marching ahead... We do not want to be stopped.

As such we need to work in a mission mode for the 2019 general elections. Our

objective should be not only to re-elect BJP, but also target 450 Lok Sabha seats and 50 percent of the popular votes. Such a strong mandate and popular government is essential to accelerate the pace of development march on the path of New India that we all dream of.

The vision of New India requires uninterrupted power to BJP and Modiji.

Modiji firmly believes in Politics of Development and Sab ka Sath and Sab Ka Vikas.

There was lot of excitement in the audience. They were again and again chanting Modi/Modi. The victory celebrations finally concluded with a new slogan of Modiji Jeetega Bhai Jeetega, Vikas Hee Jeetega. **(Press Release)**



BJP members celebrate victory

NHL Bridgestone Winter Classic returns to New York



By Marvi Sajid

NEW YORK (TIP): The NHL Bridgestone Winter Classic, is an annual event held by the national hockey league that takes

place New Year's Day, and features two NHL teams. The game is brought back outside to celebrate the origin of the game. This year the New York Rangers play host to their intrastate rivals the Buffalo Sabres at the home of the New York Mets- Citi Field.

The Buffalo Sabres were the first team ever to host a Winter Classic in the history of the league in 2008, where they played the Pittsburgh Penguins. The Sabres however, did lose the affair in a 2-1 shootout loss. The Sabres, are not



the only ones familiar with playing in the Winter Classic as the New York Rangers also took center stage at the 2012

Winter Classic where they took a 3-2 win over their metropolitan division rivals and host the Philadelphia Flyers.

Thus far this season, the New York Rangers look to be the stronger of the two teams as they currently hold a 19-12-3 record this season sitting just outside of a wild card playoff position. The Buffalo Sabres on the other hand, are nearly dead last in the league with another disappointing season having won just 8 games leading up to the New Year.

The game is not the only thing viewers should look forward too during the event as Buffalo's rock group the Goo Goo Dolls are set to perform during the first intermission of the game, along with the announcement of Team USA's Olympic roster.

The Winter Classic is set to air New Year's Day at 1pm ET on NBC straight from Citi Field.

INOC USA Congratulates Rahul Gandhi for 'a brilliant campaign' in Gujarat

NEW YORK (TIP): "In Gujarat, Congress Party scored a moral victory, a BJP bastion that has been turned into a Hindutva laboratory of polarization and bigotry. Despite tremendous odds, Congress Party increased its legislative seats to 77 and the vote share to 45%", said George Abraham, Vice-Chairman of the newly reconstituted Indian Overseas Congress, USA.

IOC congratulates Mr. Rahul Gandhi for conducting a statesman like a campaign and exposing the fallacy of the 'Gujarat Development model' which promotes crony capitalism at the expense of its ordinary citizens". Gandhi said "The propaganda was good, marketing was good, but it was hollow within. I saw it there (in Gujarat)." He also underlined that in his tweet after the verdict, in which he said that the Congress "fought anger with dignity" and that "the Congress' greatest strength is its decency and courage".

On the other hand, the Prime Minister was engaged in once again invoking the religious symbolism or exploiting a statement from an opposition party leader or even implying that the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of colluding with Pakistan to fix the Gujarat election. It was indeed a low point of the campaign, however; Modi may have succeeded in diverting the focus away from 'development' to these extraneous issues.



*INOC USA Chairman George Abraham with Rahul Gandhi
File photo*

This election has indeed exposed the rural and urban divide in the State that took a beating with misguided demonetization policy and messy implementation of GST that hurt the farmers and the trading community disastrously. Congress may have lost the election; however, Rahul Gandhi was able to drive home the message that those 22 years of BJP rule has left

most of the rural folks far behind while favoring the Industrialists and the urban upper class.

Apparently, Rahul Gandhi had an uphill battle; however, he has certainly helped himself changing the perception among the voting public that he is a caring person who is willing to listen and learn. BJP had to resort to an all-out campaign with suspending the winter session of the parliament while deploying almost the entire team from the central cabinet along with total support from national and local institutions together with the RSS cadre to protect Gujarat from falling into the opposition ranks.

Gujarat election may also show that Modi may be vulnerable 2019 with rural areas across the country are struggling, and joblessness among the youth are increasing with more younger leaders like Harkesh Patel, Alpesh Thakur and Jignesh Movani may emerge to challenge the status-quo.

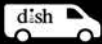
Finally, we respect the decision of the voters to give another term to BJP manifesting the strength and resilience of India's democracy. It is vital that the Institutions of democracy that were created under the Nehruvian vision remain strong and resolute in defending freedom and voter's right to choose their leaders. The current allegations against the tampering of the EVM machines should be thoroughly investigated and the integrity of the election process ought to be preserved.

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GUEST COMMENT

India in US global strategy: Limits to friendship with Uncle Sam

A new US national security strategy under Donald Trump was bound to induce great interest, especially about India's place in how the global system should be ordered. The 68-page document is confined to a macro view of the world's complex and interconnected problems. However, India clearly emerges as a useful cog in US attempts to prevent a shift in the balance of power in the Asian heartland. More than West Asia, the US has chalked out a more prominent role for India in the maritime domain in line with its strategy to prevent a free hand to hobble China's bid to expand its regional influence.

What are the payouts? Trump explicitly asks India to loosen its purse strings in Central and South Asia, perhaps as compensation for declining to put Indian boots on Afghan soil. The price for partnering the US in the Indo-Pacific is both tangible - more orders for US military companies at a time when the US budget is facing constraints - and intangible - greater Indian visibility in the near neighborhood. Just as the US is single-mindedly devoted to advancing American influence, India will have to cut its cloth according to its own national interests. It cannot view Russia and China from the American lens of unremitting hostility: its only two make-in-India defense projects are of Russian origin and there is already word that a Sino-India trade-off on NSG and One-Belt One-Road may be in the offing. India can ill afford to shrink the room for dialogue with both Russia and China.

A reality check is also in order: the US mentions India as only one of the eight potential allies in the Asia Pacific. If India is described as a "leading world power", there is approbation for the others: Japan is a "critical ally", Australia "a key partner", and friendship with South Korea "forged by trials of history". In West Asia too, India has a marginal role as the US has several irons in the fire. Whether it was Obama earlier or Trump now, proximity with the US has its limits as well as advantages.

(Tribune, India)

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AS I SEE IT

THE 'DO-MORE' CHORUS
BY US FOR PAK

Given the insipidities and banalities of diplomatic-speak, 'do more' is as direct an expression of dissatisfaction that the US can convey to Pakistan, given the American compulsions.

LT-GEN BHOPINDER
SINGH (RETD)

The slyest foreign policy warrior, Henry Kissinger, propounded the term 'constructive ambiguity' to describe the language of diplomacy that seeks to disguise, retain and still suggest the actual intent in a construct-of-words that are generally palatable (allowing some concessions), yet, allude to future necessity of actions towards a certain goal. The art of diplomatic wordsmithing has been tested to its limits in the Indian subcontinent, given the irascible tempers and the evolving narrative that besets the tempestuous fundamentals in the trilogy of the US-Pakistan-India equations.

In 1971, as National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger had underlined the US position and bias in the Indo-Pak war by stating, "We're in the position where a Soviet stooge, supported with Soviet arms, is overrunning a country that is an ally of the United States." The cold war binaries had cemented the Pakistani status as a 'major non-NATO ally', and then the annexation of Afghanistan by the USSR in 1979 had led to the largest covert joint operation in history, 'Operation Cyclone', - the US and the murky General Zia-led Pakistani establishment funded, trained and supplied manpower and weaponry to mujahideen.

Later, the end of cold war and the disintegration of the USSR ensured the selfish and thoughtless withdrawal of interest and bankrolling in the region by the US. However, the kettle of intrigues and virulent religiosity was kept boiling by the shadowy Pakistani-ISI to fertilize the environment into a breeding ground for terrorists, who today haunt the subcontinent, and beyond.

Like in Afghanistan, the US, after achieving its limited objectives in the Gulf wars, left a festering trail of destruction and chaos for the germination of the uber-intolerant and militant pan-Islamism that manifested in the unprecedented tragedy of 9/11, which recalibrated the global equations, thereafter. The decades-old cold war wiring in the US-Pakistan-India underwent a sudden relook and the inter-nation expectations, conversations and transactions underwent a complete re-haul.

The Pakistanis, under General Musharraf, were embarrassingly coerced into joining the global 'war on terror' as George W Bush threatened Pakistan with bombing, 'into the stone age', should it fail to cooperate. Expected reluctance emanated from the sudden retraction from the consistent Pakistani position, e.g. treating terror organizations as 'state assets' and the principle of 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan - the half-hearted



US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis arrives in Islamabad on December 4.

(Photo / Courtesy Tribune)

Pakistani commitment soon exposed its machinations as a double-dealing 'ally'. The 'taking out' of Osama bin Laden from Abbottabad, continuing drone attacks on to Pakistani territories and the parallel warming of the Indo-Afghan ties further vitiated the US-Pakistani equation. It led the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, to specifically ask the Pakistanis to 'do more' and 'squeeze' out terror networks by famously stating, "You can't keep snakes in your backyard and expect them only to bite your neighbors. Eventually, those snakes are going to turn on whoever has them in the backyard." The subtext of subsequent US-Pakistan conversations, have remained fixated on the expression of 'do more', much to the irritation of Pakistanis.

In the 2016 presidential campaign, Trump had maintained his line of fire, saying, "Pakistan is a very very vital problem and really vital country for us because they have nuclear weapons and they have to get a hold of the situation." Nearly one year into his presidency, Trump's insistence on Pakistan to change its tracks has found expression in a persistent and forceful 'do more'.

Perforce, the US has to maintain a functional working relationship with Pakistan to sustain its operations, manpower and assets in Afghanistan and within the Pakistani narrative. The expansive import of 'do more' within the context of diplomatic language suggests both a perfunctory acknowledgement of efforts by the Pakistanis (critical to retain engagement), and yet clearly points to insufficiency of efforts on account of doing the needful. Often, Trump's bluster results in a brazen statement, like: "We are paying Pakistan billions and billions of dollars; at the same time, they are housing the very

terrorists that we are fighting. But that will have to change."

This leads to an equally jarring counter-narrative from the Pakistanis who decry the American hypocrisy and selective amnesia to remind the US of its historical support for jihadism in the 80s. However, the fact that the playing field, cards and the essential game of the 21st century have evolved but the Pakistanis remain fixated to the dynamics of the earlier times, that is haunting the Pakistanis the most.

'Do more' is also contextualized to future aid as the promised \$250 million in military aid to Pakistan is withheld, subject to further evidence of Pakistani actions. The chorus for 'do more' was echoed by US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in October when he reiterated that Pakistan must do more to eradicate militants in its country.

In November, the commander of the NATO-led coalition in Afghanistan, Gen John Nicholson continued to lament, "Haven't seen any change yet in their behavior", and earlier this month, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis goaded the Pakistanis to "redouble" efforts and urged for the "need to move forward with issues at hand." Given the banalities of diplomatic-speak, 'do more' is as direct an expression of dissatisfaction that the US can convey to Pakistan. With the ongoing specter of a free-run for the internationally designated terrorists, seminaries spewing hatred, state supporting extremist ideologues and the still selective action against terror organizations, the pressure from the Americans to 'do more' will remain relentless and cryptic. India needs to reassure and satisfy itself with the American pressure of 'do more' as its implied context is deeply suggestive, perceptive and conducive to the change required in the situation in Pakistan.

HOW GUJARAT WAS WON

BY SHREYAS SARDESAI / SANJAY KUMAR

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has managed only a modest victory in Gujarat, confirming some earlier psephological predictions and ground reports of a close electoral contest. Two polls conducted by us at Lokniti, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), one in end-October and another in end-November, had found the electoral race between the BJP and the Congress to have tightened considerably. In fact, the November survey had found the race to be neck-and-neck in terms of vote share. That trend, however, did not hold entirely till Voting Day. It now seems that a last-minute swing by some voters towards the final stages of the campaign ended up giving the edge to the BJP.

We say this based on evidence gathered from a post-poll, a survey of voters at their residences after they voted, conducted by Lokniti. The poll reveals that over two in every five voters (43%) took a final call on who they would vote for in the last two weeks of campaigning - and more than half of them (53%) said they voted for the BJP while only about 38% went with the Congress. In fact, a majority of these late deciders are those who decided at the last minute, either on the day of voting or a day or two before it. In 2012 the share of late deciders had been much lower, at 31%, and back then they had split their vote evenly between the BJP and the Congress.

The question then is, what really happened, between the last week of November when our final pre-poll took place and the second week of December when actual voting took place, that made some disaffected voters planning to vote for the Congress change their minds? The answer to this question is not so difficult to find.

The late shift

We believe that it is quite obviously Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaigning,

which was for the most part controversial and divisive, that played a role in turning a section of voters towards the BJP, thus saving it from a possible defeat. This is the period when the Prime Minister, who is hugely liked in Gujarat (by 72% of those surveyed, post-poll), campaigned extensively in the State. Starting from November 27 right up till December 11, he addressed more than 30 election rallies across the State. Most of his speeches, especially the ones made at rallies post-December 5, focused on divisive themes. Mandir-Masjid, Mughals, Pakistan, Ahmed Patel, Salman Nizami, etc., he practiced classic dog-whistle politics by using coded language that might have stoked passions among some sections of the electorate.

In our final pre-poll done in end-November, we had found only about 45% of Hindu voters to be voting for the BJP. In the post-poll, we noticed that eventually nearly 52% of them ended up voting for the incumbent party. This is also three points higher than the Hindu support that the BJP received in 2012. While our post-poll also suggests an increase in Muslim votes for the BJP compared to last time, at the same time it also points to a consolidation of Hindu votes behind the party in Assembly seats where the Muslim population is much higher than average. In constituencies where Muslims in the population are less than 10%, the BJP's lead over the Congress among Hindu voters is only 4 percentage points. In seats where Muslims constitute 10-20% of the population, the gap is six times higher at 25 points. And in areas where Muslims are over 20% of the population, the BJP leads the Congress by 42 points among Hindu voters. In our pre-poll, these gaps had been minus-3, 16 and 11 points, respectively.

The Hindu card

Among the major worries of the BJP all throughout the campaign had been the Patidar disaffection with the party as well as the Congress's attempts to build a rainbow coalition of different castes by roping in young Patel, Dalit and OBC (Other Backward Classes) leaders on its side. By giving communal overtones to the campaign, the Prime Minister seems to have ensured a subsuming of some of these caste identities within the Hindu fold, thus helping the BJP hold on to its bastion. We notice a shift away from the Congress among all Hindu communities, be it Patidars, Kshatriyas, Dalits, and Adivasis, between the pre-poll and the post-poll. To be fair, it wasn't just the BJP that played the Hindu card; the Congress tried doing it too, albeit covertly. All throughout the campaign, Rahul Gandhi, who led the party campaign, steered clear of raising issues concerning Muslim voters and instead chose to appeal to majoritarian sentiments by visiting temples across the State.

However, eventually it seems that in this competition to woo the Gujarati Hindus, most Hindu voters, particularly urban ones, were more convinced by Mr. Modi's insinuations than by Mr. Gandhi's attempts at asserting his Hindu-ness. The Congress's strategic abandonment of its pluralistic legacy for electoral gains is to our mind as worrying as the communal rhetoric in Mr. Modi's campaign.

Also, the fact that a seemingly neck-and-neck election can be turned around in such a short span by appealing to the majoritarian impulses of voters raises troubling questions about the health of our electoral democracy.

A section of the Gujarati press may have also played a role, perhaps inadvertently, in

effecting the late swing of some voters. A day after Mr. Modi raised a hue and cry at one of his rallies about Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar's remark calling him a "neech kisam ka aadmi (a low type of man)", the hugely popular Gujarati newspaper, Gujarat Samachar, which has otherwise been quite critical of Mr. Modi over the years, ran a headline on its front page: "Modi neech jaatino maanas chhe: Mani Shankar Aiyar (Modi is a man from a lower caste says Mani Shankar Aiyar)". While Mr. Aiyar had described Mr. Modi as "neech", the newspaper chose to give the remark its own spin, or rather Mr. Modi's spin, by adding the word "jaati" to it. Such misreporting of Mr. Aiyar's comment in sections of the press just a day before voting was to take place in Saurashtra-Kutchh and South Gujarat may well have affected the mood of a significant proportion of voters. Our series of surveys in Gujarat suggest that on an average about one-third of voters in Gujarat are daily readers of newspapers. Among such voters, the BJP's lead over the Congress widened from 8 points in the pre-poll to 14 points in the post-poll.

Uncomfortable questions

Winning the trust and confidence of a majority of voters election after election is no mean achievement, and there's no doubt the BJP should be commended for this. But at the same time the uncomfortable question we must be asking is this - was this trust of voters won by the BJP fairly and squarely on the performance plank alone or whether a large part of it was also won through divisive innuendos, falsehoods and fear mongering?

(Shreyas Sardesai is Research Associate at Lokniti, CSDS. Sanjay Kumar is a Professor and currently the Director of CSDS, Delhi)

CHRISTMAS MUSINGS...



By George Abraham

I was merely happy to be invited to the 'Holiday Party' organized by the South Asian Community in Queens. However, I have learned that the main purpose of the gathering was to honor the newly appointed Consul General Sandeep Chakraborty of India and introduce him to various elected officials from Queens, New York. The program ran in typical Indian style, with as many of the community leaders jockeying for VIP seats and later on putting up a brave struggle to position themselves for a celebrity photo for their next Facebook post.

These politicians in New York City appear to show very little respect for the South Asian Community. To them, we are an ATM they could push a button and get their so-called campaign contributions. They seem to be quite confident as well that we are 'simple-minded' and would go away happily after an embrace and a Selfie shoot for the next edition of one of those Indian weekly newspapers.

I wonder why the South Asian Community, probably the largest concentration anywhere in the U.S. has so far failed to get a footing in the mainstream politics in New York City! Indians who live even in the old Confederacy seem to have more success than their peers who live in

the most liberal city in the U.S.

I had long wanted to vent this long and boiling frustration within me to somebody when Professor Saluja, the emcee for the evening, informed me that I would have an opportunity to say few words at the function felicitating the Chief Guest before all those public officials from the Queens. However, it never came to pass, and they simply had too many speakers who paid the bill, they said!

However, I had an opportunity to speak to Ms. Letitia James, the Public Advocate for the New York City Council. I tried to make my case and requested her to help appropriate one city council seat, probably District 23, for an Asian Indian if not a South Asian. She tried to convince me that we have to come together and fight the election. I responded to her stating that we are quite observant of the dynamics and unless Democratic Party officially put their weight behind a South Asian, the effort will be futile! We have indeed learned how the single-party system in New York is lately reduced into machine politics and unless you are in it, 'you ain't going anywhere'!

As I sat there listening to speaker after speaker greeting the audience, not a single one uttered the word "Merry Christmas". A number of them were eager to say "Happy Hannukah", that was mostly addressed to the visiting Jewish public officials. Anyway, we could confirm by now that 'Merry Christmas' has become a toxic greeting phrase in New York. As a Christian who is sitting there, probably one of the few in the

audience, my mind wandered back to the younger days of growing up in Kerala, India where we all greeted each other with 'Merry Christmas' for the simple reason for the season.

Upon my return that evening home, Gujarat poll results started coming in. Congress has indeed outperformed all the expectations and appeared to have thoroughly thrashed the much-heralded exit poll results. However, people of Gujarat still handed BJP another term despite becoming miserable and more impoverished through their demonetization policies as well as the messy GST implementation. The verdict sends a clear message to the world that hate and bigotry trumps over economic troubles and personal misery!

Opening up the Internet browser the following day, I am once again reminded that this is not a season of peace and goodwill toward men as right-wing fringe groups have threatened to disrupt Christmas and New Year celebrations in some Uttar Pradesh towns. A series of warnings have come from these groups just days after an alleged attack on priests in a Madhya Pradesh town. In Aligarh, a group called the Hindu Jagran Manch has warned schools against celebrating Christmas, saying they could do so "at their own risk".

In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had declared that December 25, Christmas Day, would be observed as Good Governance day. India has a history of 2000 years of Christianity that was long before even England embraced that religion. Why then

this alienation of a religious group in India that has contributed much to the educational and social development of the poor and the downtrodden! However, it is quite impressive to note that as the first generation Indians to the US, we are already lobbying to make Diwali a holiday in New York City!

By this time you may have heard about the decimation of ISIS and its Caliphate in Syria and Iraq. Recently, Iraqi forces with overwhelming support from U.S. Airforce have retaken the city of Mosul. ISIS has pushed Iraq's religious minorities to the edge of extinction. However, the sad story of one Christian family brings the ugly face of religious discrimination home to us all.

The story is told as follows: A family of four lived in a small village about sixteen miles outside of Mosul. Shortly after the Islamic State took over, the father, a construction worker, took his wife of twenty-eight years to Mosul to continue her breast cancer treatments. But at the hospital, a guard refused to allow the man's wife to enter because they were Christians. He told her that to continue receiving medical care, she would have to convert to Islam. She refused and the couple was forced to return to their village. Ten days later she died with her husband and sons at her bedside.

As we are on the threshold of a new year, the human effort to bring peace and security appear to be as elusive as ever! Will the year 2018 bring us a ray of hope?

(The author is chairman, INOC USA).

Pakistan to release 291 Indian fishermen on humanitarian grounds

ISLAMABAD (TIP): Pakistan on said it will release 291 Indian fishermen on humanitarian grounds in two phases starting from next week.

"Pakistan has decided to release and repatriate 291 Indian fishermen in two phases on December 29, 2017 and January 08, 2018 via Wagah Border as a goodwill gesture on humanitarian grounds," Foreign Office spokesman Dr Mohammad Faisal said.

Pakistan had released 68 Indian fishermen in October.

Faisal said Pakistan has always maintained that humanitarian issues should be facilitated and not politicized.

A spokesman for Pakistan's Maritime Security Force (PMSF) last week said that the authorities have arrested 400 Indian fishermen this year.

Fishermen from Pakistan and India are frequently detained for illegally fishing in each other's territorial waters since the Arabian Sea does not have a clearly defined marine border and the wooden boats lack the technology to avoid being drifting away. (PTI)

Taliban kill 11 Afghan police in attack on checkpoints

KABUL (TIP): Taliban insurgents attacked checkpoints in the southern Helmand province early Sunday, killing 11 police, an official said.

Omar Zwak, the spokesperson for the provincial governor, said Afghan forces eventually repelled the attack in the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah. He said the insurgents also suffered casualties, without providing figures.

The Taliban, who have a strong and growing presence in Helmand, claimed the attack. The insurgents launch near-daily attacks across the country, mainly targeting security forces.

In the southern Kandahar province, a suicide car bomber attacked a convoy of foreign forces, killing an Afghan woman and wounding five other civilian bystanders, said Gen. Abdul Raziq, the Kandahar police chief. He said he did not know if any foreign forces were killed or wounded.

A spokesperson for the coalition said he was not immediately able to confirm reports of the attack. (AP)

Bangladesh wants India to raise Rohingya issue in United Nation

KOLKATA (TIP): Bangladesh wants Myanmar to take back the Rohingya refugees and it expects India to move a resolution in the United Nations for the same, Bangladesh minister Mosharraf Hossain said on Dec 22. It is not sustainable for a poor country like Bangladesh to carry on feeding the huge number of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar for a very long time, he said. "We would like India to move a resolution in the United Nations to call on Myanmar to take back the Rohingyas from Bangladesh as we cannot keep them lifelong with our limited resources," the Bangladesh minister for Housing and Public Works said.

Hossain said it was due to humanitarian reasons that Bangladesh decided to give shelter to the Rohingyas. "Had we pushed them back, they would have been killed," he said. (PTI)

Kulbhushan Jadhav under no threat of immediate execution, says Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (TIP): Pakistan on rejected the insinuations that the mother and wife of Kulbhushan Jadhav would be having last meeting with him on Monday, saying the Indian prisoner is under no threat of immediate execution.

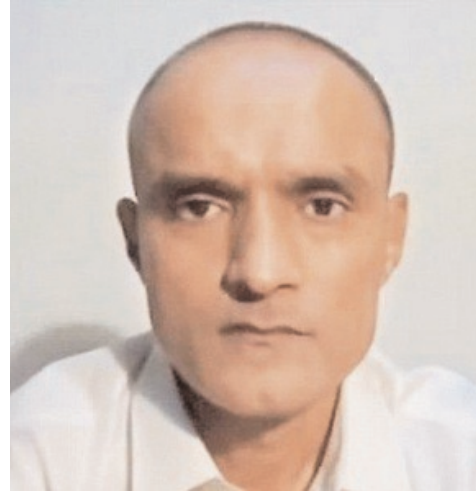
Foreign Office spokesman Dr Mohammad Faisal said that Pakistan had decided to permit the meeting of the wife and mother of Jadhav+ with him purely on humanitarian grounds.

"Let me assure you that the Commander (Jadhav) is under no threat of immediate execution and his mercy petitions are still pending," Faisal told the media at the weekly briefing.

He was responding to a question on the possible immediate execution of the Indian prisoner on death row after his meeting with his family.

Faisal said the mother and wife of Jadhav were being provided with a meeting with him in the light of "Islamic traditions and based on purely humanitarian grounds."

He said that the meeting between Jadhav and his family will take place at the Ministry



of Foreign Affairs.

"Pakistan has issued visas to both the ladies. The meeting will be held in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs," the spokesman said.

A diplomat from the Indian high commission in Islamabad would be allowed to accompany the visitors.

To a question Faisal said, "Pakistan is ready to permit media interaction with the wife and mother of Commander Jadhav. We await Indian decision in this regard."

Jadhav, 47, was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of espionage and terrorism in April, following which India moved the ICJ in May. The ICJ+ halted his execution on India's appeal pending the final verdict by it.

Pakistan has repeatedly denied India consular access to Jadhav on the ground that it was not applicable in cases related to spies.

It said that Jadhav is not an ordinary person as he had entered the country with the intent of spying and carrying out sabotage activities.

Pakistan claims its security forces arrested Jadhav alias Hussein Mubarak Patel from its restive Balochistan province on March 3 last year after he reportedly entered from Iran.

India, however, maintains that Jadhav was kidnapped from Iran where he had business interests after retiring from the Indian Navy. (PTI)

Rohingya refugees to start returning from January: officials

DHAKA (TIP): Bangladesh and Myanmar on Dec 19 reaffirmed their commitment to begin repatriating Rohingya refugees from January, despite growing concern that their safety is still not assured should they return.

The foreign secretaries of Bangladesh and Myanmar met in Dhaka to finalise the agreement signed on November 23 for the voluntary return of nearly three-quarters of a million stateless Rohingya living in refugee camps along the border.

A new working group would "ensure commencement of repatriation within two months" by developing a timetable for the verification of refugee identities and logistics of their return, Bangladesh's foreign ministry said in a statement.

"Now, we will start the next step of our work," Bangladesh foreign minister A.H. Mahmood Ali told reporters after the meeting.

But there is growing doubt that the persecuted minority will be safe if returned to Rakhine state, where Doctors Without Borders said nearly 7,000 Rohingya were killed in a month of violence.

An estimated 655,000 refugees from the stateless group have poured across the border into Bangladesh since August, fleeing what the US and United Nations have described as ethnic cleansing.

UN rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said he had received no assurances that international observers would be allowed into northern Rakhine to monitor the return of the Rohingya.

"We have seen no interest or desire to invite my office in. So we are sceptical of that," he told AFP in an interview Monday.

Human Rights Watch on Monday,



citing analysis of satellite imagery, said Myanmar's army burned down dozens of Rohingya homes within days of the signing of the repatriation deal.

The watchdog said the repatriation deal was "a public relations stunt" and warned the Rohingya would not be safe in Rakhine without guarantees of equal rights and protections.

The Rohingya have been the target of past pogroms in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, which does not recognise the group as a genuine ethnicity and has stripped them of citizenship.

Testimonies gathered by AFP from displaced Rohingya in Bangladesh suggest few refugees wish to return to Myanmar, where many saw their villages burned to ashes and loved ones killed.

"We will not go back to our country until our rights are afforded," said Rohingya refugee Roushan Ali from a camp in Bangladesh's southeast.

"We want full citizenship and the return of our land and property. We also want justice for our people who were slaughtered, tortured

and raped."

British charity Oxfam said in a new report Tuesday that many Rohingya were terrified of returning and unwilling to consider it without guarantees of safety.

Conditions remain bleak in Bangladesh's displacement camps, with an outbreak of diphtheria having killed 19 refugees so far, the International Organization for Migration said on Tuesday.

Myanmar's leader Aung San Suu Kyi has said major security operations against Rohingya militants stopped in early September.

Responding to international pressure, Suu Kyi's civilian government signed an agreement with Bangladesh to start the repatriation of the stateless Muslim refugees within two months.

The agreement promises the "safe and voluntary return" of displaced Rohingya in Bangladesh - not just the latest 655,000 new arrivals but more than 70,000 from a separate influx in October 2016. (AFP)

India most reliable regional partner of Afghanistan: Pentagon

WASHINGTON (TIP): India is Afghanistan's "most reliable regional partner", the Pentagon told the US Congress on Dec 22 as it welcomed additional economic, medical, and civic support from New Delhi to the war-torn country.

"India is Afghanistan's most reliable regional partner and the largest contributor of development assistance in the region," said the Pentagon in its report to the Congress titled 'Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan'.

This assistance includes civil development projects such as the Afghanistan-India Friendship Dam and the Afghan parliament building, the report said.

India provides significant training opportunities for Afghan officers and enlisted personnel and has frequently offered to increase its burden sharing for Afghanistan, it said, adding that approximately 130 Afghans travel to India each year to attend various military and commissioning programmes.

India has also donated limited security assistance, most notably four Mi-35 aircraft, the Pentagon said.

"The new South Asia policy highlighted our relationship with India and called on India to provide more assistance to the international efforts in Afghanistan. The United States welcomes additional Indian economic, medical, and civic support to Afghanistan," the Pentagon said in its report. (PTI)

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Generous Couple Donates house in a plot of 832 sq. yards for Eye Foundation of America -run Goutami Eye Hospital



Mr. Ram Mohan and Mrs. Amala Nagamani desired that their self-earned wealth should go for the service to mankind. They approached Goutami Eye Institute, Rajahmundry, after hearing about their services and donated their house at Machilipatnam, in a plot of 832 sq. yards, to extend eye care services to the needy. Seen in the picture, from R to L: Dr. V.K. Raju, President of Eye Foundation of America and Chairman of Goutami Eye Institute, Mr. Ram Mohan, Mrs. Amala Nagamani, and another

MORGANTOWN, WV (TIP): Dr. V.K. Raju, President of Goutami Eye Institute sent in a press note which said that Mr. Ram Mohan, retired Office Sales Manager of Geoffrey Manners, a Pharma company and Mrs. Amala Nagamani, retired Branch Manager of AP State Cooperative Bank, Hyderabad, desire that their self earned wealth should go for the service to mankind. They also believe that Goddess Durga bestowed on them her grace as well as the material possessions and hence they should utilise it for the well being of the fellow mankind. Recently, they approached Goutami Eye Institute, Rajahmundry, after hearing about their services and donated their house at Machilipatnam, in a plot of 832 sq. yards, to extend eye care services to the needy. They are simple and unassuming.

In line with their wishes, Goutami Eye Institute, Rajahmundry is planning to establish their Vision Centre and ROP (Retinopathy of Prematurity) Screening Centre catering to Krishna and Guntur districts. They are also planning to launch their program for Prevention of Diabetic Retinopathy in collaboration with GAPIO (Global Association of Physicians of Indian Origin) from this Centre during the 1st week of January 2018.

Lawmakers Ask Ethics Agency to Look into Sexual Misconduct Allegations against Trump

Their letter comes after Republican congressional leaders pushed back on conducting an investigation

WASHINGTON (TIP): In the wake of congressional leaders dodging calls for a probe into accusations against President Donald Trump of sexual misconduct, two lawmakers are calling on an independent federal agency to investigate the claims instead.

In a letter issued Wednesday, December 13, Rep. Joe Crowley (D-N.Y.) and Rep. Jackie Speier (D-Calif.) asked the U.S. Office of Government Ethics to investigate the 19 allegations of sexual misconduct lodged against Trump, who has firmly denied all accusations.

"Credible claims of inappropriate conduct against the holder of the highest office in the nation have gone uninvestigated," the two representatives wrote. "Following the release of a video tape in October 2016 in which then-candidate Donald Trump admits ? and brags about ? making unwanted and inappropriate sexual advances toward women, numerous individuals came forward to share their own personal stories of their encounters."

The tape they reference is the infamous audio recording in which Trump brags about kissing women without their consent and says he can just "grab 'em by the pussy." The audio, a 2005 conversation with then-"Access Hollywood" host Billy Bush, was released



Rep. Joe Crowley (D-N.Y.) and Rep. Jackie Speier (D-Calif.) asked the U.S. Office of Government Ethics to investigate the 19 allegations of sexual misconduct lodged against Trump, who has firmly denied all accusations.

by The Washington Post shortly before Trump won the election.

Trump now denies the audio is authentic.

Crowley and Speier's letter comes a day after 59 Democratic congresswomen signed a letter urging the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform to investigate the allegations. However, both House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) haven't been receptive to requests for an

investigation.

Crowley and Speier's suggestion to go through the U.S. Office of Government Ethics would bypass their objections.

Several of Trump's accusers have also banded together to ask for an investigation.

"We believe public officials must set the gold standard for professional behavior, particularly those who hold the high offices of representative, senator, and especially president of the United States," Crowley and Speier wrote.

An uplifting and powerful evening as Suzy's place celebrates its first winter gala

CHICAGO, IL (TIP): Suzy's Place held its First Winter Gala on Saturday, December 2nd at Pearl Banquets and Conference Center in Roselle, Illinois.

After a Capella performance of the national anthem, the evening kicked off with the high-energy acrobatics of the world-famous Jesse White Tumblers. Their performance, set to intense music, revved up the crowd. The audience needed that strength, as the evening dealt with the very serious issue of domestic violence, and what it takes to fix it. Suzy's Place was honored by the presence and thoughts of the two keynote speakers of the evening, the Hon. Judge Divya Sarang of Kane County and Dr. Shastri Swaminathan, Chairman, Department of Psychiatry at Advocate Illinois Masonic Center. They talked effectively about the legal and medical/mental aspects of domestic violence. The law and mental health go hand in hand as Suzy's Place helps survivors through its shelter and services.

Shahida Khan, President of Suzy's Place, welcomed everyone. Arshia Hasnain, Executive Director of Suzy's Place introduced the organization's structure and presented the organization's activities. Member of the Advisory Board, Stephanie Pelzer, presented an artistic personal and emotional video collage of women helped by Suzy's Place. She used her pencil sketches and art to tell their stories while respecting their privacy. The audience was



visibly moved.

There was a short fundraising session, including artwork, a football signed by Richard Dent of the Chicago Bears, and many colorful items at silent auction. Everything was donated, and everything went. The audience recognized that it took money to do what Suzy's Place did and they were generous.

The evening's entertainment was the well-known Bollywood singer Poonam Bhatia who mesmerized the audience with her vocal talents and reminded her fans of the importance of tackling the issue of domestic violence.

Several elected officials attended. Toni Preckwinkle, Cook County Board President,

recognized domestic violence as a major problem and lauded the work of Suzy's Place and organizations like it. Mayor Tim Baldermann of New Lenox reminded everyone that there needed to be a conversation on domestic violence at the local and community level. Members of law enforcement were well-represented. Chiefs of Police from multiple cities and senior executives of NOBLE were present and fully participated in the evening's activities.

Suzy's Place provides emergency and transitional housing, and services, to women survivors of domestic violence in Rogers Park in Chicago. It serves a very diverse community

spanning ethnic, religious, socio-economic and cultural groups. Its shelter can accommodate 15 women at a time for up to 3 months. It provides emotional support and diversified continuum of services focused on safety, empowerment and self-sufficiency. Through community partnerships, it raises awareness, provides services and educates community members about domestic violence. Services include counseling, educational support, job skills training and job placement, basic health, language assistance, legal assistance, parenting and life-management skills, and wellness.

(Photograph and Press release by: Asian Media USA)

Gandhi Samaj of Chicago Celebrates 33 Anniversaries in a traditional way

CHICAGO, IL (TIP): Gandhi Samaj of Chicago ("GSC") hosted its 33rd Anniversary at Waterford Banquet, 933 S Riverside Dr, Elmhurst, IL in celebration of 33rd Anniversary, led by Executive board of Gandhi Samaj. Attendance at event was house full over 700 people, along with their families and friends. Gandhi Samaj of Chicago includes over 320 "Gandhi" families, native of South Gujarat part of India (Surat to Vapi), from Chicago and its close vicinity.

The event started with social hour accompanied by Traditional Gujarati (Indian) Cuisine dinner, which was followed by a cultural program and open dance. This is a tradition observed by GSC for last 33 years, where families come together to celebrate and socialize and enjoy cultural program performed by members of all ages.

Dr. Anuja Gupta, CEO of Verandah Retirement Community, was invited as chief guest. Community Service Awards were presented to Mr. Ashwin Gandhi and Mr. Hary Gandhi in honor of their active support in the community. The 2014-2015 committees were also presented with an award to recognize their service to the GSC community. Educational Achievement Awards were also awarded, to those who pursued higher education. Mr. Hitesh Gandhi will lead the Samaj as President over the next two years.

Cultural program touched everyone's hearts as imaginations of performers (from age 5 to 60) showcased their talents. Program started by a small Prayer followed with American & Indian National Anthems. The Kathak performance of Ganesh Vandana by Mansi Gandhi, Maya Ghayal, and Suhani Gandhi added a beautiful touch. The children and adults of Gandhi Community performed Classical and Bollywood Dance performances, songs, and showcased other talents. Group dance performance on "Luv Letter" and "Badri Ki Dulhania" songs became the highlight of the event when Roma Bhagat, Ami Gandhi, Riya Ghayal, Keyur Ghayal, Bhumika V. Gandhi, and Vimal Gandhi performed with high energy and brought everyone to their feet.

Some of the other highlights of evening included Madhuri Medley family dance performed by Riya Ghayal, Keyur Ghayal, Maya Ghayal, and Milan Ghayal; Mixed Bollywood dance performance by Tushar Modi, Gemini Modi, Krishna Gandhi, Dennis Gandhi, Nikita Gandhi, Minesh Gandhi, Freya Gandhi, Ashish Gandhi, and Bharat Ghayal; Sun Sathiya dance performance by Risha Bhagat; Shiva Tandav performed by Freya Gandhi, Misha Gandhi, Manya Gandhi, Riya Gandhi, and Krishna Gandhi; Kheech Meri Photo song performed by Maya Ghayal, Milan Ghayal, Suhani Gandhi, Ishan Gandhi, Aashini Sheth, Keshav Sheth; Kabhi Jo Badal Barse on Instrument by



Isha Guard & Daksh Guard;

The event ended after 2.5 hours of continuous entertainment with astounding performances by various members of the Gandhi Samaj Community. It was followed by open dance, where the members and community supporters were able to join the performers on the dance floor and dance the night away.

2019 Hitesh Gandhi will be president of Gandhi Samaj of Chicago. He has lots of feathers in his hat such as Executive Vice President of FIA, President of Adbhut Entertainment, Director of GOPIO, and Vice President of North Mount Prospect Home Owner Association. I am fortunate and privileged that I have the opportunity to serve various organizations and Asian Community. I am honored and grateful to GSC Board and members for their trust in me in heading the well-respected service oriented Gujarati organization in Chicago land area. I would also like to thank all our volunteers, supporters and "Gandhi" families for their enthusiasm to support and promote our cultural, educational, social and community affairs.

"Gandhi Samaj of Chicago is proud of to make this magnificent event successful and thus keeping the Indian culture alive in the USA. Thanks to all the sponsors of the grand event without their support it would not be possible to have such a wonderful event also thanks to audience of Chicago and well-wishers who attended the event" Said by Mr Hitesh Gandhi, Exec Vice President of Gandhi Samaj.

A special mention goes out to the 2017 committee members of Gandhi Samaj of Chicago for a memorable evening full of wonderful memories, including Mr. Keyur Ghayal (President), Mr. Hitesh Gandhi (Executive Vice President), Mrs. Bhumika V. Gandhi (Vice President), Mr. Ashwin Bodalia (Treasurer), Mr. Manhar Gajjar (Secretary), Mrs. Roma Bhagat (Cultural Secretary), Mr. Bharat Ghayal, Ramesh Gandhi, Dipak Ghayal (Joint Secretaries) & Priya Ghayal, Hiren Ghayal (Youth Secretary). (Photograph and Press release by: Asian Media USA)

Rep. Ro Khanna on The Nation's Progressive Honor Roll

WASHINGTON (TIP): Rep. Ro Khanna was featured on the 2017 Progressive Honor Roll by the Nation Magazine.

Khanna, who represents California's 17th Congressional District, was chosen as the most valuable house newcomer by The Nation.

"Capitol Hill's steadiest champion of congressional oversight on war-making, Representative Barbara Lee always needs allies. She got a great one when Khanna arrived in January," said The Nation. "Lee's fellow California Democrat jumped into a leadership post with the Congressional Progressive Caucus (as did two other outstanding newcomers, Washington's Pramila Jayapal and Maryland's Jamie Raskin) and emerged as a savvy champion of net neutrality," it added.

The list honors leaders who "refused to go backward," and "challenged old orthodoxies."

According to the magazine, the law-school instructor made his boldest mark as an advocate for the restoration of constitutional checks and balances.

The Nation praised Khanna's efforts



to end the military action in Yemen.

He beat veteran congressman Mike Honda last year in his second attempt after being lost in 2014 by just three points.

Khanna was born in 1975 in Philadelphia to Indian parents who immigrated to the US seeking better opportunities and life for their children.

Khanna took student loans to complete his university studies which, according to him, he is still paying off. He was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate in B.A. Economics from the University of Chicago and received a law degree. He

also attended Yale Law School and received his law degree in 2001, with his specialization being intellectual property law. Khanna has worked with Milpitas Mayor Jose Esteves. He also worked with Santa Clara City Councilwoman Lisa Gillmor, and with environmentalists to stand up to Lehigh Cement Plant and insist that the plant is held to modern day environmental standards. Former President Barak Obama in 2009 appointed Khanna as the Deputy Assistant Secretary at the Department of Commerce. He has been a proponent of clean technology trade mission, expanding the Green Embassy program, giving an opportunity to US green energy companies to display their products in embassies abroad.

Khanna was also involved in the White House Business Council, maintaining a close relationship between both business and labor in an effort to bring back American manufacturing jobs. American exports grew and he received a letter of commendation from Frank Sanchez, Under Secretary for International Trade, for his services.

Indian American Preeti Patel appointed the Vice President of Technology at Rauxa



rauxa

NEW YORK (TIP): Full-service agency Rauxa appointed Indian American Preeti Patel its new Vice President of Technology.

Patel, who will be based in Rauxa's New York office, is an industry veteran in the IT, digital and market research industries, with more than 20 years of experience providing technology, vision and strategic leadership to organizations in competitive marketplaces, reported marketwired.com.

At Rauxa, Patel will lead long-term strategy and innovation opportunities for a group of clients including Vans and Frontpoint Security.

"Not only does Preeti come to us with years of relevant experience leading digital transformations for brands, but she also has a strong drive and determination to be innovative," Gina Alshuler, President & CEO of Rauxa, was quoted as saying by marketwired.com.

"Our clients want to win, and Preeti is here to help them do just that," Alshuler added.

A graduate of MIT Pune, Patel currently holds three patents for electronic media communication, creation and distribution systems.

Patel joined Rauxa after her successful career at 360i and the Marlin Company. Most recently, she was senior director of technology for IPG agency Huge. There, she delivered award-winning campaigns, led platform strategy and product development for Thompson Reuters, Verizon and Morgan Stanley and Exxon Mobile.

"It's an exciting time to join the Rauxa team. I've been in this industry for more than 20 years, and it's refreshing to join a female-led management team that's looking to use data and creativity to answer clients' business challenges," said Patel.

Rauxa is the country's largest woman-owned independent advertising agency. Rauxa applies data, technology, and content to create measurable impact at maximum speed for clients that include Gap Inc., TGI Fridays, and Verizon.

Indian American lawmakers against Trump administration's tax bill

WASHINGTON (TIP): Indian American congressmen came down heavily on the tax reforms of the Trump administration calling the tax bill passed by the US Congress as "tax scam."

Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi said that the tax bill would add nearly \$1.5 trillion to the national debt while destabilizing the healthcare system of the nation.

"House Republican egos just wrote a check the middle class shouldn't have to cash. The tax bill Republicans just jammed through would add nearly \$1.5 trillion to the national debt while raising taxes on working families, and destabilizing our health care system by leaving 13 million more Americans without insurance - including 2 million who currently have employer-provided coverage," Krishnamoorthi said in a statement.

"This legislation is a ticking tax bomb: millions of middle-class families could see their taxes increase over the next decade as state and local tax deductions and other middle-class provisions get dramatically scaled back. Health insurance premiums will jump by 10 percent per year, and massive additional debt will be piled on the backs of our children and future generations," he added.

The tax bill that is considered to be the biggest reform of the US tax code in 30 years was approved by the House of Representatives on Wednesday.

Though the Democratic party unanimously voted against the act, the \$1.5 trillion tax bill was passed by the Senate and House of Representatives which is considered as President Donald Trump's first major legislative victory.

"The Republicans can't fool the American people with their trickle-down scam. 76 percent believe that the tax bill will help large corporations while only 28 percent believe that the tax cuts will be used to create jobs. This unpopular #GOPTaxScam must be rejected," tweeted Rep. Ro Khanna.

Read full story on www.theindianpanorama.news

WOMAN SET ON FIRE BY SPURNED LOVER ON HYDERABAD STREET DIES

HYDERABAD (TIP): A 25-year-old woman, who was allegedly set ablaze on Thursday evening in full public view in Secunderabad by a man suspected to be her lover, succumbed to her burns this morning, police said.

She died around 7.30am while undergoing treatment at Gandhi Hospital in Secunderabad, deputy commissioner of police (north zone) B Sumathi said.

Sandhya Rani, a graduate, worked as a receptionist at an aluminium fabrication unit, police said.

A police official earlier said the man was apparently in love with Rani and was harassing her. However, she had not told her family members about him or the harassment, the official said.

As per preliminary investigation, the man, aged around 28, called Rani to the Lalaguda area, located about 10 kilometres from here.

Quoting eye-witnesses, the police said she was returning home when the youth on a motorcycle met her. They were seen talking for about 10 minutes. Then the attacker suddenly sprinkled petrol and set her on fire. He escaped before people could raise an alarm.

Hearing her cries, some passersby rushed to help her and doused the flames. The woman, who suffered 60% burns, was then shifted to the hospital.

Adarsh scam: Bombay HC rejects Maharashtra gov's nod to prosecute ex-CM Ashok Chavan

MUMBAI (TIP): In a big relief to former chief minister and Congress leader Ashok Chavan, the Bombay high court on Friday set aside the Maharashtra governor's 2016 sanction to prosecute him in the Adarsh housing society scam.

Reacting to the decision, Chavan, who is state Congress Chief, said: "Truth has prevailed. I have full faith in the judiciary. The governor's order was politically motivated."

In February 2016, Governor C Vidyasagar Rao had reviewed the December 2013 decision taken by then Governor K Shankarnarayanan, who had rejected the CBI's plea for sanction to prosecute Chavan, and given the go-ahead to prosecute him.

Following this, Chavan had filed a petition challenging the sanction. In his petition, Chavan had contended that the move to review the December 2013 decision was politically motivated and biased, and that there was no additional material to warrant a review. Rao's order was motivated by the change in political circumstances and not by any change in any material aspects of the case, his petition had said.



INDIA TO SEEK SUPPLY OF RADARS, MISSILES BY 2018

NEW DELHI (TIP):

India is all set to take a big stride in exports of arms and equipment with the defence ministry in the process of tying up with Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Myanmar and Armenia for supply of radars, helicopters and missiles, and tank upgradation by 2018.

South Block sources confirmed deepening of military ties with these countries with high-level delegations interacting with defence ministry and Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) units in Bengaluru this month. For the first time, Saudi Arabia is sending 10 of its nationals for training to become officers at the National Defence Academy (NDA) next year.

The proposed tie-ups assume significance as India is the largest importer of arms in the world but figures nowhere in the list of global arms exporters.

Government sources confirmed that two joint committee meetings have already taken place with Riyadh as the latter is interested in a joint venture to manufacture weapons and equipment in Saudi Arabia. *Source: HT*



Raja, Kanimozhi, all other 2G scam accused acquitted

CBI court says prosecution failed to prove any charge; agency to file appeal in HC

NEW DELHI (TIP): Former telecom minister and DMK leader A Raja, Rajya Sabha MP Kanimozhi and others were today acquitted in the politically-sensitive 2G spectrum allocation cases by a special court which held that the prosecution miserably failed to prove the scam involving corruption and money laundering.

The court, which held there was no scam in the 2G spectrum allocation in 2007-08 when Raja was the telecom minister in the erstwhile UPA regime headed by Manmohan Singh, also set free all accused in two offshoot cases lodged by the ED and the CBI.

It said some people created a scam by "artfully arranging a few selected facts and exaggerating things beyond recognition to astronomical levels".

In the main CBI case, besides Raja and Kanimozhi, the 15 other accused allowed to walk free include former telecom secretary Siddharth Behura, Raja's erstwhile private secretary R K Chandolia, Swan Telecom promoters Shahid Usman Balwa and Vinod Goenka, Unitech Ltd MD Sanjay Chandra and three top executives of Reliance Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group (RADAG) — Gautam Doshi, Surendra Pipara and Hari Nair.

Bollywood film producer Karim Morani, Kalaingar TV's director Sharad Kumar, Asif Balwa and Rajiv Aggarwal of Kusegaon Fruits and Vegetables Pvt Ltd were also acquitted.

The companies which were not found guilty are Shahid Balwa's Swan Telecom Pvt Ltd, Chandra's Unitech (Tamil Nadu) Pvt Ltd and Reliance Telecom Ltd of Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group.

Raja and Kanimozhi, daughter of DMK supreme M Karunanidhi, along with 17 others were also let off in another case lodged by the Enforcement Directorate under the money laundering law arising out of the 2G scam.

Raja remained in jail for over 15 months while Kanimozhi was in prison for six months before they were granted



Rajya Sabha MP Kanimozhi and Former telecom minister and DMK leader A Raja

bail.

Other accused persons were also in jail for varying term.

The court also acquitted Essar Group promoters Ravi Kant Ruia and Anshuman Ruia and six others in a separate CBI case arising out of the 2G scam probe.

Besides Ruia's, Loop Telecom Promoters I P Khaitan and Kiran Khaitan and Vikash Saraf, one of the Essar Group Directors, Loop Telecom Ltd, Loop Mobile (India) Ltd and Essar Teleholdings Ltd were also acquitted.

While giving clean chit to all the accused in the three case connected with the 2G spectrum allocation, Special Judge O P Saini was critical of the CBI and the apex court-appointed special public prosecutor Anand Grover, saying the quality of prosecution had "totally deteriorated" and by the end it became "directionless".

It observed that the CBI had started its case with "great enthusiasm and ardour" but at the final stage of the trial, SPP Grover and the regular CBI prosecutor moved in "two different directions without any coordination".

Further, the judge was not convinced with the prosecution theory that the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was misled by Raja or that the facts were misrepresented to him, saying such

arguments were taken "just to prejudice the mind of the court by invoking the high name and authority of the prime minister of the country."

In embarrassment to the CBI, the court said the genesis of the instant case lies not so much in the actions of Raja but in the action or inaction of others and "there is no material on record to show that the telecom minister was 'mother lode of conspiracy' in the case".

"There is also no evidence of his no holds barred immersion in any wrongdoing, conspiracy or corruption," it said about the alleged scam in which high profile witnesses like the then Attorney General G E Vahanvati, Anil Ambani, his wife Tina Ambani, corporate lobbyist Niira Radia, then TRAI Chairman Nripendra Mishra, then DoT secretary D S Mathur, former RBI governor D Subba Rao and former Law Secretary T K Vishwanathan deposed.

In the main CBI case involving Raja, Kanimozhi and others, the court held that the depositions of senior officers of Department of Telecom (DoT) and key prosecution witnesses were contrary to the record and they were just passing the buck without suggesting anything.

However, it said Raja's statements matched with the official record and "appeared to be cogent, truthful and as such acceptable". *Source: PTI*

'Gujarat poll results zabardast jhatka for BJP'

NEW DELHI (TIP): A day after the Gujarat result, Congress president Rahul Gandhi said the polls had delivered BJP a "zabardast jhatka (terrific shock)" that exposed PM Narendra Modi's credibility crisis, prompting BJP to respond that the leader was enjoying "defeat as victory".

In his first comments on the Gujarat election result where Congress ran rival BJP close, Rahul told reporters, "It is a very good result for us. Agreed that we lost and could have won, we fell short. But BJP suffered a massive jolt in Gujarat. People of Gujarat do not accept Modi's model. It is high on propaganda but it's hollow."

Senior BJP leader and HRD minister Prakash Javadekar said Rahul was under an illusion that the Gujarat polls were a jolt to the ruling party. "We (BJP) won both state assembly elections and in Gujarat for the sixth time. Actually this is a jolt for Congress," he said.

Javadekar alleged that Congress adopted divisive politics in Gujarat, but people put their faith in Modi and his development agenda. "It seems Rahul Gandhi is under an illusion and he is enjoying defeat as victory. This shows his dynastic arrogance and is an insult to the people's mandate," he said.

BJP's, Thakur favorites for Himachal CM post

SHIMLA (TIP): BJP central observers Nirmala Sitaraman and Narendra Singh Tomar arrived here today to meet the newly elected party MLAs to elicit their views and arrive at a consensus on a new chief minister.

A meeting of BJP Legislature party has been convened for the interaction of central observers along with in charge for party affairs Mangal Pandey with party MLAs and a meeting of core committee is also scheduled later in the evening, the BJP sources said.

The shock defeat of the BJP's chief ministerial candidate Prem Kumar Dhumal from Sujampur has opened up the race for the top post in Himachal Pradesh.

Union Health Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda and Jairam Thakur, five-time MLA from Seraj in Mandi district, are being seen as front-runners for the chief minister's post.

The central observers would also hold a meeting with members of core committee which included Dhumal, state party chief Satpal Singh Satti, all five MPs from the state and organisation secretary, Pawan Rana.

The central members are also likely to meet the MLAs individually to elicit their views and the leader would be elected by consensus, the party sources said.

The BJP has 44 members in the 68-member Assembly.

Support for terror outfits must be forced to stop: India at United Nations

UNITED NATIONS (TIP): Supporters of terror organisations like Taliban, Haqqani network and Lashkar-e-Taiba must be forced to stop and all safe havens must end, India has told the UN Security Council, expressing concern over the collapse of security situation in Afghanistan.

Terrorists continue to attack the most vulnerable, including the sick in hospitals, children in schools, devotees in mosques and even mourners at funerals. Terrorist groups have gained territory, Deputy Permanent Representative of India to UN, Tanmaya Lal, said during an open debate of the Security Council on Afghanistan.

"The support for terrorist organisations like the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Daesh, Al Qaeda and its designated affiliates such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed from outside Afghanistan, must be forced to stop," Lal said.

"All safe havens and sanctuaries available to such groups outside Afghan borders must end. The Security Council has an important responsibility in this regard in our collective interest," Lal said. "The continued resilience shown by the Afghan people and security personnel has been exemplary but hopes of a better future still appear distant. Our regular consultations and the work done by the Council have not been enough to more effectively reverse the situation on the ground," he added.

Lal said it had been painfully clear since long that the security situation in Afghanistan had implications not only for the region but the entire world.

"While new threats emerge from the Daesh, the Security Council cannot even decide whether to designate the new



Deputy Permanent Representative of India to UN, Tanmaya Lal.

leaders of Taliban or to freeze the assets of the slain leader of the group more than a year after the issue was brought to its attention," Lal said.

In his address to the Security Council Afghan Ambassador to the UN Mahmoud Saikal said Afghanistan's patience on indiscriminate shelling from across the border by Pakistan should not be tested.

"Under the pretext of receiving fire from our side, Pakistan's violations across the Durand Line, including indiscriminate artillery shelling, have continued unabated throughout 2017, resulting in the loss of innocent lives and destruction of villages," he said.

The proposal of Afghanistan for engagement and operational coordination towards addressing these

concerns had not seen any response, he told the UN Security Council.

"At the same time, Afghanistan has the will and the capacity to defend its territory and our patience should not be tested," Saikal said.

Afghanistan believed that confidence-building measures could be successful only when violations of this nature came to a complete halt, he said.

"In a similar vein, we are also in communication on the imperative of addressing terrorists' regional safe havens and hope to see positive developments on this front soon," he said, adding that Afghanistan looked forward to the upcoming trilateral meeting in Beijing next week between the Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China. *Source: PTI*

INDIA, CHINA HOLD SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE-LEVEL TALKS ON BORDER ISSUES



Indian national security adviser Ajit Doval with Chinese state councillor Yang Jiechi in New Delhi on Friday.

NEW DELHI (TIP): India and China on December 22 held special representative-level talks on key aspects related to border issues.

National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and China's State Councillor Yang Jiechi met along with senior officials for the 20th round of the India-China border talks.

During the day-long talks the Doklam episode and other concerns pertaining to unresolved issues of boundary between India and China were discussed.

The Doklam standoff began on June 16 over People's Liberation Army's plans to build a road in an area claimed by Bhutan after the Indian troops intervened to stop it as it posed a security risk to Chicken Neck, the narrow corridor connecting India with its North-eastern states.

The standoff ended on August 28 following mutual agreement between India and China. *Source: PTI*

RAJYA SABHA ADJOURNED TILL WEDNESDAY

NEW DELHI (TIP): The Rajya Sabha on Friday was adjourned till next Wednesday by Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu following request by Congress members.

After papers were laid in the House, Leader of Opposition Ghulam Nabi Azad said the government is talking with the Opposition to end the logjam and till a solution comes out, the House should be adjourned.

However, MoS for Parliamentary Affairs Vijay Goel asked the Opposition to let the House function.

As the Congress members persisted with their demand, Naidu adjourned the House till Wednesday. *Source: IANS*

AAP MULLING TO CONTEST KARNATAKA ASSEMBLY POLLS

BENGALURU (TIP): The Gujarat debacle notwithstanding, the Aam Aadmi Party is gearing up to contest assembly elections in Karnataka.

AAP's observer for Karnataka and party's political action committee member Sanjay Singh today visited Bengaluru and discussed with the state team about the possibility to contest the elections.

"Today Sanjay Singh had a discussion with the team and saw the ground realities", AAP's state convener and central core committee member Prithvi Reddy told PTI here. AAP may not have a popular face in the state but it has decided to invite all like-minded people to join the party.

"Leadership will automatically evolve. Just because you don't have a face that doesn't mean you should not fight an election. It is not necessary to have a face to fight an election," Reddy said.

Reddy said the AAP was open to welcome dissident Ravi Krishna Reddy, who quit the party about two years ago. If he chooses to come back, the party would definitely consider it. It was time for good people to come together, Reddy said.

Social activist Santosh Nargund has joined the party and will contest against BJP heavyweight and former chief minister Jagdish Shettar in Hubballi.

In the just-concluded assembly polls in Gujarat, AAP had failed to make an impact with all the 27 candidates fielded by it losing their deposits.

India inks deal on sharing Swiss bank data



Sushil Chandra, Chairman, CBDT, and Andreas Baum, Ambassador of Switzerland to India, signing the mutual agreement at North Block, New Delhi on Thursday.

NEW DELHI (TIP): In a move aimed at combating black money stashed abroad, India signed an agreement with Switzerland today that would allow automatic sharing of tax-related information from January 1 next year, the CBDT said.

"With the completion of the parliamentary procedure in Switzerland and signing of the agreement, India and Switzerland are set for automatic exchange of information for the period beginning from January 1, 2018," the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said.

A joint declaration for the implementation of Automatic Exchange of Information signed last month provided that both countries would start collecting data in

accordance with the global standards in 2018 and exchange it from 2019 onwards.

While Switzerland has conformed to the global standards on automatic exchange of information with the signing of the declaration, India, on its part, has promised to safeguard the confidentiality of the data.

"It will now be possible for India to receive from September, 2019 onwards, the financial information of accounts held by Indian residents in Switzerland for 2018 and subsequent years, on an automatic basis," the government earlier said.

Switzerland, at the centre of the debate on black money allegedly stashed by Indians, used to be known for very strong secrecy walls till a few years ago around its banking practices.

Woman moves HC claiming to be Jaya's daughter

CHENNAI (TIP): Claiming to be the biological daughter of former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalithaa, a woman on Thursday moved the Madras High Court seeking that the body of AIADMK leader be cremated as per the Vaishnavite brahmin community rituals.

Justice S Vaidyanathan posted the petition of the woman for tomorrow to decide on maintainability after senior counsel V Prakash appearing for her sought time to amend the prayer to include a plea for a DNA test to establish her parentage.

The woman had last month moved the Supreme Court with the same prayer but it had refused to entertain it. The woman had claimed that she had been given in adoption to Jayalithaa's sister and her husband. A bench of Justices M B Lokur and Deepak Gupta had, however, said she was at liberty to approach the high court.

When the matter came up for hearing, Justice Vaidyanathan, noting that several persons were claiming they were the legal heirs of Jayalithaa, orally observed that to put the quietus on the issue, a DNA test may be ordered.

If the claim was proved to be false after the test, the petitioner should face the consequences, he said.

THEATER IN NJ: FOR THE HOLIDAYS

BY MABEL PAIS

Paper Mill Playhouse housed in Millburn, NJ is the recipient of the 2016 Regional Theatre Tony Award, under the direction of Mark S. Hoebee, (Producing Artistic Director) and Todd Schmidt (Managing Director). The Playhouse is one of the country's leading regional theatres.

Paper Mill shares the wonder of creation in its 2017-2018 season with an astonishing 4 premieres: The Honeymooners; The Outsider; The Sting, A New Musical; Half Time, a New Musical; and, the major revival of a cherished holiday classic, Annie.

Along the way, some of today's best classical singers, dancers, directors, choreographers, actors, playwrights and designers share their talents to transport you with captivating, human and funny American stories.

It's all part of what has placed Paper Mill center stage in bringing the new American musical theater to life, and it's why anyone looking for what's truly next and noteworthy subscribes.

Paper Mill Playhouse is located at 22 Brookside Drive, Millburn, NJ 07041

For additional information, please visit www.papermill.org.

Annie (The Musical)

There is no better way to celebrate the "love of family, the promise that hope brings, and the joy" of this festive season than by sharing one of the world's best-loved musicals Annie with the audience, confesses Mark S. Hoebee, Artistic Director of Paper Mill Playhouse and Director of Annie. It returns to Paper Mill Playhouse in time for the holidays.

Inspired by the irrepressible comic strip heroine, Annie's brilliant book writer, the late Thomas Meehan, threaded through this musical the powerful message that family can be found in the most unlikely of places - in a Lower East Side orphanage among one's childhood companions, or in a mansion on Fifth Avenue with one of the world's richest men.

The musical tells of little orphan Annie who charms everyone's hearts when she is taken away with her lovable mutt named Sandy from an orphanage from the clutches of the cruel Miss Hannigan to stay at billionaire Oliver Warbucks' mansion for the holidays, in the wondrous world of 1930s New York City. Along the way, she befriends President Roosevelt. When Annie wins the hearts of Warbucks and his staff, they set out on an epic mission to find Annie's parents.

Annie premiered over 40 years ago; it was in 1977 when that beloved little redhead orphan took Broadway by storm. The musical captured the hearts of all generations around the globe, winning 7 Tony Awards including Best Musical, Best Book, and Best Score. The score features some of the unforgettable songs, as "It's The Hard-Knock Life," "Easy Street," "A New Deal for Christmas" and the eternal theme of optimism "Tomorrow." The anthemic tune, "Tomorrow" Annie sings near the beginning of the story declares that even during the dark times of the Great Depression, when half the country was broke or out of work and it seemed as though politicians were unconcerned with the plight of the common man, there was still hope. And so, a little girl raised her eyes and her voice to tell the world that no matter how bad things may seem today, there's one thing certain: the sun'll come out tomorrow.

The Broadway original inspired 2 sequels, about 3 movie versions, countless national and international tours, major revivals, and previous Paper Mill productions in 1983 and 2002.

BOOK: (the late) Thomas Meehan; **Music:** Charles Strouse; **Lyrics:** Martin Charmin

BASED ON: "Little Orphan Annie"

MUSIC SUPERVISION AND DIRECTION: Jeffrey Saver

CHOREOGRAPHED by Joann M. Hunter

DIRECTED by Mark S. Hoebee

STARRING: Tony Award



The cast of Annie

winner Beth Leavel as Miss Hannigan; Tony Award Nominee Christopher Sieber as Oliver Warbucks

ENSEMBLE ACTORS: Peyton Ella, Cooper Grodin, Erin Mackey, Kevin Pariseau, Cassidy Pry, Kim Sava

Annie, the Musical, began its run on November 22 at Paper Mill Playhouse and will continue playing until December 31, 2017.

The Honeymooners (The Musical)

The Honeymooners opened the Paper Mill Playhouse's 2017-2018 season. Book writers Dusty Kay and Bill Nuss, composer Stephen Weiner, and lyricist Peter Mills "breathe fresh life into the beloved characters of Ralph and Alice Kramden, and Ed and Trixie Norton, true icons from the Golden Age of television - not simply rehashing old teleplays on the stage, but inventing an ingenious

storyline in the best American musical comedy tradition. Tony Award-winning director John Rando ramps up the fun with his clever staging, showcasing a stellar cast of cosmic pros as well as the talents of lauded Broadway designers, a consummate music team, and Emmy Award-winning choreographer Joshua Bergasse's splashy production numbers," explain Mark S. Hoebee, Artistic Director and Todd Schmidt, Managing Director of the Playhouse.

The Honeymooners was a television sitcom that began in 1951 as a recurring sketch on Jackie Gleason's live Cavalcade of Stars on the DuMont Network. The following year it moved to CBS and the new Jackie Gleason Show. In 1955, The Honeymooners became its own weekly half-hour sitcom.

The memorable madcap cast included Jackie Gleason, Art Carney, Audrey Meadows and Joyce Randolph.

The show followed an everyman



Peyton Ella (Annie) with Macy (Sandy).

Photos /Courtesy Even Zimmerman for MurphyMade.

bus driver named Ralph Kramden and his sarcastic wife Alice (Audrey Meadows) who often comes to his rescue. Ralph also has his best friend Ed Norton, portrayed by Art Carney and his wife Trixie, played by Joyce Randolph. It was one of the first comedies on television to portray a normal married couple that is struggling to get by. Most of the action takes place in the kitchen of their Brooklyn apartment.

In the Paper Mill Playhouse's stage musical story, America's favorite dreamers have a brand new scheme. The Honeymooners is a World premiere musical comedy inspired by the classic television series. Ralph Kramden and his buddy Ed Norton are back and still shooting for the moon. After shocking their wives by winning a high profile jingle contest, they are catapulted out of Brooklyn and into the cutthroat world of Madison Avenue advertising, where they discover that their quest for the American Dream might cost them their friendship. Filled with big laughs and an infectious score, The Honeymooners bang zooms its way into your heart.

The principal cast featured Tony Award winner Michael McGrath as Ralph Kramden, Michael Mastro as Ed Norton, Leslie Kritzer as Alice Kramden, and Tony Award nominee Laura Bell Bundy as Trixie Norton, with Lewis Cleale as Bryce Bennett, Lewis J. Stadlen as Old Man Faciamatta, and David Wohl as Allen Upshaw; backed by an impressive ensemble of dancer-actors.

The production team includes set design by Beowulf Boritt, costume design by Jess Goldstein, lighting design by Jason Lyons, sound design by Kai Harada, hair, wig & makeup design by Leah J. Loukas, with orchestrations by Doug Besterman and dance arrangements by Sam Davis. The production stage manager is Timothy R. Semon. Casting is by Telsey + Company, Patrick Goodwin, CSA.

The Honeymooners, completed its run at the Playhouse, but the buzz is that the production may soon be heading to a New York's Broadway theater.

(The author is a freelance writer. She writes on The Arts and Entertainment, Social Issues, Health and Wellness, and Spirituality)



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 **OPINIO**



YET TO FIND THE RIGHT PERSON TO MARRY, SAYS PRIYANKA CHOPRA

Actress Priyanka Chopra said that marriage doesn't happen as per plans and she is yet to find the right person to marry.

Priyanka attended an event on Tuesday and during a media interaction she was asked about her marriage plans to which she replied, "Marriage doesn't happen as per plans. You just have to find the right guy for yourself. If I find a right guy then I will do it. I still haven't found that person."

Priyanka, a global star, has two Hollywood films in her kitty - 'A Kid Like Jake' which also features Jim Parsons, Claire Danes, Octavia Spencer and she has also begun shooting for 'Isn't it Romantic' with Rebel Wilson, Adam DeVine and Liam Hemsworth.

TAAPSEE PANNU TO SHOOT FINAL SCHEDULE OF 'SOORMA' IN SERBIA



Taapsee Pannu can't wait to shoot the "final leg" of her upcoming film 'Soorma' in Serbia. The actress said that she is excited to visit a new country. "It's the final leg of shooting and I am getting to visit a country which I have never been to before," Taapsee said in a statement.

She added, "I fear cold weather as I am not a cold weather person but the excitement of

visiting a new place keeps me warm and getting to play a hockey player along with some real hockey players is what makes the journey even more exciting. I will be done in a week in Serbia and that will be a wrap for team Soorma."

The cast have just wrapped up the India schedule shoot specifically in Shahabad (in Uttar Pradesh) and Chandigarh and now is

all ready to move ahead for the next half in Serbia. 'Soorma' is a sports biopic based on the hockey legend Sandeep Singh and is being directed by Shaad Ali, who has earlier directed hit films like 'Saathiya' and 'Bunty Aur Babli'.

It also features Dilit Dosanjh in the lead role. The film is all set to be released on June 29, 2018.

Source: IANS

MOVIE REVIEW



JOURNEY OF BHANGOVER

Cast: Prerika Arora, Aradhya Taing, Jimmy Sharma, Hemant Pandey, Anmol Khatri, Palash Soni, Yashpal Sharma, Jaideep Ahlwat, Soniya Sharma, The Begraj, Rajoo Maan, Sapna Choudhary

Director: Mahinder Singh Saniwal

Attempted as a silly comedy-thriller, Mahinder Singh Sahiwal's directorial effort involves 5 friends – Ram (Jimmy Sharma), Nisha (Prerika Arora), Ravi (Palash Soni), Sagar (Anmol Khatri), and Sudeepa (Aradhya Taing), who get high on bhang during a Holi party only to find out a day later (after the buzz has died down) that they were involved in the arrest of two terrorists, as informed by a cop (Yashpal Sharma). So, it's up to the hostel warden Pandey (Hemant Pandey) who brought them home on that fateful day, to help them recollect what really transpired.

No doubt this was inspired by the Hollywood hit 'Hangover' but it doesn't quite manage to hit the right buttons to make you rock in the aisles. While the events underlined here are different in context, there's not much happening that will bring a laugh or even seem amusing.

There's nothing fresh about the story which is basically a cut and paste effort, and the treatment is so ineffective that all attempts at comic timing are lost in the melee of eager first-timers trying to score big in a sloppy set-up for the funnies. The actors look out of sorts, the writing lacks wit and humour and the slap-stick is pretty much jaded. The music and songs are just about bearable, but the local flavour fails to enthuse because even that feels hopelessly put-on, instead of authentic. The only thing you are likely to feel here is irritated!



EVA LONGORIA IS EXPECTING FIRST CHILD

Actress Eva Longoria is expecting her first child - a boy - with husband Jose Baston. Longoria, 42, is four months pregnant, her representative told the media.

The couple began dating in 2013, got married in May 2016 in Mexico in a star-studded party. Baston, who already has three children from his previous marriage, is the president of a US-based media company.

Longoria had previously denied her pregnancy rumours on multiple occasions. Longoria has also appeared in films like 'The Sentinel', 'Over Her Dead Body', 'For Greater Glory', 'Frontera' and 'Lowriders'.

Source: IANS

'MAMMA MIA!' SEQUEL BETTER THAN ORIGINAL: AMANDA SEYFRIED



Actor Amanda Seyfried, who plays the role of Sophie in 'Mamma Mia!', has promised fans that the upcoming sequel is going to be better than the original.

Seyfried said she too was doubtful when she was approached for a follow-up initially.

"Truthfully, when they were like, 'We're making Mamma Mia 2' I was like, 'That's going to be terrible.' But it's not! It's amazing," she told.

The film, titled 'Mamma Mia!: Here We Go Again', will focus on Donna's, Meryl Streep younger days. Actor Lily James plays the younger Donna in the movie.

"As soon as you see Lily on screen, you're like, 'Oh my God, that's Donna! I'm seeing Donna when she was wild and young and free, and she has the essence that Meryl brought to it. And it's kind of extraordinary," Seyfried said.

The actor believes she had a better time filming the sequel than she did while shooting the first movie.

"Everybody's back together and it's been 10 years. There's so much love and so much family that it's infused 100 times in this movie. It was so unexpected for me."

Source: PTI

MOVIE REVIEW



FERDINAND

Cast: Anthony Anderson, Bobby Cannavale, Boris Kodjoe, Carlos Saldanha, Colin H. Murphy, Daniela Bobadilla, Daveed Diggs, David Tennant, Flula Borg, Gabriel Iglesias, Gina Rodriguez, Jack Gore, Jeremy Sisto

Director: Carlos Saldanha

Any picture book that a parent can read to kids in a few short minutes, no matter how delightful, requires fattening up to become a film. Sometimes Hollywood's crassness kills the charm.

Happily, that is not the case with "Ferdinand," an animated film inspired by Munro Leaf's 1936 children's classic that brims with bumptious fun, droll characters and poignant emotions. Honoring Leaf's gentle "The Story of Ferdinand," about a Spanish bull who would rather smell the flowers than fight in the ring, the film incorporates the book's story arc, with stylistic nods to Robert Lawson's drawings of Spanish scenes and people. But it also adds new incidents, characters and depth, with a contemporary wit that doesn't coarsen the story — or not much, anyway.

The movie widens Ferdinand's world, allowing him to bring others along with him on his quest to be who he wants to be, and to let others do the same. That theme and the anti-bullfighting message, so subtle in the book, are

made bolder in the film, but never preachy. An overlong chase sequence on the streets of Madrid in the third act feels like padding. Yet even then, the characters' personalities enrich it.

Director Carlos Saldanha, who worked on the "Rio" and "Ice Age" films, has chosen the voice cast well. In the title role, wrestler-turned-actor John Cena gives Ferdinand just the right balance of sweetness and strength. He becomes the wholly convincing center of the parable.

As in the book, we first meet Ferdinand when he's a wee calf on a farm, where he discovers early on that smelling flowers in the pasture beats butting heads with the other young'uns, who mock him and long to prove themselves in the bullring. Still, he never wavers.

After his father fails to return from a bullfight, a grieving Ferdinand runs away from the farm. Nina (Lily Day), a little girl, finds him and takes him home to her father's farm as a pet. There, Ferdinand grows into an enormous, happy fellow. One day, he follows Nina into town for a festival, gets stung by a bee and reacts wildly. Terrified, the townsfolk lasso him and send him back to the farm where he was born.

His owners hope that the famed toreador El Primero (Miguel Ángel Silvestre) will choose Ferdinand for the ring. Lupe (Kate McKinnon, in fine eccentric form as a whacked-out "calming goat") is assigned to get Ferdinand in the right frame of mind.



MARTYRDOM OF SAHIBZADAS

Baba Ajit Singh, Baba Jujhar Singh, Baba Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh were the four Sahibzadas (sons) of Guru Gobind Singh ji. Generally, we use the word 'Baba' for an old man but it is also used for a person, worthy of respect. At the time of their martyrdom Baba Ajit Singh and Baba Jujhar Singh were 17 and 15 years old, and the two younger brothers, Baba Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh were only 9 and 7.

Baba Ajit Singh was an excellent swordsman. He was also expert in the use of other weapons of war like bow and arrow. He started taking part in Sikh battles against tyrants, early in life.

Once a young Hindu Brahman came to Guru Gobind Singh ji at Anandpur Sahib and requested him to help him as some Pathans had abducted his newly-wedded wife. Baba Ajit Singh offered to recover the young Brahman's wife. With a few brave Sikhs he chased the Pathans, overpowered them, and recovered the young lady and restored her to her husband.

In the year 1704, when Guruji had to leave the besieged fort of Anandpur, all the four Sahibzadas were with him. The Anandpur Fort had been surrounded by the Mughal armies for several months and all supplies to the Sikhs inside had been completely cut off. To take over the control of the fort, the Mughal officers sent in a note to Guru Sahib saying that if he and his followers vacated the fort, they would let them pass through peacefully and vowed not to hurt anyone.

The enemy betrayed the Guru, violated their oath and fell upon the Sikhs as soon as they opened the gates to move out. Baba Ajit Singh with a few Sikhs held up the enemy while the rest crossed the river Sirsa. When all had crossed, Baba Ajit Singh and the young Sikhs in his command plunged their horses into the flooded river and joined a group of Sikhs marching ahead of them.

In the utter confusion of the battle and the river crossing, the two younger sons of the Tenth Guru along with their grandmother Mata Gujri ji got separated from the rest. While Guruji with his two elder sons and forty Sikhs hurried towards Chamkaur, a nearby village, where they quickly occupied a strategically located Garhi (a small fortress) and started preparing for their defense against the Mughal forces pursuing them from all sides, while Mata Gujri ji and the younger Sahibzadas moved on in a different direction.

The Mughal forces soon besieged the Garhi and decided to force open its gate. Baba Ajit Singh with the permission and blessings of his father took five Sikhs with him, went out and riddled the enemy with a continuous spray of arrows. He fought very bravely to his last breath and died a martyr's death. Guru Sahib watched his eldest son's great fighting skills and thanked God that he met a saint-soldier's death.

Baba Jujhar Singh, the second son of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, also had the same training as his brother. He stood up and requested his father to allow him to be the next one to go and follow his elder brother. Guruji embraced him and gave him a sword and a shield. He also went out with five Sikhs. Many mighty warriors fell upon this lad of fifteen. He fought with courage for as long as he could, till he got overpowered by the huge army. He breathed his last, fighting like a true Sikh warrior with Waheguru, Waheguru on his lips.

On the other hand, Baba Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh, the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh ji and their grandmother Mata Gujri ji, who got separated from Guruji, moving in a different direction, reached a



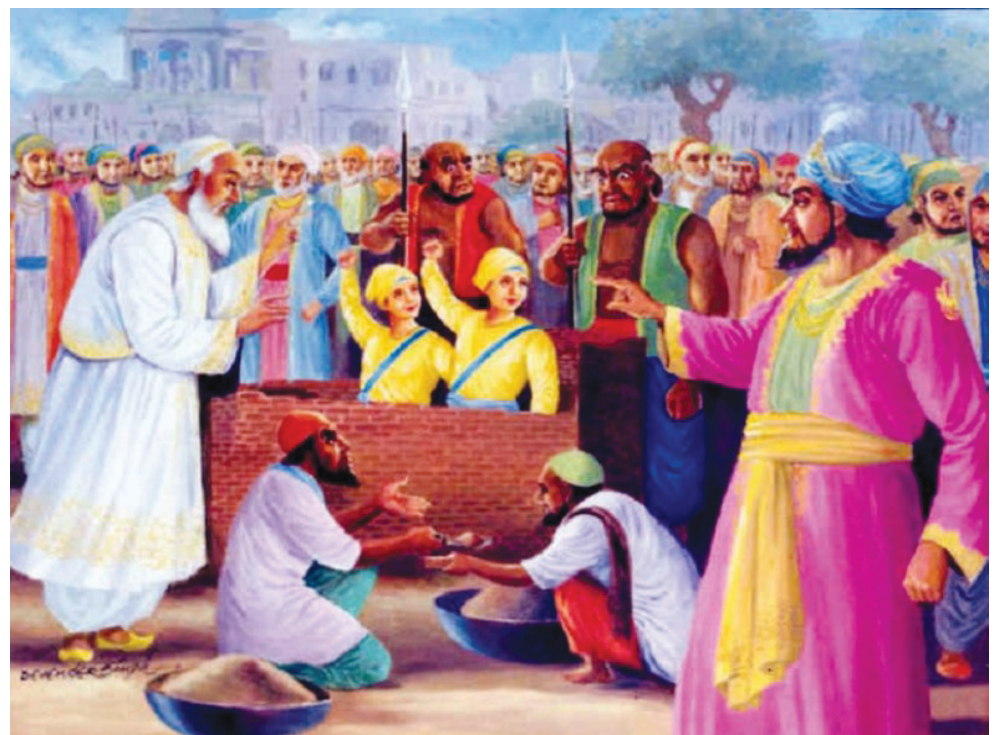
village nearby. There they met a Brahman named 'Gangu' who had earlier served in the Guru's house. He offered them shelter in his house but stole their valuables and money when the three of them were resting at night. Later, when Mata Gujri questioned him about it, he became furious and reported their presence to the village chief who was a Mughal. Both the Sahibzadas with their grandmother were arrested and taken to the Governor of Sarhind, who confined them in a tower of his fort where they passed a cold December night on hard floor without any bedding or food.

Next day, the Sahibzadas were summoned before the Governor. The young Sahibzadas kept up their princely dignity and refused to bow before the Governor. Instead, they uttered "Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh". The Governor was annoyed and threatened them with torture if they did not embrace Islam. Both of them firmly refused to give up their faith. The Governor gave them 24 hours to think and consult their grandmother. He promised them many charming favors if they agreed and warned them that they would be bricked alive, if they refused.

When Mata Gujri heard all about it, she warmly hugged them and told them how proud of them she was. "Stay strong, my beloved kids, it is better to die with honor than to live in disgrace", she counseled. Next day when they were taken to the court, the Governor again made them tempting offers but they rejected all of them, and refused to give up their Sikh faith for Islam. The Governor ordered them to be bricked alive. The Governor of Malerkotla, Sher Mohammed who was also present pleaded for their release as they had not committed any offence, he said, but of no avail.

The two brothers were made to stand closely side by side and a brick wall started being raised around them. When they were covered in the wall upto their shoulders, the Governor again asked them to embrace Islam and go free. But these two young faces, glowing with confidence, calmly shook their heads in the negative. At this point, the Governor ordered and their heads were cut off. This is how the two younger sons of the tenth Guru became martyrs.

When Mata Gujri was told about the martyrdom of her grandsons, she thanked Waheguruji for giving them a dignified death. Then she closed her eyes and went into deep meditation. Next morning they found she had breathed her last.



Todar Mal, a rich businessman and follower of Guru Gobind Singh ji sought permission from the Governor to cremate the three bodies. He was permitted on the condition that he paid as many gold coins as placed closely together would cover the piece of land required. Todar Mal agreed, purchased the land and cremated the

dead bodies. 'Gurdwara Joti Sarup' was erected later on that piece of land. The place where the Sahibzadas were bricked and beheaded stands the Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib. At the site where the three were imprisoned stands the Gurdwara called 'Mata Gujri Burj'(Tower). This happened in the month of December 1704.



Christmas is both a sacred religious holiday and a worldwide cultural and commercial phenomenon. For two millennia, people around the world have been observing it with traditions and practices that are both religious and secular in nature. Christians celebrate Christmas Day as the anniversary of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, a spiritual leader whose teachings form the basis of their religion. Popular customs include exchanging gifts, decorating Christmas trees, attending church, sharing meals with family and friends and, of course, waiting for Santa Claus to arrive. December 25 — Christmas Day — has been a federal holiday in the United States since 1870.

AN ANCIENT HOLIDAY

The middle of winter has long been a time of celebration around the world. Centuries before the arrival of the man called Jesus, early Europeans celebrated light and birth in the darkest days of winter. Many peoples rejoiced during the winter solstice, when the worst of the winter was behind them and they could look forward to longer days and extended hours of sunlight.

In Scandinavia, the Norse celebrated Yule from December 21, the winter solstice, through January. In recognition of the return of the sun, fathers and sons would bring home large logs, which they would set on fire. The people would feast until the log burned out, which could take as many as 12 days. The Norse believed that each spark from the fire represented a new pig or calf that would be born during the coming year.

The end of December was a perfect time for celebration in most areas of Europe. At that time of year, most cattle were slaughtered so they would not have to be fed during the winter. For many, it was the only time of year when they had a supply of fresh meat. In addition, most wine and beer made during the year was finally fermented and ready for drinking.

In Germany, people honored the pagan god Oden during the mid-winter holiday. Germans were terrified of Oden, as they believed he made nocturnal flights through the sky to observe his people, and then decide who would prosper or perish. Because of his presence, many people chose to stay inside.

SATURNALIA

In Rome, where winters were not as harsh as those in the far north, Saturnalia—a holiday in honor of Saturn, the god of agriculture—was celebrated. Beginning in the week leading up to the winter solstice and continuing for a full month, Saturnalia was a hedonistic time, when food and drink were plentiful and the normal Roman social order was turned upside down. For a month, slaves would become masters. Peasants were in command of the city. Business and schools were closed so that everyone could join in the fun. Also around the time of the winter solstice, Romans observed Juvenalia, a feast honoring the children of Rome. In addition, members of the upper classes often celebrated the birthday of Mithra, the god of the unconquerable sun, on December 25. It was believed that Mithra, an infant god, was born of a rock. For some Romans, Mithra's birthday was the most sacred day of the year.



In the early years of Christianity, Easter was the main holiday; the birth of Jesus was not celebrated. In the fourth century, church officials decided to institute the birth of Jesus as a holiday. Unfortunately, the Bible does not mention date for his birth (a fact Puritans later pointed out in order to deny the legitimacy of the celebration). Although some evidence suggests that his birth may have occurred in the spring (why would shepherds be herding in the middle of winter?), Pope Julius I chose December 25. It is commonly believed that the church chose this date in an effort to adopt and absorb the traditions of the pagan Saturnalia festival. First called the Feast of the Nativity, the custom spread to Egypt by 432 and to England by the end of the sixth century. By the end of the eighth century, the celebration of Christmas had spread all the way to Scandinavia. Today, in the Greek and Russian orthodox churches, Christmas is celebrated 13 days after the 25th, which is also referred to as the Epiphany or Three Kings Day. This is the day it is believed that the three wise men finally found Jesus in the manger.

By holding Christmas at the same time as traditional winter solstice festivals, church leaders increased the chances that Christmas would be popularly embraced, but gave up the ability to dictate how it was celebrated. By the

Middle Ages, Christianity had, for the most part, replaced pagan religion. On Christmas, believers attended church, then celebrated raucously in a drunken, carnival-like atmosphere similar to today's Mardi Gras. Each year, a beggar or student would be crowned the "lord of misrule" and eager celebrants played the part of his subjects. The poor would go to the houses of the rich and demand their best food and drink. If owners failed to comply, their visitors would most likely terrorize them with mischief. Christmas became the time of year when the upper classes could repay their real or imagined "debt" to society by entertaining less fortunate citizens.

AN OUTLAW CHRISTMAS

In the early 17th century, a wave of religious reform changed the way Christmas was celebrated in Europe. When Oliver Cromwell and his Puritan forces took over England in 1645, they vowed to rid England of decadence and, as part of their effort, cancelled Christmas. By popular demand, Charles II was restored to the throne and, with him, came the return of the popular holiday.

The pilgrims, English separatists that came to America in 1620, were even more orthodox in their Puritan beliefs than Cromwell. As a result,



Christmas was not a holiday in early America. From 1659 to 1681, the celebration of Christmas was actually outlawed in Boston. Anyone exhibiting the Christmas spirit was fined five shillings. By contrast, in the Jamestown settlement, Captain John Smith reported that Christmas was enjoyed by all and passed without incident.

After the American Revolution, English customs fell out of favor, including Christmas. In fact, Christmas wasn't declared a federal holiday until June 26, 1870.

IRVING REINVENTS CHRISTMAS

It wasn't until the 19th century that Americans began to embrace Christmas. Americans reinvented Christmas, and changed it from a raucous carnival holiday into a family-centered day of peace and nostalgia. But what about the 1800s peaked American interest in the holiday?

The early 19th century was a period of class conflict and turmoil. During this time, unemployment was high and gang rioting by the disenfranchised classes often occurred during the Christmas season. In 1828, the New York city council instituted the city's first police force in response to a Christmas riot. This catalyzed certain members of the upper classes to begin to change the way Christmas was celebrated in America. In 1819, best-selling author Washington Irving wrote *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, gent.*, a series of stories about the celebration of Christmas in an English manor house. The sketches feature a squire who invited the peasants into his home for the holiday. In contrast to the problems faced in American society, the two groups mingled effortlessly. In Irving's mind, Christmas should be a peaceful, warm-hearted holiday bringing groups together across lines of wealth or social status. Irving's fictitious celebrants enjoyed "ancient customs," including the crowning of a Lord of Misrule. Irving's book, however, was not based on any holiday celebration he had attended — in fact, many historians say that Irving's account actually "invented" tradition by implying that it described the true customs of the season.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Also around this time, English author Charles Dickens created the classic holiday tale, *A Christmas Carol*. The story's message—the importance of charity and good will towards all humankind—struck a powerful chord in the United States and England and showed members of Victorian society the benefits of celebrating the holiday. The family was also becoming less disciplined and more sensitive to the emotional needs of children during the early 1800s. Christmas provided families with a day when they could lavish attention and gifts on their children without appearing to "spoil" them.

As Americans began to embrace Christmas as a perfect family holiday, old customs were unearthed. People looked toward recent immigrants and Catholic and Episcopalian churches to see how the day should be celebrated. In the next 100 years, Americans built a Christmas tradition all their own that included pieces of many other customs, including decorating trees, sending holiday cards, and gift-giving.

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Key ally of British prime minister resigns amid porn scandal

LONDON (TIP): key ally of British Prime Minister Theresa May was forced to resign on Dec 20 after an investigation concluded he made misleading statements about pornographic images found on a Parliament computer in his office in 2008.

Damian Green, who was ousted as first secretary of state, maintains he did not use pornography on his office computers, but he agreed he had not been forthcoming in statements made about the matter in November. A report by May's Cabinet secretary concluded Green had made misleading statements regarding his knowledge about the indecent images found by police. "I accept that I should have been clear in my press statements that police lawyers talked to my lawyers in 2008 about the pornography on the computers, and that the police raised it with me in a subsequent phone call in 2013," Green said in his resignation letter, which was made public Wednesday night.

May said she asked Green for his resignation after the investigation concluded he had not been open about the matter.

"I have also carefully considered the report's conclusions in relation to two statements you made on 4 and 11 November which you now accept were inaccurate and misleading," the prime minister wrote in a letter requesting Green to step aside. She said he had fallen short of the standards expected of him.

"It is therefore with deep regret, and enduring gratitude for the contribution you have made over many years, that I asked you to resign from the Government and have accepted your resignation," May wrote.

Green was a vital political ally who acted as a de facto deputy prime minister and supported May in her difficult Brexit



negotiations. His removal will cost her an important supporter as she tries to balance competing visions of Brexit within her Cabinet.

Green had claimed earlier he was the victim of a smear campaign. The pornography was found on his office computer during a police investigation of government leaks.

The Cabinet investigation did not yield a conclusion about sexual misconduct allegations writer Kate Maltby made against Green. Maltby said Green had "fleetingly" touched her knee during a meeting in a pub

and later sent a suggestive text after a picture of her wearing a corset appeared in a newspaper.

The cabinet secretary investigation said it was "not possible to reach a definitive conclusion" on whether Green's behavior with Maltby was appropriate wily, but added that her account was "plausible."

Green is among a number of British politicians who have stepped down or been forced out in recent weeks as a wave of allegations of sexual harassment has surfaced. (AP)

Putin says Russia's spy agencies prevented 60 terror attacks

MOSCOW (TIP): President Vladimir Putin says Russian security agencies have thwarted 60 terror attacks in the country this year.

Russia marked its Day of Employees of State Security Agencies on Wednesday. Speaking to intelligence officers on their professional holiday, Putin said Russia would continue working to "destroy hotbeds of international terrorism" following its campaign in Syria.

The Russian leader called US President Donald Trump on Sunday to thank him for a CIA tip that the Kremlin said helped prevent a series of bombings in St. Petersburg last weekend.

The Kremlin's account of the call was Russia's first public assertion that information from the U.S. has helped prevent an attack.

In his comments Wednesday, Putin nonetheless emphasized the need to counter foreign spies and block foreign attempts to meddle in Russia's domestic politics. (AP)

Uber a taxi company, not a tech firm: EU court

BARCELONA (TIP): Ride-hailing service Uber suffered a new blow on Dec 20 as the European Union's top court ruled that it should be regulated like a taxi company and not a technology service, a decision that crimps its activities around Europe and could weigh on other app-based companies too.

Taxi drivers honked in celebration while Uber which is wrapping up a particularly punishing year sought to play down the ruling on Wednesday by the Luxembourg-based European Court of Justice. The decision might only affect its operations in four countries, and the company said it will try to keep expanding in Europe anyway.

The decision in theory applies to ride-hailing services around the 28-nation EU. But the ruling leaves it to national governments to decide how and whether to change the way they regulate Uber and similar services, which have expanded rapidly in recent years. (AP)

29 dead in fitness centre blaze in S. Korea: fire service

SEOUL (TIP): At least 29 people were killed and 26 injured Thursday in a major blaze at a fitness centre building in the South Korean city of Jecheon, officials said, in one of the country's deadliest fire disasters. The fire broke out around 4:00pm local time (0700 GMT) and quickly engulfed the entire eight-storey building, leaving many trapped inside.

Twenty victims were found at a public sauna and others elsewhere in the building that houses a fitness centre, public bath and restaurants, the National Fire Agency said. "The fire produced so much toxic smoke so quickly, leaving many people unable to evacuate," an agency spokesman said. Many victims appeared to be unaware of the fire raging outside the bathhouse until it became impossible to flee, he added.

The death toll may rise further as firefighters continue to search the building, the spokesman said. Television footage showed the building consumed by orange flames and issuing dark plumes of smoke, as several people stood waiting to be rescued from an outdoor terrace. (AFP)

19 hurt as car ploughs into crowd in Melbourne: Police

MELBOURNE (TIP): A car ploughed into a crowd in Australia's second-largest city on Dec 21 injuring 19 people in what police said was a "deliberate act" but one they did not believe was terror related. Witnesses said people were thrown through the air after being hit by the vehicle, which did not appear to be trying to stop as it "mowed everybody down" at a busy intersection in downtown Melbourne.

Victoria state police said the 32-year-old driver, an Australian of Afghan descent, was known to authorities for traffic and "minor assault" offences and had mental health issues.

The car was driven "intentionally" through the intersection and collided with a "large number" of pedestrians, Acting Chief Commissioner Shane Patton told reporters in Melbourne.

The driver "has a history of drug use and mental health issues... At this time we do not have any evidence or intelligence to indicate a connection with terrorism" or extremism, he said. (AP)

Mosul is a graveyard: Final ISIS battle kills 9,000 civilians

MOSUL (TIP): The price Mosul's residents paid in blood to see their city freed was 9,000 to 11,000 dead, a civilian casualty rate nearly 10 times higher than what has been previously reported. The number killed in the nine-month battle to liberate the city from the Islamic State group marauders has not been acknowledged by the U.S.-led coalition, the Iraqi government or the self-styled caliphate.

But Mosul's gravediggers, its morgue workers and the volunteers who retrieve bodies from the city's rubble are keeping count.

Iraqi or coalition forces are responsible for at least 3,200 civilian deaths from airstrikes, artillery fire or mortar rounds between October 2016 and the fall of the Islamic State group in July 2017, according to an Associated Press investigation that cross-referenced independent databases from non-governmental organizations.

Most of those victims are simply described as "crushed" in health ministry reports.

The coalition, which says it lacks the resources to send investigators into Mosul, acknowledges responsibility for only 326 of the deaths.



"It was the biggest assault on a city in a couple of generations, all told. And thousands died," said Chris Woods, head of Airwars, an independent organization that documents air and artillery strikes in Iraq and Syria and shared its database with the AP.

"There doesn't seem to be any disagreement about that, except from the federal government and the coalition. And understanding how those civilians died, and obviously ISIS played a big part in that as well, could help save a lot of lives the next time something like

this has to happen. And the disinterest in any sort of investigation is very disheartening," Woods said, using an alternative acronym for the Islamic State group.

In addition to the Airwars database, the AP analyzed information from Amnesty International, Iraq Body Count and a United Nations report. The AP also obtained a list of 9,606 people killed during the operation from Mosul's morgue. Hundreds of dead civilians are believed to still be buried in the rubble. (AP)

PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS OR INTELLIGENCE: WHAT QUALITIES DO WOMEN LOOK FOR IN A MAN?

Some women may claim that chiselled abs and giant biceps are not what they are seeking in a man. But a scientific study suggests that if your female partner tells you this, she is probably just being kind. The study, on the subject of male bodily attractiveness, has found that the most Herculean bodies were universally the most appealing, at least according to the 160 women doing the rating. Previous studies, too, have backed this finding.

"We weren't surprised that women found physically strong men attractive ... what did surprise us was just how powerful the effect was," said Aaron Sell, a senior lecturer at Griffith University, Queensland, Australia, who led the work. "Our data couldn't find even a single woman that preferred weaker or feminine male bodies."

The findings run counter to a theory that has been gaining traction in the field of male attractiveness research, that there exists a "sweet spot" for brawn, and that beyond a certain threshold too much strength becomes unappealing. This view is wrong, the team behind the latest study claim.

Aaron Lukaszewski, an evolutionary psychologist at California State University, said: "The theory is that there would have been benefits ancestrally, in terms of the ability to acquire resources, protecting offspring, hunting and so on. But at a certain point, mating with highly dominant men, they can exert all this aggressive coercive control and there might be costs."

The paper, published in the Royal Society journal *Proceedings B*, highlights the potential downside that physically formidable men might be "better able to invest resources in a family [but] less willing to do so than weaker men of poorer quality".

However, the empirical evidence suggests that if there are downsides to being muscular, this fact is not reflected in female preferences. Lukaszewski said the field appears to have been misled by studies which used line drawings of the male body, rather than photographs. "Most of the studies have been done using line drawings, which have shown hulk-like freaks of nature, that are at the borderline of looking like a human," he said.

In the latest study, 160 women were shown photographs of male bodies, with the head blanked out and asked to rate them for attractiveness. One set of photographs showed male university students and a second set showed men recruited from a gym, who worked out between three to five



times each week. The men were also given a strength test.

The strength of a man was by far the strongest predictor of whether he was rated as attractive — it explained 70% of the difference in scores. Being tall gave men a small boost of a few percentage points, while being overweight incurred a few negative points. "Our results suggest that even if you're a bit overweight, looking strong can buffer that. Basically, being a strong, fat guy is OK, which I think would bring

comfort to many."

The team said they now intend to turn their gaze to the question of why the results differ to studies on facial attractiveness where women have shown a preference for feminine male faces. "It looks like the face is being analysed differently by women, and we're not sure why yet," said Sell.

Source: *The Guardian*

FOOD CORNER

NAWABI KESAR KOFTAS

Ingredients

1 tbsp milk, 1/4 cup grated low fat mawa (khoya), 1/2 cup grated paneer (cottage cheese), 1/2 cup boiled, peeled and grated potatoes, 1 tbsp roughly chopped raisins (kismis), 1 tbsp cornflour, 1 tbsp plain flour (maida), 1 tsp finely chopped green chillies, salt to taste, 3/4 cup sliced onions, 1 tbsp broken cashewnuts (kaju), 1 tbsp chopped almonds (badam), 2 tsp coriander (dhania) seeds, 2 tsp cumin seeds (jeera), 1 tbsp poppy seeds (khus-khus), 2 tsp aniseeds (vilayati saunf), 2 tbsp freshly grated coconut, 2 tsp chopped ginger (adrak), 1 tsp chopped green chillies, 4 whole dry kashmiri red chillies, broken into pieces, 2 cardamoms, 2 cloves (laung / lavang), a small stick of cinnamon (dalchini), 6 curry leaves (kadi patta), salt to taste, 1 tbsp oil, 4 tbsp tomato puree, 1/2 tsp dried fenugreek leaves (kasuri methi) salt to taste, 1/4 cup fresh cream,

Method

- Combine the saffron and milk in a small bowl and mix well.
- Combine all the ingredients along with the saffron-milk mixture in a deep bowl and mix well.
- Divide the mixture into 8 equal portions and shape each portion into a ball.
- Heat the oil in a deep non-stick kadhai and deep-fry, a few koftas at a time, on a medium flame till they turn golden brown in colour from all sides.
- Drain on an absorbent paper and keep aside.

For the gravy

- Heat the oil in a deep non-stick pan, add the prepared paste and sauté on a medium flame for 5 minutes.
- Add the tomato purée, mix well and cook on a medium flame for 2 to 3 minutes, while stirring continuously.



- Add 1/2 cup of water, dried fenugreek leaves and salt, mix well and cook on a medium flame for 3 minutes, while stirring occasionally.
- Lower the flame, add the fresh cream, mix well and cook on a medium flame

for 1 minute, while stirring occasionally.

- Just before serving, re-heat the gravy, add the koftas, mix gently and cook on a medium flame for 2 minutes, while stirring occasionally.

CHECK OBESITY: HAVE HEAVY BREAKFAST, LIGHT DINNER, QUIT SMOKING

You can prevent obesity and related health problems like diabetes, hypertension and hormonal disorders by changing a few lifestyle habits. Stop smoking, eat right at the right time, have a balanced diet and meditate, suggest experts.

Here's a detailed list of the lifestyle changes to make to keep obesity away:

- **Eat healthy:** A balanced diet should be a healthy mix of carbohydrates, proteins and fats. It should include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, low fat dairy and nuts to take care of minerals, vitamins, antioxidants, fibre and probiotics.
- **Eat right:** Have a healthy breakfast. This is the time when your muscles are absolutely depleted and hungry after a 10-hour fast since dinner. Eating well in the morning helps you revitalise your muscles and prevents excess calorie intake in the second half of the day. A light breakfast like cereals, milk with honey and nuts would suffice. Lunch: Pick up a piece of fruit, handful of soya nut or an oatmeal bar and see the difference for yourself.
- **Pre-workout:** To sustain throughout the workout and to get the maximum out of it, it is mandatory to fuel your system with the right kind of food like fruits, nuts and eggs.
- **Post-workout:** Feed your hungry muscles after 30-45 minutes of your workout with fruits and proteins.
- **At night:** Most people skip their meals due to their busy schedules and tend to gorge during dinner which is the main culprit of added



on calories and feeling of sluggishness throughout the day. The trick is to keep the dinner light with soups, salads, lean meat and yoghurt.

- **During parties:** It is wise to opt for salads, veggies, barbecued or roasted snacks rather than fried snacks and creamy dishes.
- **Drink water:** Drinking water at regular intervals helps in better digestion and also keeps the body hydrated. This leads to better metabolism and subsequent weight loss.
- **Get active:** Physical inactivity raises the risk of obesity. Exercise renders cells more sensitive to insulin. A mere brisk walk makes the difference. An ideal workout designed by a health professional is a suitable mix of resistance and

aerobic training for optimum muscle building along with weight loss.

- **Eliminate stress:** Lower metabolic rate leads to weight accumulation and thereby tendency towards obesity. Physical activity, socialising, meditation, enjoying music, nature and time with children and pets – all keep stress at bay.
- **Sleep well:** It's a well-known fact that when asleep the human body produces growth hormones that increase metabolism and repair tissue. Sleep deprivation not only hampers this bodily activity but also makes the body lethargic and unable to focus on any other physical or mental activity planned during the day.

Source: IANS

Women are more conscious about their fitness routine than men

Nearly 57% gym goers plan their workouts impulsively, usually within an hour, says a yearlong study done by Fitpass, one stop solution for fitness enthusiasts. The survey covered a wide range of areas including fitness goals; favourite workouts of users, impulsive versus planned workouts and more.

The key finding of the study was that women are more fitness conscious than men. Also as per the study, 58% users are females who follow workouts to stay fit and slim down, while only 42% users are males that have a defined fitness or health goals.

The study also says that nearly 57% gym goers plan their workouts impulsively, usually within an hour, 27% reserve workouts within 24 hours and only 16% reserve their workouts in advance, within the week, said a statement.



A yearlong study done by Fitpass - the all-access pass to thousands of gyms and fitness studios, was conducted on the fitness routines and preference of 5,000 people in Delhi, Gurugram and Noida. Source: IANS



HIGH BLOOD SUGAR IN EARLY PREGNANCY COULD CAUSE HEART PROBLEMS FOR BABY

Higher blood sugar in early pregnancy can up the risk of a congenital heart defect in babies, according to a research.

The study was led by researchers at the Stanford University School of Medicine.

For many years, physicians have known that women with diabetes face an increased risk of giving birth to babies with heart defects. Some studies have also suggested a link between nondiabetic mothers' blood sugar levels and babies' heart defect risk. However, the new study is the first to examine this question in the earliest part of pregnancy, when the fetal heart is forming.

"Most women who have a child with congenital heart disease are not diabetic," said the study's senior author, James Priest, MD, assistant professor of pediatric cardiology. "We found that in women who don't already have diabetes or develop diabetes during pregnancy, we can still measure risk for having a child with congenital heart disease by looking at their glucose values during the first trimester of pregnancy." The study's lead author is Emmi Helle, MD, PhD, an affiliate in pediatric cardiology and former postdoctoral scholar.

The research team studied medical records from 19,107 pairs of mothers and their babies born between 2009 and 2015. The records included details of the mothers' prenatal care, including blood test results and any cardiac diagnoses made for the babies during pregnancy or after birth.

Infants with certain genetic diseases, those born from multiple pregnancies and those whose mothers had extremely low or high body-mass-index measures were not included in the study. Of the infants in the study, 811 were diagnosed with congenital heart disease, and the remaining 18,296 were not.

The scientists analyzed blood glucose levels from any blood sample collected from the mothers between four weeks prior to the estimated date of conception and the end of the 14th gestational week, just after the completion of the first trimester of pregnancy.

These early blood glucose measurements were available for 2,292, or 13 percent, of women in the study. The researchers also looked at the results of oral glucose tolerance tests performed around 20 weeks of gestation, which were available for 9,511, or just under half, of the women in the study.

After excluding women who had diabetes before pregnancy or who developed it during pregnancy, the results showed that the risk of giving birth to a child with a congenital heart defect was elevated by 8 percent for every increase of 10 milligrams per deciliter in blood glucose levels in the early stages of pregnancy. Source: ANI

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IIT SCIENTISTS USE ONION SKIN TO GENERATE ELECTRICITY



NEW DELHI (TIP): Scientists at IIT Kharagpur have used waste onion skins to develop an inexpensive device that can generate 'green' electricity from body movements, and may power pacemakers, smart pills and wearable electronics.

The non-toxic, biodegradable and biocompatible device takes advantage of the suitable piezoelectric properties of the onion skin, researchers said.

Piezoelectric materials have the ability to convert energy from everyday mechanical motions into electricity.

"This homespun inexpensive innovative finding can be a breakthrough scientific research in new direction; even common people can generate energy in any circumstances using this simple novel cost-effective idea," Bhanu Bhusan Khatua, professor at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur in West Bengal, told PTI.

Increasing population, industrialisation, and ubiquitous use of electronics and vehicles are playing a huge role in destroying the environment day by day.

The rising burden on fossil fuels and depletion of natural resources has made the development of sustainable and alternative green energy technologies a pressing requirement in current energy deficiency world, researchers said.

Piezoelectric materials can be used to convert simple body movements into green energy without adding any pollution to our environments.

However, piezoelectric nanogenerators are difficult to synthesise and are often very expensive. They are also usually highly toxic or pose environmental hazards, which means their use in real life application remains limited.

These drawbacks prompted researchers at IIT Kharagpur and Pohang University of Science and Technology in South Korea to develop a non-toxic, biodegradable and biocompatible piezoelectric nanogenerator (BPNG).

Among various cellulose containing bio-materials, onion skin is the most abundant bio-waste, said Khatua.

"This motivated us to study the piezoelectric co-efficient of the onion skin and its suitability as a bio-piezoelectric material," Khatua said.

"The uniqueness of our work lies in the novelty of utilising naturally abundant biocompatible and biodegradable onion skin directly as efficient piezoelectric material, which is thrown as tonne-scale garbage in every day worldwide," he said.

The device could be used in various biomedical applications such as pacemakers powered by heart beats or edible devices that can track health from inside the body.

Researchers estimate that the device could be manufactured easily at a cost of less than a rupee, with existing technologies. This would make the system accessible to people the economically weaker sections of the society. To build the device, the researchers coated an onion skin with a thin layer of gold and added copper wires with silver paste. It was then encapsulated in polymers.

The nanogenerator is capable of harvesting several types of mechanical energies, including body movements, wind flow and even machine vibrations.

The device developed by researchers has an output of 18 volts and can turn on 30 green LEDs under repeated human finger touch response, according to the study published in the journal *NanoEnergy*.

The device could withstand repeated cycles of pressing and releasing for up to five months. The voltage generated remained almost unchanged even after long cycles, indicating good mechanical stability of the device for biomedical applications, researchers said.

"We also studied the durability of the device under sewing machine vibration for 10,000 cycles. From the result it can easily be said that the device had enough mechanical durability and chemical stability for realistic applications," Khatua said.

The researchers, including Sumanta Kumar Karan and Sandip Maiti from IIT, are optimistic about commercialising the technology soon, although more research is required before it can be realised in practical applications. *Source: PTI*

FIRST ROBOT CAR THAT CAN DRIVE THROUGH SNOW DEVELOPED

LONDON (TIP): Scientists have developed the first robotic car that can drive over snow covered roads, paving the way for autonomous vehicles that can safely navigate through slippery stretches.

The fully autonomous robot car Martti, developed by researchers at the VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, also succeeded in making a new speed record of 40 kilometres per hour.

Martti is equipped with cameras, antennas, sensors and laser scanners, just like its counterpart Marilyn.

It has three laser scanners sensing the environment only in front of the car, whereas its 'spouse' Marilyn has two scanners looking forwards and one looking backwards.

"When in spring 2017 we taught the automated car Marilyn to drive, this autumn it has been teaching us on how to make Martti such that it can get along with its spouse, and follow GPS and positioning information on its route," said project manager Matti Kutila from VTT's RobotCar Crew.

"Martti has been designed for demanding weather conditions and Marilyn shines as the queen of urban areas," said Kutila.

On the intelligent road of Muonio, Martti was also given intensive training.

"It clearly has a very determined mindset, and after a persistent 24-hour training session, it started functioning," said Ari Virtanen, who was in charge of building the car and its equipment.

"Earlier, Marilyn required a lot more work, because its control software was



created from scratch. Martti uses the same software, which did no longer require more than minor adjustments," Virtanen said.

Martti made its speed record, when it was allowed to pick up speed after having felt its way for a little while.

"It probably also made a new world record in fully automated driving, making 40 kilometres per hour in a snowfall on snow-covered terrain without lane markings," Kutila said.

"It could have had even more speed, but in test driving it is programmed not

to exceed the limit of 40 kilometres per hour," he said.

The next step for VTT's autonomous cars will be changing the wavelengths of the optical components, increasing the resolution of the radar, and building more intelligence in the software monitoring the capabilities of the sensors.

These are intended to enhance the vehicle's functioning capacity step by step also on slippery road surfaces, where concealed edge of the road or fog may obstruct visibility. *Source: PTI*

WhatsApp asked to stop sharing data with Facebook

LONDON (TIP): France's privacy watchdog has issued formal notice to WhatsApp, asking the popular mobile messaging app to stop sharing user data with the parent company Facebook within a month.

The Chair of the National Data Protection Commission (CNIL) had asked WhatsApp to provide a sample of the French users' data transferred to Facebook.

"The company explained that it could not supply the sample requested by the CNIL since it is located in the US, it considers that it is only subject to the legislation of this (US) country," CNIL posted on its website late on Monday.

"As a result, the Chair of the CNIL decided to issue formal notice to the company WhatsApp to comply with the Data Protection Act within one month," it added.

Facebook acquired WhatsApp in 2014.

On August 25, 2016, WhatsApp released a new version of its Terms of Service and Privacy Policy where it



explained that "from now on, its users' data are transferred to Facebook for three purposes: targeted advertising, security and evaluation and improvement of services (business intelligence)".

"While the security purpose seems to be essential to the efficient functioning of the application, it is not the case for the 'business intelligence' purpose

which aims at improving performances and optimising the use of the application through the analysis of its users' behaviour," noted Chair of the CNIL.

The watchdog considered that the data transfer for "business intelligence" purpose is not based on the legal basis required by the Data Protection Act for any processing.

It then decided to send a formal public notice in order to ensure the highest level of transparency on the massive data transfer from WhatsApp to Facebook Inc. and, thus, to alert to the need for individuals concerned to keep their data under control.

This is not the first incident where WhatsApp-Facebook data sharing has been condemned.

Germany has also ordered Facebook to stop collecting data from WhatsApp users.

After repeated criticism, Facebook also agreed to stop collecting WhatsApp user data in the UK. *Source: IANS*

UBER SUFFERS NEW BLOW AS EU COURT RULES IT'S TAXI SERVICE

BRUSSELS (TIP): The EU's top court ruled on December 20 that Uber is an ordinary transportation company instead of an app and should be regulated as such, in a decision that will be closely watched around the world.

The case is yet another thorn in the side for US-based Uber, which has drawn the fury of taxi drivers and officials for flouting local regulations.

It also comes the same week as one of its drivers admitted to the attempted rape and murder of a British embassy worker coming home from a night out in Beirut, Lebanon.

"The service provided by Uber connecting individuals with non-professional drivers is covered by services in the field of transport," said the Luxembourg-based European Court of Justice.

"Member states can therefore regulate the conditions for providing that service."

Uber, the biggest name in the growing gig economy, claims it is a mere service provider, connecting consumers with drivers in more than 600 cities.

Uber has run into huge opposition from taxi companies and other competitors who say this allows it to dodge costly regulations such as training and licensing requirements for drivers and vehicles.

The case was brought by a taxi drivers' association in the Spanish city of Barcelona, where belief runs high that Uber is a taxi company that should be subject to rules governing such vehicles.

Uber said the ruling would make little difference in practice.

"This ruling will not change things in most EU countries where we already operate under transportation law," an



Uber spokesperson said in an emailed statement.

"However, millions of Europeans are still prevented from using apps like ours."

In a dense legal judgement, the ECJ said that Uber was a service that connects "by means of a smartphone application and for remuneration non-professional drivers using their own vehicle with persons who wish to make urban journeys."

That means it is "inherently linked to a transport service and, accordingly, must be classified as a 'service in the field of transport' within the meaning of EU law."

The EU court's senior adviser had said in a legal opinion in May that Uber was indeed a transport company.

Uber has had a rough ride in Spain, where a judge ruled in 2014 that its UberPop service risked breaking the law, leading to the Barcelona submission to the ECJ.

Early last year it decided to only

operate a limited a version of its UberX service in Spain which uses licensed, professional drivers instead of the amateurs who had previously worked via the UberPop application.

Uber has already had problems with the law in several European countries, particularly France where the company was forced to overhaul its business model.

In November a labour court in London, where the company is threatened with losing its license, said it had to pay the drivers a minimum wage and give them paid leave.

Uber does not employ drivers or own vehicles, but instead relies on private contractors with their own cars, allowing them to run their own businesses.

Licensed taxi drivers meanwhile often have to undergo hundreds of hours of training, and they accuse Uber of endangering their jobs by using cheaper drivers who rely only on a GPS to get around. *Source: AFP*

BANK OF INDIA UNDER RBI LENS OVER NPAs



NEW DELHI (TIP): The RBI has initiated a 'prompt corrective action' against Bank of India for mounting bad loans, placing various restrictions on it including issuing of fresh loans and dividend distribution, BoI said today.

In a filing to stock exchanges, BoI said RBI has placed it under Prompt Corrective Action Framework, consequent to the onsite inspection under the risk-based supervision model carried out for the year ended March 2017.

"This is in view of high net NPA, insufficient CET1 Capital and negative ROA (return on asset) for two consequent years. This action will contribute to the overall improvement in risk management, asset quality, profitability, efficiency, etc of the bank," BoI said.

At the end of March 2017, the bank's asset quality worsened with gross non-performing assets (NPAs) at 13.22%, as against 13.07% in the previous year. Net NPAs, however, improved to 6.90% from 7.79%.

For the second quarter ended September, 2017-18, asset quality improved as gross NPAs declined marginally to 12.62% of gross advances, from 13.45% a year ago.

In absolute terms, gross NPAs stood at Rs 49,306.90 crore as on September 2017, from Rs 52,261.95 crore earlier.

Source: PTI

BITCOIN SINKS 15% IN ASIA

TOKYO (TIP): Bitcoin prices plunged about 15% in Asian trade today before recouping some of the losses as investors apparently took fright at news that a South Korean exchange had been hacked. The unit, which hit a record \$19,500 at the start of the week, took a hit as it emerged that South Korean



exchange Youbit had been hacked, leading the firm to say it will close and start bankruptcy proceedings, according to Bloomberg News. The US on December 19 suspended trading in a Bitcoin-related stock, citing concerns about market manipulation. *Source: AFP*

RCOM SHARES SURGE 36%

NEW DELHI (TIP): Shares of Reliance Communications (RCom) garnered heavy demand, surging nearly 36%, in an otherwise sluggish broader market on Wednesday. The sharp rise in the stock came amid reports that the National Company Law Tribunal adjourned the hearing of insolvency petitions filed against Reliance Communications to early next month. The stock zoomed 35.24% to close at Rs 17.27 on the BSE helped by fag-end buying. During the day, it rose sharply by 44.94% to Rs 18.51. At NSE, shares of the company rose 35.68% to end at Rs 17.30. In terms of equity volume, 370.98 lakh shares of the company were traded on BSE and over 26 crore shares changed hands at NSE during the day. *Source: PTI*

AIRTEL APPROVES TAKEOVER OF TATAS' TELCO BUSINESS

NEW DELHI (TIP): The Board of Bharti Airtel has approved an arrangement for takeover of consumer mobile business of Tata Teleservices, in a deal involving issue of equity and preference shares. In October this year, the takeover of Tata Group's consumer mobile business by Airtel on a 'no-debt, no-cash basis' was announced by the two firms. "...the Board of Director in its meeting held on December 19, 2017 has approved...composite scheme of arrangement between Tata Teleservices, Bharti Airtel and Bharti Hexacom and their respective shareholders and creditors..." Airtel said in a regulatory filing. *Source: PTI*

AMAZON DROPS SALE OF CIRCUMCISION KIT IN UK AFTER COMPLAINT



LONDON (TIP): The British arm of Amazon has dropped sale of a circumcision training kit from its website after concerns were raised.

The kit had been offered by a third party seller and offered instructions and instruments that could be used to practice circumcision on a model of male genitals.

Circumcision consists of removing part of the foreskin of the penis and is typically done for religious or medical purposes on very young boys.

The National Secular Society in Britain complained to Amazon that the training kit violated Amazon's standard's policy.

The group said it feared the sale of the kit would encourage unqualified practitioners to carry out unneeded surgery in non-clinical conditions. *Source: AP*

Indian-origin tycoon purchases ArcelorMittal's US steelworks

LONDON (TIP): UK-based Indian-origin metals tycoon Sanjeev Gupta's Liberty House Group has completed the purchase of the South Carolina-based Georgetown steel mill from ArcelorMittal, the company has announced.

The deal between Liberty House and NRI steel magnate Lakshmi N Mittal's US steelworks, which includes a 540,000-tonne a year electric arc furnace and 680,000-tonne a year rod mill, had been agreed to earlier this year.

The sale marks the first in a series of strategic North American acquisitions and new projects targeted by Gupta-led GFG Alliance.

The 600,000-square-foot plant, serving the construction and automotive markets, is set to re-start melting and rolling next year as the first step in GFG's investment plans for the American steel industry.

"Securing the Georgetown furnace and mill is a major milestone for us, marking our first major step in the USA. The melting and rolling facilities here give us a formidable entry to the American market and provide a strong platform for expansion," GFG Alliance and Liberty House chief Gupta said in a statement.

The steel tycoon said he wanted to apply his GreenSteel sustainable strategy to the American plants, in line with the UK and Australia.

"We've already had customers contacting us about placing orders, so we're keen to get back up and running as quickly as possible," he said.

Liberty will initially re-hire 125 former employees at Georgetown and then build the workforce to 250 in the medium-term. The group is targeting a major share of the US market for home-produced wire rod, demand for which is projected to grow substantially during 2018. *Source: PTI*

Shree Ganeshaya Namah



Horoscope Forecast for DECEMBER 2017

BY BEJAN DARUWALLA

Email: info@bejandaruwalla.com / Phone: +91-8141234275 / www.bejandaruwalla.com

Ganesha says in digital terms speed + space + spirituality + showmanship = Sagittarius.

Add to it the great divide between illusion / reality, evolution / revolution, freedom / captivity, knowledge / wisdom. The archer pierces the eye of the Sun and hits infinity.

Finally, Sagittarius is all about freedom. Sagittarius is both fast and furious.

Aries:

The body and physicality means much to Aries. Therefore, December is a good time to do away with "Old habits, patterns and deep-seated memories from the subconscious, claw our being backwards." You have a great opportunity to be new and shining clean from December onwards. Go for it. Pilgrimages and pious deeds are fated.

Taurus:

Tantra and mantra, prayers and hymns should give an extra boost to life and living this month. At the same time health precautions are absolutely essential. Life is a concoction of concord and conflict. This truth will be seen and felt by you in December. The last week finds you calm of mind as pressures ease.

Gemini:

Psychologists tell us again and again that today life is all about RELATIONSHIPS. I agree totally with it now because the Sun in your seventh angle is mainly about meeting people. But relationships can also be with Nature and with your own self. Travel with a stop-over is more than possible. Reach out to people and you will find God.

Cancer:

Most Cancerians are emotional, intuitive and can link up with God naturally and easily. But in December hard work, sustained labor and intense concentration will result in awards and rewards. You jolly well deserve the grace of God as well as promotion and perks. However, you must learn to take excellent care of your health and wellness.

Leo:

Time to sing, make merry and also marry. In other words, hobbies, the fine arts, exhibitions, romance, children, crash into your life. Throw a party and also join a satsang, a Christian Mass, a Parsee Navjote. Be both busy and happy. Nietzsche asks, "Is man one of God's blunders, or is God one of man's blunders?" What say you?

Virgo:

House, home and property will figure very prominently in your scheme of things. It will interest health conscious Virgos to know that "The advent of massive human genome databases is enabling researches to look for possible connections between mental illnesses and the environmental and societal conditions that drive their development."

Libra:

Libra is all about beauty, poise, harmony and spirituality. Therefore, Volcanic hair from lava of volcano stretches 6 feet long could excite you. Use all media of transport and publicity to get what you desire. Preachers, pundits, priests, tv anchors, politicians, professors will succeed in impinging on the minds of the entire world.

Scorpio:

Scorpio many times stands for trusts, public money, banking and helping out others with money and active support as well as secret co-operation. Scorpio Bill Gates is the best example of it. By your oratory and charm you can change the world. Great praise this but well deserved. A mix of honey and money.

Sagittarius:

"Seaweeds, sawdust, skeletons, skulls" were never meant for you. You are meant for space travel, research, knowledge of your own self and most certainly you have the power to break with a mighty jerk all the chains that bind you. Osho the Sagittarian could well be the Master you may follow. Your choice.

Capricorn:

The dead world sleeps / The living world cares not is what most of us believe. But for you Capricornians the dead world can come alive now and the living world could dare and care for one and all. This is the special significance of Jupiter and Saturn for you in December. Hidden secret and mighty powerful forces will help you with or without your knowledge. Ganesha smiles.

Aquarius:

Shri Shri Anandamurti speaks of Surrendering to the Universal Rhythm and this applies very specially to you cosmos embracing Aquarians in the month of December when the Sun, the power planet, is in your eleventh angle. Connecting to the universal rhythm is to me very spiritual, extremely important and also very natural and our destiny.

Pisces:

Aristotle said, "The energy of the mind is the essence of life." To this I add power, position, prestige, promotion and a big round of profit and pleasure. Sounds interesting, doesn't it? The only snag is do not be overly aggressive, sly and greedy. After all nobody is perfect. It is our imperfection which makes us so very special. You may or may not agree with it.

Bejan Daruwalla is world's most famous astrologer today. He appears regularly on world wide TV shows. Bejan who has been a professor in English, has authored a number of books on astrology. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on March 29, 2012, lunched one of Bejan's books, '2012-End of the World? Bejan contributes to a number of

journals and newspapers in many parts of the world which include Berkley Communications (London) Times of India (Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai) and The Indian Panorama (New York and Texas). Bejan's predictions have mostly been correct and people the world over rely on his predictions.

Bejan Daruwalla is available for astrological consultations. He can be reached at info@bejandaruwalla.com and on phone 011-91-8141234275 www.bejandaruwalla.com

THE INFLUENCE OF VEDIC 'RSIS AND MUNNIES' ON PLATO

Metaphysics of Plato is Vedas Retold in the West and is followed with Conviction.
In India Vedic Metaphysics is followed by Faith as Brahmjnan

The metaphysics of Socrates and Plato influenced so much the Western social and spiritual thought and brought enlightenment to the West that today WEST describes "Plato as philosophy and philosophy as Plato." We the followers of Vedic Sanatan Dharma in India seem to have forgotten that that source of his writings and philosophy was Vedic metaphysics. Before Plato, Pythagoras went from Samos (Greece) to land of Ganga to learn Geometry. He would not have gone such a long and strange journey had the reputation of Brahmin's (Vedic) science not been long established in Europe. (Francois. M. Voltaire).

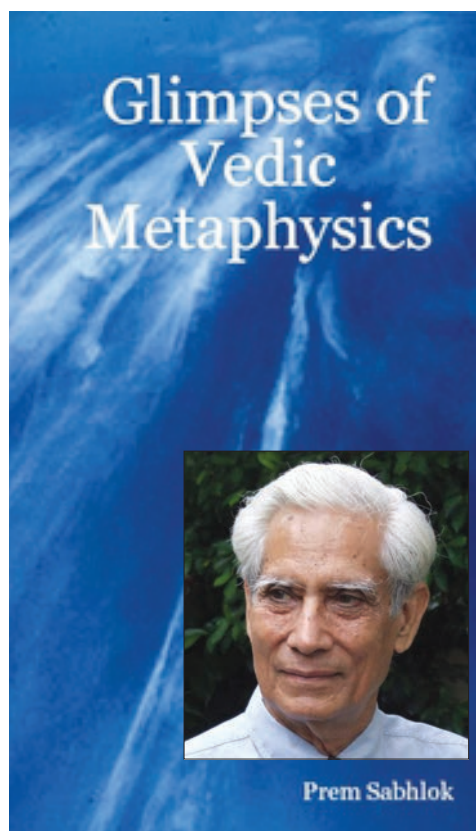
Plato left Athens for about one decade and visited Prasava (Persia), Ariana (Iran) and North-West part of the then India-land of Aryans. He seems to have discussed a number of metaphysical concepts with the then Vedic Rsis and Munnies. On his return to Athens, he propagated those thoughts in his Academy, without perhaps making any reference to Vedic rsis and munnies. However, the influence of Vedic metaphysics is clearly visible in Plato's writings/books.

Like the Vedic concept of moderation and Iddm nan mam (enlightened liberalism) Plato mentions in his Laws (174-f) and also in Utopia that in an Ideal state the range of economic disparities should be within 1:16. If the range of disparity increases marginally, the state is less ideal. However, if it increases considerably, the state is either a Democracy or an Oligarchy. The rulers in both tend to be tyrannical, corrupt, and hypocritical.

In his metaphysics, Plato says that the soul of virtuous people becomes lighter and goes toward heaven by moving upward after death and that of the non-virtuous, being heavier, it stays near the earth and is the cause of rebirth. On rebirth, people may be born in one of the nine kinds of families professing different faiths, religions, as well as in the different regions of the earth. Plato thus becomes one of the few ancient Western philosophers who gave a perfect philosophical theory on secularism and universal brotherhood which in the East Vedic rsis and munnies had already conveyed through Vedas.

In an ideal state, which he described as Republic, divine guidance is the maximum and in Tyranny it reaches its minimum and world dissolution (Vedic Pralaya) comes when that divine guidance is totally withdrawn. Like Vedic metaphysics Plato confirms that life in this vast turbulent ocean of matter- the material world is an illusion of comfort (Vedic Maya) and described the gross world as a phenomenal world. Plato held largely similar views like Vedic Rta (Laws of Nature) in his theory of Forms and Ideas. A few other glimpses of Vedic metaphysics can also be seen in Plato's writings relating to divinity in the noble vocations, social classes, education system extending up to 48 years, value system and need based living, absolute nature of right and wrong and many other concepts.

Like Vedas he mentioned worst thing about corruption is that it distorts the concept of knowledge. He must have learnt about the ideal philosopher king Janaka of Bhagavad-Gita assisted by Rishi Yajnavalkya and Rsika Gargi and developed the theory of



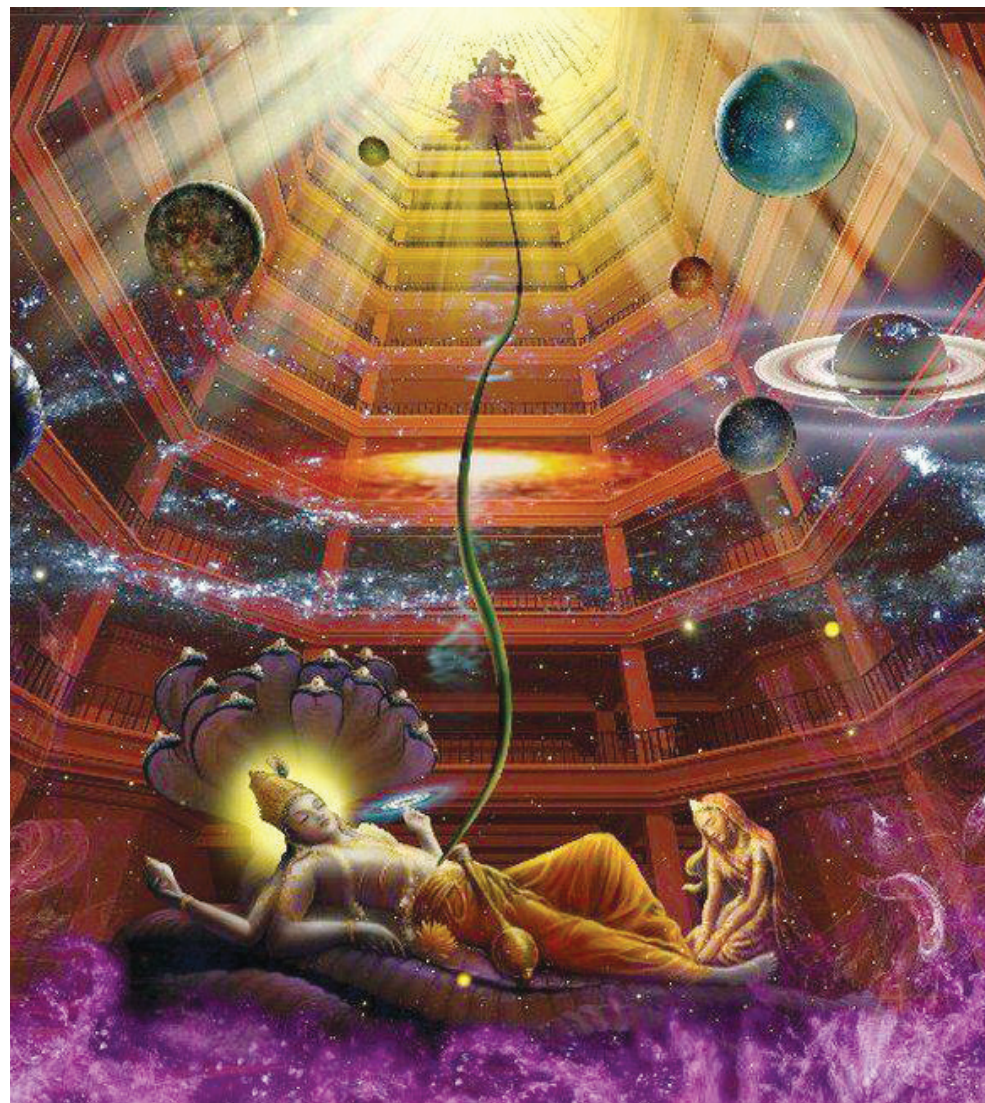
LET NOBLE THOUGHTS COME TO US FROM ALL SIDES. (RIG VEDA)

"philosopher kings" for his Republic. His concept of economics and global trade has great resemblance to Vedic economics and global trade.

While Plato propagated the Vedic concept of scientific temper, his disciple Aristotle spread the message of Physical Sciences of matter with unsuspected vitality due to entelchy, without referring to Vedas. Later many of these thoughts are found in the metaphysics of Saint Aquinas, Augustine, Immanuel Kant and many others including some scientists like Newton, Einstein etc.

Is it not surprising that seekers of Vedic knowledge can get PhD Degree in Vedas in USA- the bastion of secularism and a few other Western countries but not in secular India? Even the former Acting Chief Justice of Pakistan Supreme Court Mr. Mohd Ramde Khalilee when he met me about two years ago confirmed that he was a seeker of Vedic knowledge as it originated largely in the then North-West India now in Pakistan. Lately an e-mail has been sent to a large number of people by an American Christian "Mike" who has done PhD in Vedic metaphysics. The e-mail says if the world is to be saved from self-destruction follow Vedic eternal spiritual science - Sanatan Dharma. Somewhat similar thoughts earlier the great German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer had expressed about Upanishads about two hundred years ago.

Considering the great importance of Vedic metaphysics for the welfare of mankind and



Sanatan Dharma (Vedic eternal religion), after studying the metaphysical (Upanishadic) part of four Vedas, I have written the book "Glimpses of Vedic Metaphysics" as a commoner and for the common people who are seekers of Vedic knowledge. It is not a book on Vedic literature, history or language but contains Vedic guidelines, teachings and thoughts on material, spiritual and divine aspects of human life. The seekers of Vedic knowledge can read and even take print at no cost on website <http://www.sabhlokcity.com/metaphysics>. Also, the book can be accessed through

google.com, yahoo.com, lulu.com.

Kindly render divine noble service and forward this Website to other seekers of Vedic knowledge and strengthen Vedic eternal religion. Suggestions for any improvement in the book conforming strictly to Vedas are most welcome. Within my limitation of knowledge, I do try to update the book periodically.

It is high time we establish a University in India where through Vedic studies students could get post graduate and PhD degrees and they strengthen Vedic Sanatan Dharma (eternal religion) in India and abroad.

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'If Hindus don't maintain Hinduism, who shall save it? If India's own children don't cling to their faith, who shall guard it? Indian alone can save India, and India and Hinduism are one.'

THE IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY INSPECTIONS ON CONSTRUCTION SITES



By Neil Kalra

According to The National Safety Council falls, slips, trips, contact with objects or equipment, overexertion and

being struck by a falling object accounted for over 70,000 construction site injuries and 500 deaths in 2014 alone. While these tragedies cannot be undone, many of the injuries and deaths may have been preventable. Daily inspections of work sites by all workers and following protocol with safety equipment, materials and tools are integral to maintaining the safety of workers and the general public near construction sites.

Accidents happen as a result of rushing projects, short cuts, and lapses in safety such as strewn debris. On construction sites, debris and gear is constantly moving and can pose a threat if not appropriately accounted for and dealt with. Scattered debris like metal or wood fragments, sharp glass and other dangerous materials may cause workers to trip, fall and consequently injure themselves. Due to the unsanitary nature of these materials, a victim might also be susceptible to infection and disease. Untethered tools and personnel can also pose a danger. Falling



debris may pose as serious hazards to the general public, not just to construction workers.

Just ask John who was stopped at a light while driving his taxicab at 55th street and looking for a new passenger when a crowbar falling 32 stories landed directly on his windshield. Shocked and bruised he contacted the Kalra Law Firm seeking restitution for his damaged vehicle and injuries sustained by the falling object. When contractors cut corners to lower prices and quickly complete jobs, mistakes such as this can be dangerous

and costly to all parties involved.

Every worker on construction sites should be constantly on the lookout for dangers and hazards and report such breaches in the law immediately. Daily inspection is integral to maintaining safety on work sites. Inspection programs usually begin by concentrating on operations with the greatest potential for hazards and later extend to other conditions. Continuous inspections are to be conducted ad hoc by employees and management. Employees should always note and report hazards so that the employer can take corrective actions. If corrective actions are not taken, then there lies the possibility of serious repercussions.

Problems and injuries can arise when proper inspection protocols are not properly followed. If you or a family member has been injured due to negligence at a construction site, you may be entitled to full benefits and compensation. Know your rights and get the answers you deserve. Our attorneys are dedicated to getting victims of negligence the compensation they deserve through thorough investigations of all forms of evidence including inspections reports. Call the trusted New York City and Queens construction accident lawyers at Kalra Law Firm for a free initial consultation at (718) 897-2211. www.unionlawyer.com (Advertisorial)

FOOD WASTE: France's war on waste makes it most food sustainable country

Americans lead the world in food waste

Globally, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that one-third of all food grown is lost or wasted, an amount valued at nearly \$3 trillion

A war on waste food in France, where supermarkets are banned from throwing away unsold food and restaurants must provide doggy bags when asked, has helped it secure the top spot in a ranking of countries by their food sustainability.

Japan, Germany, Spain and Sweden rounded out the top five in an index published by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), which graded 34 nations based on food waste, environment-friendly agriculture and quality nutrition.

It is "unethical and immoral" to waste resources when hundreds of millions go hungry across the world, Vytenis Andriukaitis, EU Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, said at the launch of the Food Sustainability Index 2017 on Tuesday.

"We are all responsible, every person and every country," he said in the Italian city of Milan, according to a statement.

One third of all food produced worldwide, 1.3 billion tons per year, is wasted, according to the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization.

Food releases planet-warming gases as it decomposes in landfills. The food the world wastes accounts for more greenhouse gas emissions than any country except for China and the United States. "What is really important is the vision and importance of (food sustainability) in these governments' agendas and policies," Irene Mia, global editorial director at the EIU, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"It's something that is moving up in governments' agendas across the world." Global hunger levels rose for the first time in more than a decade, last year, with 815 million people, more than one in 10 on the planet, going hungry.

France was the first country to introduce specific food waste legislation and loses only 1.8 percent of its total food production each year. It plans to cut this in half by 2025.

"France has taken some important and welcome steps forward including forcing supermarkets to stop throwing away perfectly edible food," said Meadhbh Bolger, a campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe.

"This needs to be matched at the European level with a EU-wide binding food waste reduction target."

High-income countries performed better in the index, but the United States lagged in 21st place, dragged down by poor management of soil and fertilizer in agriculture, and excess consumption of meat, sugar and saturated fats, the study said.

The United Arab Emirates, despite having the highest income per head of the 34 countries, was ranked last, reflecting high food waste of almost 1,000 kilos per person per year, rising obesity and

an agriculture sector dependent on depleting water resources, it said.

Americans Lead the World in Food Waste: Americans waste an unfathomable amount of food. In fact, according to a July 2016 Guardian report roughly 50 percent of all produce in the United States is thrown away—some 60 million tons (or \$160 billion) worth of produce annually, an amount constituting "one third of all foodstuffs." Wasted food is also the single biggest occupant in American landfills, the Environmental Protection Agency has found.

What causes this? A major reason is that food is cheaper in the United States than nearly anywhere else in the world, aided (controversially) by subsidies to corn, wheat, milk, and soybeans. But the great American squandering of produce appears to be a cultural dynamic as well, enabled in large part by a national obsession with the aesthetic quality of food. Fruits and vegetables, in addition to generally being healthful, have a tendency to bruise, brown, wilt, oxidize, ding, or discolor and that is apparently something American shoppers will not abide. For an American family of four, the average value of discarded produce is nearly \$1,600 annually. (Globally, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that one-third of all food grown is lost or wasted, an amount valued at nearly \$3 trillion.)

Writing about food waste for The Atlantic back in 2014, Elizabeth Segran gestured at both the shoppers who refuse to buy imperfect-looking fruit as well as the grocers who refuse to stock the shelves with any wonky-looking wares. "Grocery stores routinely trash produce for being the wrong shape or containing minor blemishes," Doug Rauch, the former president of the Trader Joe's Company, told her.

But that assumes such produce even reaches the stores. Quoting workers and experts at a variety of vantage points in the food system, The Guardian's Suzanne Goldenberg also reports that, "Vast quantities of fresh produce grown in the U.S. are left in the field to rot, fed to livestock or hauled directly from the field to landfill, because of unrealistic and unyielding cosmetic standards." "In my mind, the desire for perfect produce came about in the 1940s as housewives adapted to widespread refrigeration and new CPG [consumer packaged goods] products," Eve Turow Paul, the author of *A Taste of Generation Yum*, writes in an email. "Suddenly, you could get a pineapple in Chicago in January. Wonderbread hit shelves a decade before. Perfection and manicured foods came to represent safety and new technology."

It's easy to see how this obsession might become amplified in an era of high foodie-ism and Instagram where a sort of heirloom airbrushing has taken hold. Writing in The Times in 2014, Pete Wells christened the extension of this phenomenon in restaurants as "camera cuisine," where dishes are tailored for the



patron as well as a "global club whose members, checking out their phones or laptops, constitute an invisible gallery in the dining room."

Wells relays a story of being "shutter-shamed" after posting a picture of trout that did not meet a certain communal artistic benchmark. The retail version of this experience might be a farmer's market where a bunch of ramps or sheaths of leeks would be shunted aside if they couldn't pass muster on a Nancy Meyers set.

Paul pushes back against the idea that the anointed few seated at the head of the table might be oblivious to the cause of food waste. "Especially in the last year, 'foodies' and chefs have catapulted the issue of food waste into popular conversations," she adds, naming initiatives by chefs and public intellectuals such as Dan Barber and Roy Choi as well as the pu pu platter of coverage of the issue in elite food magazines.

Last year, the Obama administration announced a public-private campaign to halve the more than two million calories that Americans waste annually by the year 2030 by focusing on improving food efficiency, recycling, decoding food labels, and finding ways to deliver food to the one-in-six Americans that are hungry. Meanwhile, start-ups like the Bay Area's Imperfect Produce are starting to deliver ugly but otherwise consumable goods at a discount. Elsewhere in the world, the tinkering between policy and public education is underway. France has banned supermarkets from throwing away food by directing them to compost or donate all expiring or unsold food. Germany is focusing on the issue in part by reforming expiration dates, which many argue are arbitrary and problematic.

The United States still may have the farthest to go, particularly on a cultural level. "My hope is that as food education proliferates, so will an appreciation for ugly fruits and veggies, biodiversity, local crops, and so much more, all of which can help mitigate food waste," Paul adds. "Wouldn't it be neat if the power of Instagram was used to share recipes for carrot top pesto and food scrap stock? Or if we had easy-to-use apps for sharing extra produce with neighbors or food pantries? Both ideas I've already seen foodies fiddling with." (Sources: *Atlantic / World Economic Forum/Ruairi Casey-Freelance Journalist*)

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contd from Page 1

UN General Assembly rejects...

Palestine position was independent and consistent.

The countries that joined the US in voting against the resolution were Honduras, Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau and Togo. Among major nations who abstained voting were Australia, Bhutan, Canada, Columbia, Hungry, Mexico, Panama, the Philippines, Poland and Uganda.

Israel rejected as "preposterous" the vote by 127 countries, including India, at the UNGA that opposed Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israeli capital.

2022 Commonwealth Games...

Games citing financial reasons, the Commonwealth Games Federation on Thursday, December 21, chose Birmingham in England as the new venue.

Now the multi-sports mega event that features member nations of erstwhile British empire will return to Great Britain after a gap of eight years. Before Glasgow (2014), Manchester played host to the 2002 Commonwealth Games.

The next edition of the Games will be hosted by Gold Coast, Australia, in April next year. (With input from Prabhjot Singh)

Congress votes to avert...

The Senate quickly followed suit, passing the bill on a 66-32 vote.

Congress was forced to act because the government was scheduled to run out of money at midnight Friday, raising the possibility of a partial shutdown heading into Christmas. Temporary funding is needed because Congress has been unable to agree on long-term government spending levels since the 2017 fiscal year ended last September. Instead, the government has been operating on a series of short-term extensions of last year's budget.

The measure approved Thursday, December 21, keeps the government operating for a few more weeks but puts off until next year a number of tough decisions, including the reinstatement of government subsidies for health insurers providing coverage to low-income clients and protections for young Americans brought into the United States illegally by their parents.

Indian American Sonya Jain, founder and CEO eGlobalTech passes away battling cancer

VIRGINIA (TIP): Sonya Jain, the Indian American founder and CEO of Virginia-based technology and cybersecurity consulting firm eGlobalTech, died on Sunday Dec. 17, at the age of 54 after battling cancer.

Jain, who was born in India, completed her graduation from Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi and later pursued masters from Isenberg School of Management, Massachusetts, in the 1980s.

Jain's first job was as an engineer and later she worked for the government of Michigan, building a specialized software system for the state.

She joined Booz Allen Hamilton in 1992 as an associate and continued to work there until 2004 when she decided to become an entrepreneur and started eGlobalTech.

eGlobalTech is a management consulting company offering strategy and business services. It has alliances with HIT Venture, Clinton Rubin LLC, IBM, Ernst & Young, UCSA International, Microsoft,



Sonya Jain, an IITian, worked for the state of Michigan and Booz Allen before becoming an entrepreneur.

CSC, Dewberry, Dell Perot Systems, Nortec, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, HMS, ARX, Pitney Bowes, Torres, and Definite Logic.

"Sonya was a truly remarkable person," Branko Primetica, the CSO of eGlobalTech, told Washington BizJournals. Primetica was one of the two employees Jain hired in 2004. He dropped out of business school to help launch the start-up.

Jain was an inspiration for young entrepreneurs as she started a company from scratches without the guidance of a mentor and advised the youth not to fear about failure, he said.

"She was constantly energetic, always wanting to be in touch with customers. She loved life to the fullest," Primetica added.

Jain is survived by her husband, Sanjiv Jain, and two daughters. Jain said in a number of interviews that she gained inspiration to become an entrepreneur from Indira Gandhi, who was the Prime Minister of India and her teenage fascination.

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Pondicherry will bowl you over with its cobbled lanes, blue waters and the sheer abundance of natural beauty. There is an interesting range of places to visit, including ancient temples and churches, an experimental town (Auroville), a number of museums, renowned spiritual centres and some gorgeous beaches. While Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville lure spirituality-seekers from all over the world, Pondicherry is a great choice for anyone eager for a solitary getaway.

AUROVILLE BEACH

Tucked inside the neighbouring township of Auroville, this beach is the perfect spot for quiet introspection. A 30-minute-drive from Pondicherry, it has all the tranquillity in the world you can ask for. There are no restaurants, shops, changing rooms or parking space—but you will find clear blue water and breathtaking sunsets and sunrises. Located near the Auroville bus stop on the East Coast Road, it is mostly frequented by locals and fishermen. Due to the large waves, swimming on the beach can be a bit of a challenge. Auroville beach, popularly referred to as Auro beach, is close to Auroville, a popular Pondicherry sightseeing destination.

It is situated at the right side of the ECR, opposite to the road leading to Auroville. Located about 12 kms from the main Pondicherry town, its shallow waters and small waves make it an ideal place for swimming. As the beach's slope is gentle, swimming is one of the best things to do at the Auroville beach for expert as well as novice swimmers. The shingle and shells in different colors get deposited here, making the beach all the more beautiful. It is a fairly popular destination and on weekends it can get rather crowded, whereas on weekdays it is relatively less so. Visited by locals as well as tourists in huge numbers, it is one of the most popular beaches in Pondicherry.

Auroville beach has golden coloured soft black volcanic sand. Whether it is swimming in the sea, playing on the shore or just taking a lazy stroll; indulge in your desire on clean sands and cool waters. The beach is also used by surfers - both beginners and professionals - to hone their skills. You can spot them early in the mornings. The long stretch of beach has many points of entry and exit. Hotels, guest houses and shacks are present along the shore to offer you comfortable accommodation during your vacation.

SERENITY BEACH

Located around 10 km away from Pondicherry, Serenity Beach is the right place to get your fill of the sun, sand and surf. While the picturesque beach is graced by white sand bordered by palm trees, the surrounding blue waters are a surfing hotspot. Thanks to a surf break, the beach's waves attract both beginners and professionals. Run by two Spaniards, the neighborhood's Kallialay Surf School conducts group and private surfing lessons at various levels. If you're hooked by the idea of surfing in the Bay of Bengal, there are several sea-facing home stays and boutique hotels situated in the vicinity.

PROMENADE BEACH

Situated in the heart of Pondicherry, this is rock-lined seashore is better suited for walking. It is adjacent to the Goubert Avenue, the main historical promenade of the city, which is lined with beautiful colonial buildings. The best way to take in the views is by walking down the entire 1.5 km-long stretch, stopping to admire the statue of Marquis Duplex situated at one end, the Mahatma Gandhi statue in the middle, as well as the First World War Memorial. During the evenings, the beach comes alive with street food stalls, ice cream carts and balloon sellers, as well as locals taking their evening walk. Remember to have a cup of coffee at the sea-facing Le Café during your stroll.

PONDICHERRY: THE FRENCH CONNECTION



BASILICA OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

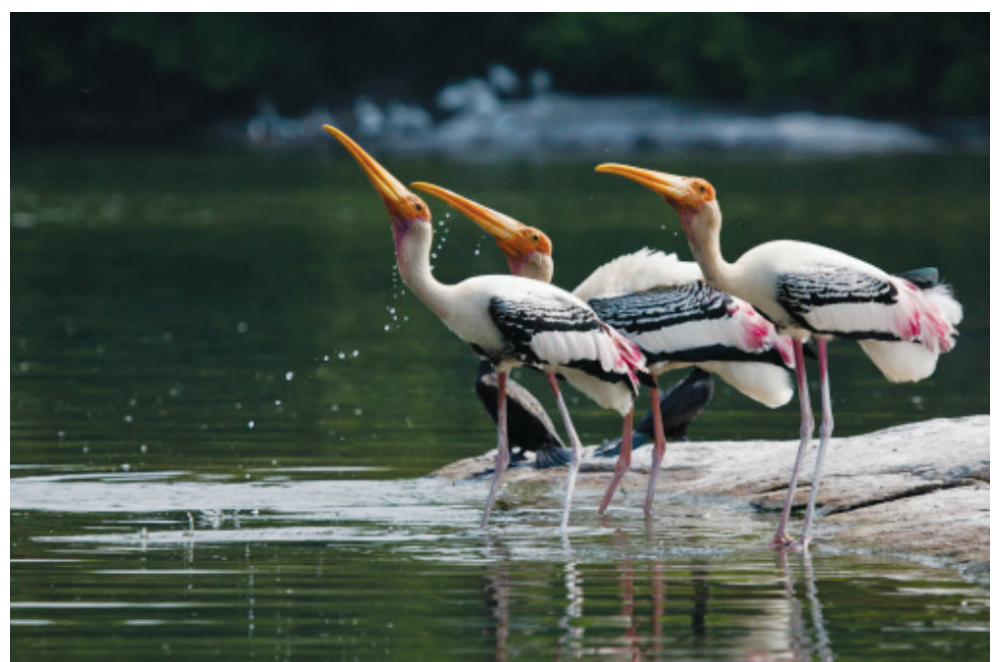
This church is one of the best examples of Gothic architecture in India. A revered pilgrimage spot, it is quite famous for its brilliant stained glass panels depicting incidents from Christ's life. A century-old structure, it is house to 28 glass pictures of saints who were related to the church. With its insides lit by huge chandeliers and flood lights, it is a sight to behold. An interesting place to visit for anyone interested in architecture or religion, it is open to tourists for Sunday mass as well.

OUSTERI WETLAND

Ousteri Wetland lies at some 10 km from the town's centre and is one of the lesser known attractions in the region. An interesting place to visit for nature lovers, this wetland boasts of a fascinating variety of marine life and is also a bird sanctuary. Pack in a pair of binoculars for hours of bird spotting; migratory birds including golden oriole, painted stork, spotted owlets and tailorbirds can often be spotted here. You will be in for a treat at Ousteri Lake for its shore is abundant with a variety of crabs. A great place for all the photographers and nature enthusiasts out there!

AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Aurobindo Ashram is the main spiritual hub of Pondicherry, attracting lakhs of visitors around the year. It came into being after Sri Aurobindo, a philosopher, yogi and poet, attained enlightenment and retired from public life with a group of his followers. It houses two shrines that have the remains of Sri Aurobindo and his spiritual partner, Mirra Alfassa, also referred to as the Mother. You can join one of the daily tours of the ashram organised by the ashram members to know more about the life and work of Sri Aurobindo. Visitors can also participate in group meditation sessions (all days except Thursday, Saturday and Sunday). The ashram also has a number of rooms for visitors, these need to be booked beforehand. *Source: HappyTrips*



INDIA BEAT SRI LANKA BY 93 RUNS IN FIRST T20

CUTTACK (TIP): India defeated Sri Lanka by a massive 93 runs in the first T20 International, here on December 20. Sri Lanka were bowled out for 87 runs with Yuzvendra Chahal picking four wickets.

Earlier, opener KL Rahul's classy 61 and some sensible batting from Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Manish Pandey powered India to a challenging 180 for three.

In absence of the first-choice opener Shikhar Dhawan, Rahul grabbed the opportunity with both hands hitting seven fours and one six en route to a 48-balls 61 after they were put in by Sri Lanka skipper Thisara Perera.

Rahul and number three Shreyas Iyer (24) put together 63 runs from 46 balls as India looked to push for a 200 on a two-paced Barabati wicket before Sri Lanka bounced back dismissing the duo in 11 balls.

But former skipper Dhoni, who was promoted to number four, smashed an unbeaten 22-ball 39 and finished with a huge six over square leg.

Manish Pandey provided fine support to Dhoni with an unbeaten 32 from 18 balls as the duo added an unbeaten 68 runs from 34 balls to prop up the total.

Rahul paced his innings brilliantly and also successfully reviewed to overturn an LBW decision when he was on 23.

Sri Lanka looked to attack through Mathews and brought him back in the ninth over to break the partnership.

Stepping out against Mathews, Rahul was hit awkwardly in the abdominal region when on 37 as he had to be attended to by the physio.

But he braved the pain and took on the Lankan former skipper and in the next ball dispatched Mathews over square leg with a crunching pull and completed his second T20 half-century in 34 balls.

There was no looking back for India but Sri Lanka slowed down the run-rate, removing Iyer and Rahul in space of 11 balls.



KL Rahul hit a classy half-century as India continued their domination over Sri Lanka to register a massive 93-run win, their biggest victory in T20 Internationals Cuttack

Iyer edged one behind the stumps and Rahul was deceived by a slower one by skipper Perera.

Dhoni came in at four to a rousing reception by a capacity crowd of 43,000 and he did not disappoint as India added 66 runs in the last five overs without losing a wicket.

Four off eight balls, Rahul decided to break free with an inside out lofted shot against Chameera en route to his boundary in the

third over. 11 runs came from Danajaya's next over with boundary each by Rahul and Sharma as India were going strong for 38 for no loss from 29 balls when Mathews gave the first breakthrough dismissing the Indian skipper.

Looking to clear the midwicket, Sharma mistimed and a brilliant forward diving catch by Chameera ended his innings for 17, but not before he became the second Indian to reach

1500 T20 runs after Virat Kohli. Sharma got to the milestone when he was on 15.

Brief Scores

India: 180 for three in 20 overs (KL Rahul 61, Mahendra Singh Dhoni 39 not out, Manish Pandey 31 not out; Angelo Mathews 1/19).

Sri Lanka: 87 all out in 16 overs (Upul Tharanga 23; Yuzvendra Chahal 4/23, Hardik Pandya 3/29).
Source: PTI

MITHALI, BISHT, HARMANPREET IN ICC TEAMS OF THE YEAR

DUBAI (TIP): India captain Mithali Raj was named in the ICC Women's ODI Team of the Year while left-arm spinner Ekta Bisht was the lone cricketer to find a place in both the ODI and T20 teams of the year announced by the world body. Besides the duo, Moga girl Harmanpreet Kaur has found a place in the ICC Women's T20I Team of the Year. ICC announced the women's ODI and T20I teams of the year with England's Heather Knight named as the captain of the 50-overs side and Stafanie Taylor of West Indies appointed skipper of the 20-overs side. The teams were selected taking into consideration players' performances from September 21, 2016 to date.

Bisht, 31, from Uttarakhand is ranked 14th in the ODIs and 12th in the T20Is. She took 34 wickets in 19 matches and 11 wickets in 7 T20Is in the period under consideration.

ODI Team of the Year: Tammy Beaumont (Eng), Meg Lanning (Aus), Mithali Raj (Ind), Amy Satterthwaite (NZ), Ellyse Perry (Aus), Heather Knight (captain) (Eng), Sarah Taylor (wk) (Eng), Dane van Niekerk (SA), Marizanne Kapp (SA), Ekta Bisht (Ind), Alex Hartley (Eng).

T20I Team of the Year: Beth Mooney (wk) (Aus), Danni Wyatt (Eng), Harmanpreet Kaur (Ind), Stafanie Taylor (captain) (WI), Sophie Devine (NZ), Deandra Dottin (WI), Hayley Matthews (WI), Megan Schutt (Aus), Amanda-Jade Wellington (Aus), Lea Tahuhu (NZ), Ekta Bisht (Ind).
Source: PTI



Harmanpreet Kaur (left) was named in ICC Women's T20I Team of the Year, while Mithali Raj (right) was named in the ICC Women's Team of the Year 2017, Ekta Bisht (centre) emerged as the only Indian cricketer to feature in both the sides.

Vijender confident of ending 2017 on high

JAIPUR (TIP): Ace Indian boxer Vijender Singh on Wednesday exuded confidence of ending the year on a high note as he takes on African champion Ernest Amuzu of Ghana at the Sawai Man Singh Indoor Stadium here on Saturday.

The 32-year-old Indian, who is WBO Oriental Super Middleweight and WBO Asia Pacific champions, laughed at his opponent's recent statement that he would leave the crowd favourite "beaten and broken" in the upcoming bout.

"Perhaps Amuzu has not goggled about me otherwise he would not have dared to talk like that about me. Only time will tell who is going to thrash whom," said Vijender, who holds a 9-0 professional record. "I can't predict how long would the fight last but I can assure you that the first round of the bout would set the tone. I am an experienced boxer and I know what and how to do. I have undergone rigorous training sessions for almost two months. I am fully prepared physically and mentally to defend my titles and want to end my year on a winning note in front of my own countrymen," he added.

Vijender also said he has serious doubts about how his opponent will last before him on Saturday.

"Undoubtedly Amuzu is an experienced boxer and capable of giving me a few new tests. He has done more rounds than me and fought in title fights but he will have to compete with my power. I don't think he would be standing there for too long," he said.
Source: PTI

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