

Indian government introduces law to impound properties of Fugitive Economic Offenders



The fugitive Diamond merchant Nirav Modi in his New York Store on Madison Avenue. File photo

NEW DELHI (TIP): Stung by a spate of cases of financial plundering of Indian Financial institutions by unscrupulous people like Vijay Mallya and more recently, Nirav Modi, government of India has decided to tighten noose around fugitive economic offenders. The Cabinet on Thursday, March 1,

approved the Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill that provides for confiscating all assets of absconding fraudsters and loan defaulters to recover dues.

contd on Page 20

President's longest-serving and closest aide Hope Hicks quits as WH communications chief



Hope Hicks has resigned as White House communications director in view of a Trump's reported rebuke for her testimony before the House Intelligence Committee

WASHINGTON (TIP): Hope Hicks, one of Donald Trump's longest-serving and trusted aides, on March 1, announced her resignation as the powerful communications director, in a major blow to the US President and the embattled White House amidst the intensifying inquiry into alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 election.

contd on Page 5

Trump calls for a comprehensive approach to Gun Laws

Republicans and Democrats alike taken by surprise



WASHINGTON (TIP): President Donald Trump called for speedy and substantial changes to the nation's gun laws, criticizing lawmakers in a White House meeting for being too fearful of the National Rifle Association to take action.

In a freewheeling, televised session on Wednesday, February 28, that stretched for an hour, Trump rejected both his party's incremental approach and its legislative

contd on Page 20

President Donald Trump (right) speaking to lawmakers on having a comprehensive law addressing gun violence in schools, at the White House on February 28, 2018

Photo / courtesy CNN

23rd Olympic Winter Games at PyeongChang end on a bright note, as Norway heads tally with a record number of medals

Ivanka Trump was cynosure of all eyes at the closing ceremony



Norway's gold medalists Ingvild Flugstad Oestberg, Astrid Uhrenholdt Jacobsen, Ragnhild Haga and Marit Bjeorgen pose on the podium after the cross-country women's 4x5km relay at the PyeongChang. Photo / Courtesy CNN

BY PRABHJOT SINGH IN PYEONGCHANG

PYEONGCHANG, SOUTH KOREA (TIP): The curtains were finally rung down on the 23rd Olympic Winter Games at PyeongChang on Sunday, February 25, after a glittering and impressive ceremony that saw athletes from all participating nations dancing their hearts out to the beats of music. The Olympic flag was ceremoniously handed over to Mayor of Beijing for holding the 2022 Olympic Winter Games there. After Sochi (2014), Olympic Winter Games continue to be confined to Eurasia. Not only that, next summer Olympic Games will also be in Asia, in Tokyo, Japan, in 2020.

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QUEEN OF SILVER SCREEN SRIDEVI CREMATED WITH STATE HONORS



Thousands of grieving fans gathered in Mumbai on Wednesday, February 28 to pay respects to Sridevi, the iconic Bollywood actress who drowned accidentally in a Dubai hotel bathtub on February 24. Photo courtesy Hindustan Times

MUMBAI (TIP): Bollywood diva Sridevi was on February 28 cremated with full state honors, mourned by millions of fans, at the Vile Parle crematorium. Sridevi's filmmaker husband Boney Kapoor performed the last rites at the ceremony. contd on Page 20

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Indian American Dr. Hiral Tipirneni wins Democratic Primary Election for the 8th Congressional District of Arizona



Dr. Hiral Tipirneni is considered to be the strongest nominee the Democrats have fielded in years

ARIZONA (TIP): Indian American Dr. Hiral Tipirneni has won the special Democratic primary election for the 8th Congressional District of Arizona, defeating her only rival Brianna Westbrook. Tipirneni will face Debbie Lesko, who won the Republican primary by beating 11 candidates, in the April 24 special general election.

The seat became vacant after GOP incumbent Rep. Trent Franks resigned following a sexual misconduct allegation. He represented the 8th district for 14 years before resigning on December 8, 2017.

"I think we won because our message was really connecting with voters, resonating," Tipirneni told The Arizona Republic after the Associated Press called the race in her favor. "I think they are looking for someone who brings something like my skill set to the table, somebody who is ready to work with people from all backgrounds and really focus on solving the problems at hand."

Tipirneni, an emergency room physician by profession, gives the Democrats a ray of hope in the Congressional District which has been a stronghold of the Republicans for a long time.

While the Democratic primary was essentially a two-candidate race, on the Republican side there were a dozen candidates.

Tipirneni is considered to be the strongest nominee the Democrats have fielded in years. Franks did not have a Democratic challenger in the last two election cycles.

Tipirneni runs on the issues of affordable healthcare, strengthening the economy, retirement security, quality education, and government accountability. She also endorses "an accountable immigration system providing a clear, affordable path to citizenship for those who qualify and have earned it."

She officially announced her candidacy on July 19, months before the staunch conservative Franks was practically pushed out of Congress by the House leadership following revelations that he had asked two female congressional staffers to bear his children as surrogate mothers.

The Indian American said she is running because she wanted to take on special interests in Washington. "I believe in solving problems and improving lives, which is all about people, not partisanship," Tipirneni said while announcing her candidacy. "That's what I did in the emergency room, and I'm running for Congress to do the same."

Tipirneni came to America from India with her family at the age of three. According to her campaign website, she earned her medical degree through an accelerated, competitive program at Northeast Ohio Medical University. Hiral chose to pursue emergency medicine because of the wide variety of challenges it presented, and it allowed her to be the first point of contact for patients. She has served the Phoenix area for more than 20 years as an emergency room physician, cancer research advocate and, most recently, on the board of directors of the Maricopa Health Foundation, which supports the county's public health care delivery system.

Indian Origin female CEO joins Commonwealth Enterprise & Investment Council Advisory Board

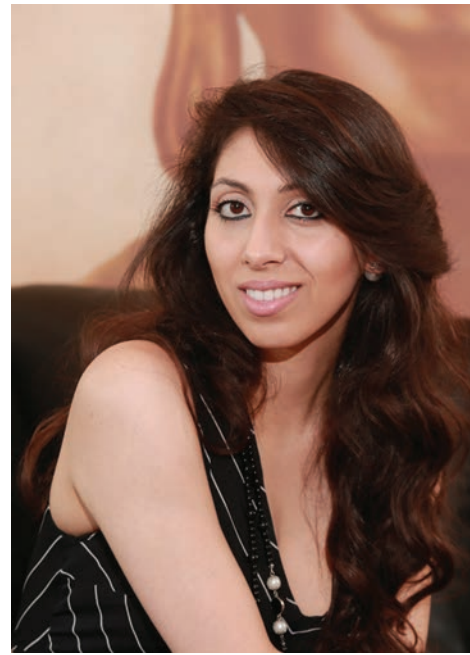
CWEIC is organiser of Commonwealth Business Forum, April 2018, London

LONDON (TIP): Award winning London-based global strategist, director and CEO Natasha Mudhar has officially been appointed to the Advisory Board for Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council (CWEIC), an organisation facilitating trade and investment throughout the 53 states of the Commonwealth and supporting private sector companies and governments to promote economic activity.

India is the Commonwealth's most populous member and has been a key member since Independence in 1947. As the world's largest democracy, India plays an increasingly important role on the world stage and is set to play a key role in the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), taking place in London for the first time in 20 years.

The CWEIC will run the Commonwealth Business Forum, to be held on 16th-18th April in London. The event forms a unique platform for dialogue, bringing together a range of industries and economies and will be organised alongside CHOGM. With the government supporting enterprise and business in the country, Indian business will also be an essential part of the Commonwealth Business Forum.

With offices in India and UK, Natasha is also the CEO & MD of the awarding multi-



Natasha Mudhar is an award-winning London based strategist

disciplinary, international business and communications consultancy Sterling Media, which has also announced a partnership with the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council, as the official global

communications partner for on-going activities.

Sterling and Natasha are renowned for its work in being the first international communications consultancy to take Bollywood global. Some of the hero campaigns she has spearheaded include Pad Man, Toilet Ek Prem Katha, Dangal, the IIFAs in the UK to name but a few.

Natasha is also the India Director of the UN's Global Goals campaign, launched by filmmaker Richard Curtis to popularise the Sustainable Development Goals globally to end poverty, reduce inequalities and tackle climate change. She was also part of the team to launch one of India's largest public health campaigns to eliminate filaria in India by 2020.

The Commonwealth announcement is the latest addition to a long-standing commitment of Natasha to work on some of the most relevant campaigns. Whether it's taking Bollywood global, be breaking the Internet with over 100 million views for the explosive release of the remake of Spice Girls Wannabe video for the UN's Global Goals to empower females or lobbying governments to end world hunger to launching iconic British brands internationally, Natasha is recognised across continents as a global campaign expert and entrepreneur in her sectors.

Indian American Judge Ravi "R.K." Sandill is running for the Supreme Court of Texas



Sandill is the first Asian American to run for the position in Texas.

a population of more than 4.5 million.

"I am running for the Supreme Court of Texas, Place 4, to restore an independent voice to our state's highest judicial body and to focus on the rule of law, rather than a fringe ideological agenda," Sandill said on his campaign website.

"The Texas Constitution tells us that all political power is inherent in the people. Yet, the Supreme Court of Texas is increasingly out of touch with the needs of everyday Texans," said Sandill.

Established in 1840, the Supreme Court of Texas comprises a Chief Justice and eight Associate Justices. Each judge is elected for a term of five years which is renewable. If elected, Sandill would replace John P. Devine, 59, of Harris County, who has been holding the position since 2013. Sandill is the son of immigrant parents from India. According to his campaign website, his father, Retired Lt. Col. Brij Sandill, served in the U.S. Army and the U.S. Air Force for a combined 28 years.

Following high school in England, Ravi Sandill attended the University of Texas at Austin, where he obtained a degree in government and served as a summer intern for President Bill Clinton's Council of Economic Advisors. Sandill went on to earn his law degree from the University of Houston Law Center, where he was an active participant in the law school's moot court team and an editor on the Houston Journal of International Law.

Sandill first ran for judge in 2008, when he prevailed over a 28-year incumbent to become a judge of the 127th.

Read full story on www.theindianpanorama.news

Indian American Veena Sud launches crime miniseries 'Seven Seconds' on Netflix

NEW YORK (TIP) : Indian American script writer and filmmaker Veena Sud launched her Netflix miniseries Seven Seconds on February 23rd. It is a 10-episode investigative drama series based on the accidental death of a black teen in the days after Ferguson.

Sud, who was born to Indian parents in Toronto and moved to Ohio at the age of two, is better recognized as the director of the American version of The Killing, which was first aired on AMC and later on Netflix.

Seven Seconds is a crime drama series that unveils, through investigation, an accident involving a black teen and a white police officer who was rushing to the hospital with his pregnant wife. The hit and run case is covered up in the aftermath of violent protests that ensued the shooting of an African American in Ferguson.

Sud is touching on a highly contentious subject and her life as the daughter of Indian parents will help her in narrating the story in an unbiased manner. According to Sud, the plot of the movie flashed in her mind in the spring of 2015 after a series of shooting events involving black Americans and white police officers. It is a forethought about what can happen if another black man or teen gets killed by a police officer. In 2014 and 2015, America witnessed the murder of Michael Brown, Freddie Gray and Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old kid, all African Americans, in the hands of white police officers. According to Sud, the protests and the anger made her write the series.

"So, I wanted to examine race and violence in America, especially as a person of color myself, but I also wanted to look at it in a different way," she said. "I picked the car accident very specifically ... it is not a hair trigger decision about pulling the trigger; it's making a decision over the course of those seven seconds to leave a child in the snow." Read full story on www.theindianpanorama.news



Seven Seconds on Netflix

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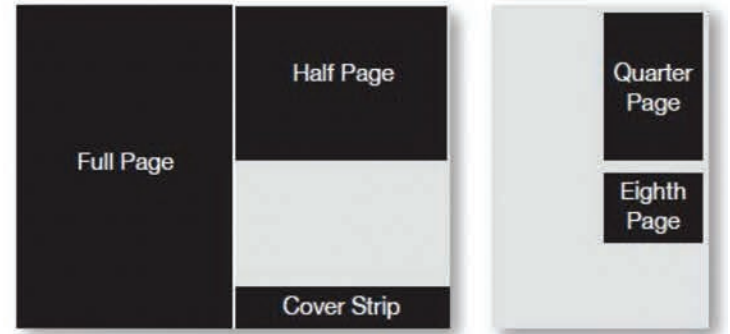


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The Indian Panorama is a South-Asian English newspaper with print editions in New York City, the Tristate area and now also as the first English Asian Newspaper from Dallas, printed weekly every Friday.

Walmart raises to 21 minimum age to buy firearms, ammo



NEW YORK (TIP): US retail giant Walmart announced on Thursday, March 1 that it was raising to 21 its minimum age to buy firearms and ammunition, the latest US company to recalibrate its stance on weapons after a deadly Florida school shooting.

"In light of recent events, we've taken an opportunity to review our policy on firearm sales. Going forward, we are raising the age restriction for purchase of firearms and ammunition to 21 years of age," it said in a statement.

"We will update our processes as quickly as possible to implement this change." The retailer said it was also removing from its website items "resembling assault-style rifles, including nonlethal airsoft guns and toys" but that it would continue to serve "sportsmen and hunters" in a "responsible way." Walmart said it does not sell bump stocks or high-capacity magazines and in 2015 stopped selling the AR-15 -- the type of gun used by 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz in Parkland, Florida.

The company also said it goes "beyond federal law by requiring customers to pass a background check before purchasing any firearm." "The law would allow the sale of a firearm if no response to a background check request has been received within three business days, but our policy prohibits the sale until an approval is given," it added.

On Wednesday, Dick's Sporting Goods, one of the country's top sporting goods retailers, also announced it would bar gun sales to any customers under 21 years old and that it would stop selling assault-style rifles.

The US gun industry is suffering a growing corporate backlash in the wake of the February 14 tragedy, with companies cutting ties with the National Rifle Association gun lobbyists that pressure US politicians to prevent any move to restrict gun ownership.

(Source: AFP)

Major storm to bring feet of snow to California mountains

SAN FRANCISCO (TIP): Motorists were warned to stay off Northern California mountain roads as a major winter storm was expected to bring heavy snowfall, powerful winds and torrential rains at lower elevations March 1. Meanwhile predictions of widespread showers across the southern end of the state raised concern about flash flooding near wildfire burn scars later in the week. A blizzard warning was issued for parts of the Sierra Nevada, where winds could gust up to 125 mph (200 kph) on the ridges and 40 to 60 mph (65 kph to 95 kph) in some valleys, the National Weather Service said. The blizzard would help the snowpack, which is vital to the state's water supply and is only about a quarter its normal size for this time of winter. "Totals will be measured in feet and mountain travel will become dangerous," the National Weather Service tweeted. "Travel is highly discouraged." (AP)

Iowa Senate & House kicked off their sessions with Hindu prayers on Feb 26

DES MOINES (TIP): On February 26, both Iowa State Senate and House of Representatives in Des Moines started their respective sessions with Hindu prayers, containing verses from world's oldest existing scripture.

Distinguished Hindu statesman Rajan Zed delivered the invocations from ancient Sanskrit scriptures before the Senate and House. After Sanskrit delivery, he then read the English interpretation of the prayers. Sanskrit is considered a sacred language in Hinduism and root language of Indo-European languages.

Zed, who is the President of Universal Society of Hinduism, recited from Rig-Veda, the oldest scripture of the world still in common use; besides lines from Upanishads and Bhagavad-Gita (Song of the Lord), both ancient Hindu scriptures. He started and ended the prayers with "Om", the mystical syllable containing the universe, which in Hinduism is used to introduce and conclude religious work.

Wearing saffron colored attire, a ruddraksh mala (rosary), and traditional sandalpaste tilak (religious mark) on the forehead; Rajan Zed sprinkled few drops of water from river Ganga of India, considered holy by Hindus, in the Senate before the prayer; where Senate President Jack Whitver introduced him. Senate adjusted its start time by few minutes so that Zed could pray in both House and Senate.

Reciting from Brahadaranyakopanishad, Zed said "Asato ma sad gamaya, Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, Mrtyor mamrtam gamaya", which he then interpreted as "Lead us from the unreal to the real, Lead us from darkness to light, and Lead us from death to



Rajan Zed delivering the invocations from ancient Sanskrit scriptures before Iowa State House of Representatives, Feb 26

immortality." Reciting from Bhagavad-Gita, he urged Senators and Representatives to keep the welfare of others always in mind.

Rajan Zed is a global Hindu and interfaith leader, who besides taking up the cause of religion worldwide, has also raised huge voice against the apartheid faced by about 15-million Roma (Gypsies) in Europe. Bestowed with World Interfaith Leader Award; Zed is Senior Fellow and Religious Advisor to Foundation for Religious Diplomacy, Spiritual Advisor to National Association of Interchurch & Interfaith Families, on the Advisory Board of The Interfaith Peace Project, etc. He has been panelist for "On Faith", a prestigious interactive conversation on religion produced by The Washington Post; and leads a weekly interfaith panel "Faith Forum" in a Gannett publication for over

seven years.

Hinduism, oldest and third largest religion of the world, has about 1.1 billion adherents and moksh (liberation) is its ultimate goal. There are about three million Hindus in USA.

Linda L. Upmeyer is Speaker of Iowa House of Representatives, which has 100 members; while Iowa Senate has 50 members. Iowa, also known as Hawkeye State and whose flag states "Our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain", is said to one of the safest states to live. Bordered by Mississippi, Missouri and Big Sioux rivers; its top exports include corn, tractors and soybeans. US President Herbert Hoover, actor John Wayne, Nobel laureate Norman Borlaug, football player Kurt Warner and Olympian artistic gymnast Shawn Johnson-all hail from Iowa. Kim Reynolds is the Governor.

Maha Shivaratri celebrated at Hari Om Mandir with chants and prayers

CHICAGO, IL (TIP): On Tuesday, Feb 13, devotees celebrated the festival of Maha Shivaratri, in the Hari Om Mandir, with great joy and enthusiasm. As per the Hindu tradition, devotees bathe the Shiva Lingam with Holy Water, Milk, Honey and offer Chandan, Bel Patra amidst chanting of prayers, mantras and the resonating sound of Om Nama Shivaya, called the "Rudra Abhishek". Living up to the tradition, hundreds of devotees came to the Hari Om Mandir to perform the rituals and sing the glory of Lord Shiva.

Due to renovation in progress at the Hari Om Mandir, the regular 'SHIV DURBAR' was not ready for the Pooja this year, so the Mandir Management had made special arrangements and set up a temporary Durbar for the Devotees to perform the Pooja & Shiv Abhishek. The marble statues of Shiva & Parvati were seated on a high pedestal, with the Shiv Ling below, so that people could offer Milk, Water, Honey etc. and do the Abhishek. The whole ambience of this set up reminded people of the Heavenly Abode of Shiva on the Kailash Parbat!!! The Snakes, the Rudraksh mala, the half Chandrama, the Ganga on Shiva's forehead, the Trishul, the Damrus...all added to the Divine environment of the Mandir.

Pandit Raghubir recited the Holy Mantras and helped Devotees to perform the rituals, as per the Scriptures and the Traditions. People had been visiting the Temple right



from the morning when the doors opened at 8am. By the evening, there was an unending que and people were seen waiting patiently in line for their turn.

A special Bhajan Sandhya was organized in the evening. Subhash Sharma started the program by singing the "Shiv Stuti & Chalisa". He was then joined by Madhu Salwan & Rama Kapur, who sang several Bhajans in praise of Lord Shiva & Goddess Parvati. As Shama Sharma & Mona Sharma

sang the traditional "Shub Vivah" of Shiv & Parvati, devotees started dancing with joy. Chantings of Om Namah Shivay echoed in the hall and the entire congregation was drenched in the glory of Lord Shiva. Also, this being a Tuesday, the regular Hanuman Chalisa for Hanuman Ji, was recited by Suchitra Sarkar.

(Photograph and Press release / Asian Media USA)

Jared Kushner loses 'Top Secret' security clearance: report

The new security clearance level will restrict Kushner's access to top secret intelligence

WASHINGTON (TIP): Jared Kushner, son-in-law to President Donald Trump, is one of the many White House aides to have his security clearance downgraded, according to Politico. Kushner, along with other aides, received the news via a memo on Friday, Feb 23. The downgraded security clearance level will restrict access to highly classified intelligence, in contrast to the access Kushner enjoyed while operating under the highest interim security clearance - Top Secret/SCI-level.

Concerns around interim security clearances surfaced after White House aide Rob Porter resigned due to domestic abuse allegations. Porter was also operating under an interim security clearance.

Many insiders and pundits scratched their heads as to the reasoning behind Kushner receiving top secret security clearance in the first place. Indeed, Kushner's background is in real estate and business; he has no previous government nor foreign policy experience. Democrats spoke of suspending his clearance back in 2017, after news leaked that Kushner omitted details of his meetings with Russians on his security clearance application.

On Feb. 16, Chief of Staff John Kelly wrote a five-page memo addressing ongoing security clearance concerns regarding White House staff, in addition to ordering actions that would impact those operating under interim security clearances. In this memo, Kelly decreed that those with interim security clearances whose background investigations had been ongoing since June 1 should see those clearances revoked on Feb. 23. However, it was unclear how this would impact Kushner - especially since his father-in-law, President Donald Trump, had the power to grant Kushner a permanent clearance.

Many suspected that the notoriously clannish president would intervene on behalf of his son-in-law. Yet Trump told reporters on Friday, according to Politico, that he would leave the fate of Kushner's security clearance in the hands of Kelly.

"I will let General Kelly make that decision," Trump said. "I have no doubt he'll make the right decision."

While Kelly did not sign the memo that was released on Friday that informed aides about the security clearance downgrades, Kelly's previous memo from Feb. 16 was likely the trigger for the downgrades.

The White House has declined to comment on Kushner's security clearance; White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders brushed past the issue when speaking to reporters on Tuesday.

"We actually haven't commented on Jared's issue indicated, but we have commented on his ability to do his job. Which, he's a valued member of the team and he will continue to do the important work that he's been doing



Jared Kushner, who has worn dueling hats for more than a year as President Donald Trump's senior adviser, has been stripped of his access to the nation's top secrets

since he's started in the administration," she told reporters.

Kushner's attorney Abbe Lowell told Politico in a statement the changes would "not affect Mr. Kushner's ability to continue to do the very important work he has been assigned by the president."

However, others saw that as wishful thinking. Quoting exclusive sources, CNN reported:

"Republican sources close to the White House said the clearance downgrade could undercut Kushner's ability to influence policy decision-making in the West Wing. Without a top-level clearance, Kushner will be unable to attend meetings where the most sensitive national secrets are discussed."

Since Porter's dismissal, Kushner's security clearance has been scrutinized - even by some Trump loyalists.

Fox News host Shepard Smith told viewers last week that there was "a Kushner problem at the White House."

"Jared Kushner submitted his application - his 'SF-86' as they call it - and did not include 100 contacts with foreigners, and then later had to go back and include them. But then later he did not include the meeting at Trump Tower with the Russian lawyer and the Russian translator. He didn't include that. So that was another amendment to this thing," Smith explained. "And that took this past June."

Officials can be imprisoned for omissions on a security clearance, as Salon previously reported.

Kushner has not been able to receive a full clearance in part because of special counsel Robert Mueller's probe into the dealings of Trump and his associates.

(Source: Salon)

New York banking regulator seeks Kushner Cos loan details

NEW YORK

(TIP): New York state has asked three banks to supply information about their relationships



with the real estate business of Jared Kushner, a senior White House adviser and President Donald Trump's son-in-law, a source said on Thursday, March 1.

Maria Vullo, Superintendent of the Department of Financial Services (DFS), sent letters last week to Deutsche Bank, Signature Bank and New York Community Bank asking for details on their financial arrangements as well as loans made to or sought by Kushner Companies, the source told AFP. The lenders were given until March 5 to respond. The DFS has refused to comment on the matter, as has Deutsche Bank. But Kushner Companies said the inquiries were politically motivated and amounted to harassment.

"We have not received a copy of any letter from the New York State Department of Financial Services," a spokesman said. "Our company is a multi-billion enterprise that is extremely financially strong. Prior to our CEO voluntarily resigning to serve our country, we never had any type of inquiries. "These types of inquiries appear to be harassment solely for political reasons." Also, The New York Times reported Kushner Companies received major loans from Apollo Global Management, one of the world's largest private equity firms, and Citigroup, shortly after Kushner held White House meetings with representatives from the two companies. The paper quoted Don Fox, the former acting director of the Office of Government Ethics during the Obama administration, as saying the loans raised questions about the appearance of conflicts of interest.

Kushner met Joshua Harris, a founder of Apollo, multiple times over the course of 2017 and even discussed a potential White House position which never materialized, the paper said. In November 2017, the firm loaned Kushner Companies USD 184 million-triple the size of its average property loan. He also met Citigroup's chief executive in the spring of 2017, Michael L Corbat, shortly before Kushner Companies received a USD 325 million loan from the firm, the Times reported. The White House referred questions to Kushner's lawyer, Abbe Lowell, whom the paper said did not dispute that the meetings took place but denied any impropriety. Kushner, who is married to the president's daughter Ivanka Trump, has been a key figure in the administration of his father-in-law, entrusted among other things with finding a peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians.

A Harvard graduate with a law degree from New York University, Kushner took the reins of his family business before announcing in January 2017 -- just ahead of his appointment to the Trump administration-that he was stepping down from his management role. While Jared Kushner voluntarily left high-level positions in more than 200 entities related to his family's real estate empire, he still retains shares in most of these companies from which he is likely able to derive income, according to documents published by the White House in April 2017.

It is not the first time Kushner's business interests, which include real estate assets in the states of New York and New Jersey, have been in the spotlight. In May 2017, the company was forced to apologize for mentioning Jared Kushner during a presentation of one of its projects to a group of Chinese investors, in a possible breach of conflict of interest rules. (Source AFP)

President's longest-serving and closest aide Hope Hicks quits as WH communications chief

CONTD FROM PAGE 1

The 29-year-old former model, though considered a political novice, was known as one of the few aides of Trump who understood his style and could influence his views. Her surprise resignation came a day after she testified before the House Intelligence Committee she testified for eight hours on allegations related to the Russian interference during the presidential campaign.

During her testimony, Hicks told the panel that in her job, she had occasionally been required to tell white lies but had never lied about anything connected to the investigation into Russia's interference in the election, US media reported.

Although Hicks maintained an unusually low profile over the past three years, she

Hope Hicks's first association with the Trump family was working with President Trump's eldest daughter, Ivanka, on her personal apparel and licensing brand about six years ago.

recently attracted scrutiny after Special Counsel Robert Mueller escalated his probe into potential collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia.

She is leaving the White House after serving Trump for three years in various capacities. This included being his campaign spokesperson and Director of Strategic

Hicks had no political experience when she joined Trump's tumultuous campaign for the White House. She initially served as a press secretary within the White House, before taking on the role of communications director

Communication when Trump was sworn in as the President.

"There are no words to adequately express my gratitude to President Trump," Hicks said in a statement. President Trump praised Hicks for her outstanding work. The White House did not announce the exact day of her

Hicks led strategic messaging for administration priorities such as the historic passage of tax reform and worked with Press Secretary Sarah Sanders to stabilize the press and communications teams after initial phases of transition

departure but said it could be sometime in the next few weeks.

In a little over 13 months of the Trump administration, Hicks is the fourth individual to resign as the White House Director of Communications. The other three being Sean Spicer, Mike Dubke and Anthony Scaramucci.

(With inputs from PTI)

Rahul Gandhi leaves for Italy to 'surprise' grandma on Holi

NEW DELHI (TIP): Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Thursday left for Italy to "surprise" his maternal grandmother and spend the Holi weekend with her.

Announcing this on Twitter, he also extended Holi greetings to fellow citizens.

"My Nani is 93. She's the kindest soul ever. This Holi weekend, I'm going to surprise her! I can't wait to give her a hug..."

"Happy Holi to all of you. Have a joyful celebration," Gandhi wrote on the microblogging website.



CBI questions Punjab CM's son-in-law in loan fraud case

NEW DELHI (TIP): The CBI on March 1 questioned Guralp Singh, son-in-law of Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh, in connection with the alleged bank fraud case of Rs 97.85 crore by Simbhaoli Sugars Limited.

The CBI had registered a case against the sugar mill, its chairman Gurmit Singh Mann, deputy managing director Guralp Singh and others in connection with the alleged bank loan fraud case.

Simbhaoli Sugars Limited is one of the largest sugar mills in the country. The company's Chief Executive Officer G S C Rao, CFO Sanjay Tapriya, Executive Director Gursimran Kaur Mann and five non-executive directors have also been booked by the agency. The CBI had carried out searches at eight premises including residences of the directors, factory, corporate office and registered office of the company in Delhi, Hapur and Noida.

The probe focuses on two loans -- Rs 97.85 crore which was declared fraud in 2015 and another corporate loan of Rs 110 crore which was used to repay the previous loan.

Source: PTI

SBI, PNB make loans costlier

MUMBAI (TIP): In a move that may make home loans costlier, country's largest lender State Bank of India (SBI) today raised its lending rates by 20 basis points to 8.15 per cent with immediate effect. Scam-hit PNB followed suit, raising its lending rate by 15 basis points to 8.30 per cent.

This is the first lending revision by the SBI since April 2016 and comes a day after it massively raised the retail and bulk deposit rates. The PNB has also increased its retail and bulk deposit rates by up 45 basis points on various maturities.

Source: PTI

Jayendra Saraswathi interred in Mutt

Kancheepuram (TIP): Jayendra Saraswathi, the 69th pontiff of the Kanchi Mutt, was on March 1 buried in the Brindhavanam annexe on the premises of the religious establishment here with Vedic honours.

Amid chants, the body of the 82-year-old (in sitting posture) was lowered into a large bamboo basket placed inside the 7 ft x 7 ft burial pit in the annexe. The pit was filled with herbs like "Vasambu", salt, sandalwood and sand.

India, US working together on regional, maritime security

WASHINGTON (TIP): The US is working with India on a range of issues including regional and maritime security, the Pentagon said on Thursday.

"Our goal is to ensure that we are working together on an array of issues with respect to regional security," chief Pentagon spokesperson Dana White told reporters at her weekly news conference.

India, she said, plays a very important role.

"Therefore the more we can have a conversation not only about Afghanistan and the future of Afghanistan but also how can we work together on maritime security?" she said.

"There's a great deal that we can learn from each other and so the Secretary (of Defence) looks forward to that conversation," White said, responding to the first two-plus-two dialogue between India and the US next month.

Source: PTI

INX Media case: Karti Chidambaram sent to five-day CBI custody

NEW DELHI (TIP): Karti Chidambaram, arrested in the INX Media case, was on March 1 remanded to five days of CBI custody by a Delhi court.

Special Judge Sunil Rana extended Karti's custody till March 6 after the CBI contended that there were "very shocking evidences" of what he has done when he went abroad and alleging "when he went abroad, he closed bank accounts in which funds were received".

Karti was produced before the court on expiry of one-day CBI custody amidst the presence of his parents P Chidambaram and Nalini Chidambaram, both senior advocates, and were seen talking to him.

Additional Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for CBI, maintained that this was "not a case of political vendetta" and the investigation was going on in accordance with Article 21 of the Constitution.

"There are very shocking evidences of what Karti did when he went abroad," he said, adding that "when he went abroad, he closed bank accounts in which funds were received".

Even though Karti did not complain of any uneasiness during his regular medical check up yesterday, doctors at Safdarjung Hospital last night sent him to cardiac care unit and he was brought to CBI office only in the morning.

Due to his hospitalisation, the CBI's one-day custody was virtually wasted as it got Karti's custody only at 7:30 pm and he returned from the hospital this morning, he said.

Senior advocate Abhishek Mani Singhvi, who is leading a team of lawyers for Karti, contended that in connection with the May 2017 FIR, CBI has spent roughly 22 hours with Karti in August last year and no fresh summons



Karti Chidambaram leaves Patiala House Courts after he was remanded to five-day CBI custody in the INX Media case, in New Delhi on March 1. pic courtesy: PTI

was issued to him after August 2017 till date, which shows the agency has nothing more to ask him.

"The only way of establishing non-cooperation is to issue summons. You never tested my non-cooperation. Sudden arrest after six months. Its bizarre, I am arrested as I stepped out of plane.

"There is not an iota of evidence against Karti. He is being arrested despite complying with court orders repeatedly," he said.

Singhvi asked if Karti has done something illegal while being abroad, why didn't CBI file a contempt petition before the court which allowed him to travel abroad.

The CBI said that in May 2007, first FIPB approval was given to INX Media and in April 2008, this reference was made in the Finance Ministry.

From June 2008 onwards, the payment of the bribe money was started. The second FIPB approval was given on

November 2, 2008. We are investigating whether the April 2008 reference was a "pressure technique", the CBI contended. "We have emails and invoices indicating money was given to Advantage Strategic Consultancy Private Limited (ASCPL), which is related to Karti, around the time period when INX Media received favours.

"There is substantial evidence with the agency which needs to be confronted with Karti. Three mobile phones have been recovered from him which need to be examined. 14 days is the minimum time required to keep him in custody," Mehta contended.

Karti was arrested yesterday at Chennai Airport on his return from the United Kingdom in connection with the FIR lodged on May 15 last year alleging irregularities in the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) clearance to INX Media for receiving overseas funds to the tune of Rs 305 crore in 2007 when P Chidambaram was the union finance minister. Source: PTI

Furious over 'special invitee' tag, Mallikarjun Kharge boycotts Lokpal meet

NEW DELHI (TIP): Mallikarjun Kharge, leader of the Congress party in Lok Sabha on March 1 boycotted a meeting of the committee that will select an anti-corruption ombudsman, or Lokpal, in protest against being asked to attend as a "special invitee".

The selection committee is supposed to have the Prime Minister, Chief Justice of India, Lok Sabha Speaker, the opposition leader and an eminent jurist. Though Kharge leads the Lok Sabha's largest opposition party, he is not the designated leader of the opposition since his party falls short of the minimum number required to claim that post.

In a strongly worded letter to the Prime Minister, Kharge said he "respectfully denied" the invite as the process was being reduced to "political pretence".

Kharge charged that there was a concerted effort by the Union government to exclude the independent voice of the opposition from the Lokpal selection process.



"A perusal simplicitor of the Lok Pal Act, 2013; its intent and objective reflects that Leader 'of Opposition' cannot be substituted as a Special Invitee'. It is a matter of surprise that your government is choosing to adopt this route as a mere paper formality rather than seek any meaningful and constructive participation," Kharge said in the letter.

The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act was passed in 2013 to constitute a statutory body to inquire into allegations of

corruption against public functionaries.

"The Select Committee of Parliament had put its seal of approval on the amending bill, yet the government has failed to introduce and pass it. This amending bill continues to languish in cold storage for want to appropriate intent, commitment and objectivity on part of the government," Kharge said in the letter.

A party that lays claim to the leader of opposition post in Lok Sabha must have at least 10% of its 545 seats. Congress, which won 44 seats in the 2014 general election, currently has 48 seats.

The meeting of the selection panel took place on Thursday evening at the official residence of the Prime Minister.

"At the outset, let me state on behalf of myself, my party and the entire opposition that the 'Special Invitee Invitation' is a concerted effort to exclude the independent voice of the opposition altogether from the selection process of the most important anti-corruption watchdog," Kharge wrote in the letter to Modi.

Anti-terror fight is against a mindset, not any religion, says PM Modi

NEW DELHI (TIP): Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the fight against terrorism and radicalization was not against any religion, but against a mindset that misguides the youth.

Speaking at a conference on "Islamic heritage: Promoting understanding and moderation", Modi said India's values of equality, diversity and harmony strengthened it in a world of uncertainty and these were important to defeat violence and extremism.

"Indian democracy is a celebration of age-old pluralism," Modi said in a speech to an audience that included King Abdullah II of Jordan and many Islamic clerics and scholars.

Abdullah, a 41st generation direct descendant of Prophet Mohammed, is known for his global initiative to fight radicalization and terrorism. He is also the custodian of holy sites in Jerusalem, including the Al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest site in Islam, located in the Old City of Jerusalem.

India views Jordan as an "oasis of stability and harmony" in conflict-ridden West Asia and New Delhi is looking to deepen bilateral ties with the country, according to senior government officials in New Delhi.

India has been a victim of terrorism since the 1980s and, since the 1990s, witnessed an Islamist insurgency in Kashmir that has claimed many thousands of lives. India blames Pakistan for supporting anti-India terrorist groups inimical in Kashmir.

In his speech, Modi said that "those who perpetrate acts of violence against humanity perhaps don't realise that they harm the religion they claim to stand for."

"The fight against terrorism and extremism, against radicalization is not a fight against any religion. It is a fight against a mentality that misguides our youth to perpetrate acts of violence against innocents," he said, urging the youth to associate themselves with the humanitarian aspects of Islam on the one hand and the use of modern technology on the other.



President Ram Nath Kovind with Jordan King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein and Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the ceremonial reception at Rashtrapati Bhawan in New Delhi.

In his speech, the Jordanian king said the current global war against terror should not be viewed as a fight between religions. "It is between moderates of all faiths and communities and against extremists who spread hatred and violence," he said. He also emphasized the need to "recognize and reject the misinformation groups promote about Islam, or indeed any religion."

"We need to take back the airwaves and internet from the voices of hatred, those who have victimized our world not only with bombs and terror but with ignorance and lies," the king said, adding that inclusion was the path to coexistence.

"The fact that the king came to India and delivered this address is very significant given that he is the direct descendant of the Prophet (Mohammed). His words carry great weight," said a person familiar with Abdullah's visit.

Later in the day, India and Jordan signed 12 agreements including a framework pact on defence cooperation that defines the "scope of such cooperation and making provisions for implementation of the cooperation in some of the recognized areas like training; defence industry; counter-

terrorism; military studies; cybersecurity; military medical services, peace-keeping, etc.," a statement from the Indian foreign ministry said.

Another pact aims to set up a Centre of Excellence in Jordan "for training of minimum 3,000 Jordanian IT professionals over a period of 5 years, and setting up of a resource centre in India for training of master trainers in IT field from Jordan," the foreign ministry statement said.

A third pact on setting up a fertilizer production facility in Jordan "with a long-term agreement for 100% offtake to India" was also signed. It is aimed at ensuring long-term and sustained supply of rock phosphate to India, the statement said.

Briefing reporters after official talks between Modi and Abdullah, S. Tirumurthy, secretary-economic relations in the Indian foreign ministry said, "There was a keenness on both sides to take this (the relationship) further."

Both sides are looking at closer security cooperation given that Jordan sits at the crossroads of a very volatile region neighbouring Israel, Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Source: PTI

MPs' perks hiked, Rs 39-crore extra burden on exchequer

NEW DELHI (TIP): Members of Parliament are set to get increased allowances with the Union Cabinet approving a proposal in this regard.

The constituency allowance, furniture allowance and communication expenses of the MPs would go up considerably, sources in the government said. The parliamentary affairs ministry had proposed an increase in the constituency allowance from Rs 45,000 a month to Rs 60,000.

The ministry had also proposed that the one-time furniture allowance be hiked to Rs one lakh from the present Rs 75,000.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had announced in his budget speech that a permanent mechanism would be set up to revise the salaries of MPs every five years, and it would be linked to inflation.

The remuneration of an MP includes a basic salary of Rs 50,000 per month and Rs 45,000 as constituency allowance, apart from other perks. The Centre spends around Rs 2.7 lakh



a month on an MP.

As of today, excluding the Speaker, the Lok Sabha has 536 MPs, including two nominated from the Anglo-Indian community. There are eight vacancies. The Rajya Sabha has 239 members.

Source: PTI

PNB FRAUD: ED ATTACHES RS 1,217 CRORE ASSETS OF MEHUL CHOKSI GROUP



NEW DELHI (TIP): The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on March 1 (Thursday) said it has attached 41 properties, valued at over Rs 1,200 crore, in connection with its money-laundering probe into the PNB scam against Gitanjali Gems and its promoter Mehul Choksi.

The central probe agency issued a provisional order for attachment under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The attached assets include 15 flats and 17 office premises in Mumbai, a mall in Kolkata, a four-acre farm house in Alibaug and 231 acres of land at locations like Nasik, Nagpur, Panvel and Villupuram in Tamil Nadu.

A 170-acre park in Hyderabad's Ranga Reddy district valued at over Rs 500 crore has also been attached, it said.

Four flats in Borivali (east) area of the Maharashtra capital and nine others in Khemu Towers in Santacruz (east) have been attached as part of the action.

"The total value of the 41 seized assets controlled by Choksi is estimated at Rs 1,217.2 crore," the ED said. Choksi and designer diamond jewellery businessman Nirav Modi and others are being investigated by the ED and other probe agencies after the bank fraud recently came to light, following a complaint by the PNB that they allegedly cheated the nationalised bank to the tune of Rs 12,000 crore, with the purported involvement of a few employees of the bank.

The CBI and the ED have registered two FIRs each to probe the case. Both Choksi and Modi are said to have left the country before criminal cases were lodged against them. They have, however, denied any wrongdoing.

The ED, a central probe agency under the Union Finance Ministry, is investigating if the allegedly defrauded bank funds were laundered and proceeds of crime were subsequently used by the accused to create illegal assets and black money.

Source: PTI

'Victim' turns hostile in rape case against ex-Akali minister

GURDASPUR (TIP): A woman who had earlier claimed she was repeatedly raped by former Akali Dal minister Sucha Singh Langah today turned hostile in a court here.

She denied her presence in a video purportedly featuring her in a compromising position with the politician. The video had gone viral ahead of the Gurdaspur parliamentary bypoll last year.

The woman recorded her statement in the court of Additional District and Sessions Judge Prem Kumar in the presence of Langah and his battery of lawyers.

A widow and government employee, the woman alleged that she had been asked by the police to sign some blank papers, "which were subsequently used to defame me". The police had acted under the influence of some politicians, and that she never knew Langah, she claimed.

DSP (Special Branch) Gurbans Singh Bains, supervising officer in the case, said he would comment only after going through a copy of the victim's statement.

The court has fixed March 12 as the next date of hearing. The bail application of Langah, booked on rape charges on September 29 last year, would come up before the Punjab and Haryana High Court on March 5.

Sources said the police, which had been assiduously building up the case against Langah, had been wrong-footed by today's proceedings. A police officer said the woman had first moved an application before the SSP that she was raped. "The SSP subsequently asked DSP (City) AD Singh to inquire into the allegations. To strengthen her case, she not only recorded her statement before the judge, but also handed over a video to the SSP to substantiate her rape claims. It was only after her allegations were found to be true that a case was registered under Section 376 (rape) against Langah," he said.

Source: The Tribune



COMMENT

Prof I.S. Saluja

BEWARE
THE IRS
IMPERSONATOR

It is tax season. It is time to pay taxes. And I hope all are serious about the tax paying business. There are some who are more active than a conscientious tax payer. It is the IRS impersonators. Come tax season, and they become active. Their modus operandi is to call and create an impression that the callers are genuine IRS officials. They introduce themselves as any professional IRS official will, giving their ID, which, of course, is not a real one. They will tell the person called that he has committed a fraud on IRS and that there are warrants of arrest. Many are filled with fear and visions of their being arrested and thrown behind bars. Something which they never ever dreamed of. Also, the impersonator will instill greater fear by saying that because of the offence committed, the called person will face deportation. Again, many will shudder at the thought of losing career and being banished from the country to face an uncertain future back in the country he had come from. The impersonating IRS officials are experts at their job. It requires nerves of steel not to be filled with fear over their threats, which believe me, sound quite real.

However, once they know they have succeeded in frightening a guy they will ask for amount due to be paid straightaway. And they have elaborate schemes to get the money from frightened guys. They do not give any time to the called person to think or consult somebody. Every year during the tax period we hear stories of people having been cheated.

IRS has been at pains to warn people of these impersonators and cheats. They keep telling that IRS will send notice if at all there is something amiss with an income tax return or if the department wants a tax payer to make a payment. Yet, many fall a prey to the wiles of these impersonators.

I will advice readers of The Indian Panorama not to panic when such a call is received. A little caution and you will save your hard-earned dollars.

Good Luck!

AS I SEE IT

Deja vu in Pakistan



By Sharat Sabharwal

As the 2013 Pakistan election approached, the security establishment was concerned at the prospect of a Nawaz victory because of his popularity in Punjab that carries more than 50 per cent seats in the National Assembly. The anxiety stemmed from Nawaz's tense relationship with his army chiefs during two tenures as Prime Minister, his bitterness against the army at his treatment after the 1999 coup and repeatedly professed desire to promote better relations with India. In 2011, Imran Khan, whose Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf had failed to make a mark since its founding in 1996, appeared on the scene out of nowhere to relaunch his political career by opposing American drone strikes in Pakistani territory and corruption in the ruling parties. The then DG, ISI, was reported to be the architect of his sudden rise, a move that subsequent events would prove to be farsighted in filling the gap left by the reluctance of the two major parties - PPP and PML (N) - wiser with the experience of the past, to collaborate with the army against each other. Closer to the election, Tahir ul Qadri, a Canada based cleric of Pakistan origin, landed up to push for its postponement. However, these machinations failed, and Nawaz won a third term with a comfortable majority in the election held in May, 2013.

In this backdrop, the civil-military equation under Nawaz was expected to be anything but smooth. Differences emerged quickly on Musharraf's trial, policy on terrorism and relations with India. The army managed to secure Musharraf's exit from Pakistan, prevailed against Nawaz's misplaced policy of dialogue with the anti-Pak terror groups and systematically undermined his agenda to improve relations with India.

Imran's agitation against the alleged rigging of the 2013 election, which kept Nawaz on the back foot vis a vis the army, came a cropper when a judicial commission ruled against him in July 2015. However, the linkage of some offshore companies to the Prime Minister's family, revealed in the Panama papers, gave Imran and his mentors another opportunity to target Nawaz. In July 2017, the Supreme Court disqualified Nawaz from holding public office. Significantly, the decision was based on the report of a six-member joint investigation team, constituted by the court that included a representative each of the ISI and Military Intelligence. Since these highly disciplined individuals would not have approved the report without a nod from the army leadership, the damning report, combined with the track record of the Pakistan judiciary kowtowing to military dictators, had left little doubt about the fate of the Prime Minister and was an indicator of provenance of the decision to oust him.

The run-up to the 2018 election bears an

The run-up to the 2018 election bears an eerie similarity to the events preceding the 2013 poll. The actors seeking to destroy Nawaz Sharif's political future are the same, with the addition of the SC and Hafiz Saeed.

Disqualified from holding the office of Prime Minister last year by the Supreme Court, Nawaz Sharif has now been barred by the same court from being the head of his party, PML (N). Ostensibly a matter of corruption in high places, his disqualification has a strong subtext of civil-military tussle in Pakistan.



Proxy ruler: Disqualified to be PM or party head, Nawaz Sharif remains the vote-getter.

eerie similarity to the events preceding the 2013 election. The actors seeking to destroy Nawaz's political future are the same, with the addition of the Supreme Court and Pakistan's terror brand ambassador, Hafiz Saeed. The army would be loath to see his return to power. The PPP has sought to exploit Nawaz's misfortunes for political gains in Punjab, but being an experienced party, would not go the extent of playing the security establishment's game. That is not true of Imran. Egged on by his ambition, he is blind to the army's design. Tahir ul Qadri is again around. The security establishment aims to deprive Nawaz of another victory by undermining him in Punjab. Hafiz Saeed's services have also been enlisted for good measure by releasing him from preventive detention. Though the Election Commission has not recognized his party, Milli Muslim League, because of opposition of the PML (N) government, he could be expected to put up independent candidates to erode Nawaz's vote.

Nawaz and his children face charges in an accountability court, with the sword of conviction and imprisonment hanging over their head. Besides depriving him of the presidency of his party, all decisions taken by him in that capacity since July 2017 have also been declared null and void. However, counting on his popularity in Punjab, which he hopes to boost by playing the victim card, Nawaz refuses to desert the field. Attempts to cause any major fissures in his party and wean away his brother, Shahbaz Sharif, have failed so far.

Nawaz, being the vote getter, is indispensable to the party. An efficient technocrat, Shahbaz complements Nawaz, but cannot replace him. Deprived of the presidency of PML (N), Nawaz threatens to lead it in the election in his individual capacity in the hope of ruling through a proxy, as he is doing now. If jailed, his loyalists could fight in his name. He thus dares the army to either go the whole hog and stage a coup, inviting international opprobrium, or face the prospect of seeing him rule, even if by proxy.

The selective accountability that has claimed Nawaz's head not only implies the departure of an individual from office, but can also target every politician, capable of winning popular mandate and consequently inclined to chart out a course independent of the worldview of the army. Nawaz, after all, was disqualified as per a Zia era constitutional amendment requiring elected representatives to be 'sadiq' (truthful) and 'ameen' (righteous), subjective criteria that can be used by the Deep State to throw out anyone not in agreement with them. The civil-military imbalance and the resulting dysfunctionality of the state that have become a curse for Pakistan and the region will get redressed essentially by opposition within Pakistan to the stranglehold of their army, with external pressure at best playing a supportive role. Therefore, though a matter internal to Pakistan, the ongoing tussle and its outcome should be of interest to us.

(The author is India's former High Commissioner to Pakistan)

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Primary task at Cong plenary: Rescuing the polity from the creeping authoritarianism



By Harish Khare

The top Congress leaders are due to gather, in a fortnight from now, for their party's plenary session. Apart from consecrating Rahul Gandhi's election as the party president, the gathering will need to undertake far more serious a task: they will have to perform a duty to start a conversation with the nation and to take the citizens into confidence on how the entire political system is groaning under the weight of one man - his whims, his fancies, his attitudes and his limitations. The Congress and its leaders need to make a case before the nation as to why the current state of affairs is neither desirable nor acceptable. At the end of this three-day gathering, the Congress should have given the country a good enough reason to look beyond Narendra Modi, as and when the Lok Sabha elections get organized.

It is already a matter of considerable dismay that otherwise decent officials, educated aides and learned advisers have acquiesced in the organized worship of a man who grandiloquently pretends to know profoundly about everything, from gaming the examinations to disrupting the economy, even without the benefit of a Harvard education, and making a virtue of "hard work". From senior most ministers to junior joint secretary, all find themselves subscribing to this "daddy knows best" syndrome, very much reminiscent of the Narayan Datt Tiwari hymns to Sanjay Gandhi during the Emergency days.

Since it will be a political gathering, there will be plenty of partisanship and mouthfuls of philippics against Narendra Modi, the BJP and the Sangh Parivar. But it would be a waste of time and resources if the Congressmen confine themselves to abuses; it will be an even greater farce and greater shame if the Congressmen were to engage in their familiar weakness for sycophancy. Instead, they have to behave and speak as responsible and reasonable keepers of the best of the constitutional values. As those who claim to be committed to the Idea of India and who subscribe to the Nehruvian virtues, the Congressmen have a sober and serious task at their hands: a democratic obligation to talk to fellow-citizens as to how we are all mindlessly getting sucked into the small-time viciousness of a small-time man; how as a nation and as a society we are getting infected with pettiness and small-mindedness. More than that, the Congressmen need to convince the nation that they have the legacy, the leadership,



Illustration by Sandeep Joshi

History of the last hundred years has taught us one simple lesson: personality cults do introduce undesirable imbalances in the body politic. Personality cult produces very little democratic good; it always ends up badly, even disastrously.

and the experience to rescue us all from this quagmire of petty vindictiveness being palmed off as a new normal.

We remain - for now - a constitutional democracy; but, all our constitutional arrangements stand diluted and all-out constitutional functionaries - be it the President of India or the Union Home Minister or External Affairs Minister - have been made to feel diminished. The Cabinet system of government has been reduced to a joke that no longer invokes a laugh. The country needs to be told that the fine architecture of checks and balances is in serious jeopardy.

It is for the Congressmen to enlighten the citizens how all the key relationships in our national scheme of things are being revised and reduced: first, the majority-minority equation has been systematically reshaped and the secular commitments stand eroded; second, the Centre-States federal equation has tipped dangerously in favor of New Delhi and the state governments are being reduced to whining tots; third, the State-Citizen balance has changed drastically, an all-intrusive Aadhaar arrangement is demanding compliance and surrender of privacy, and, we are beginning to look like a misshapen authoritarian setup; then, we have the creeping distortions in the Civil-Army relationship, with the Army in danger of losing its institutional rectitude; and, lastly, the virtual governmental takeover of the electronic media. All these key equations are off the keel. And, our citizens need to be told how these institutional distortions are unknowingly putting the nation on a road to a totalitarian-lite experiment.

When the Opposition fails to impart a democratic vibrancy to the polity, all other institutions of restraint - like the judiciary, the Election Commission - too feel discouraged; and, independent regulatory authorities like the Reserve Bank of India feel inclined to give in to the government's unreasonable

The greatest danger we face is Narendra Modi is using all the accruments of democracy to de-legitimize democracy's good practices and values, and, to turn all its bad habits to make democratic arrangements look inadequate and unequal to the task of restoration of our national glory.

demands. The Congress, as the principal opposition party, has an obligation to create conditions for robust counterpoises.

If nothing else, the country needs to be repeatedly educated about the whimsicality that has dictated the (mis) management of the economy, and how all the great projects - like Make in India - stand in tatters; and, more importantly, whether the Congress has an answer to jobless growth and whether the Congressmen can help the country find its way out of a deepening agrarian crisis.

Notwithstanding the loud chanting of deshbhakti, and balidaan mantras, it is the Opposition's task to inform the country that we stand isolated in our own backyard because we have needlessly and arrogantly alienated all our South Asian neighbors; and, the nation needs to be educated that India today is less safe than it was five years ago. The Congress has to introduce the citizens to a new narrative that takes us away from this excessive preoccupation with national security and an unwarranted and unworkable flexing of muscles at home and abroad. We are losing our national self-assurance without making smaller nations in the neighborhood respect us.

Then, there is a personality overload. A personality cult may have been "normalized" in New Delhi but it remains a personality cult, with all its unhealthy demands on men and institutions. It is already a matter of considerable dismay that otherwise decent officials, educated aides and learned advisers have acquiesced in the organized worship of a man who grandiloquently pretends to know profoundly about everything, from gaming the examinations to disrupting the economy, even without the benefit of a Harvard education, and making a virtue of "hard work". From senior most ministers to junior joint secretary, all find themselves subscribing to this "daddy knows best" syndrome, very much reminiscent of the Narayan Datt Tiwari hymns to Sanjay Gandhi during the Emergency days.

History of the last hundred years has taught us one simple lesson: personality cults do introduce undesirable imbalances in the body politic. Personality cult produces very little democratic good; it always ends up badly, even disastrously.

The greatest danger we face is Narendra Modi is using all the accruments of democracy to de-legitimize democracy's good practices and values, and, to turn all its bad habits to make democratic arrangements look inadequate and unequal to the task of restoration of our national glory. Those associated with national security are already muttering that there-is-too-much-democracy claptrap. The next pit-stop in this journey would be to look temptingly at the Xi Jinping kind of authoritarian option.

(The author is editor-in- chief of Tribune group of newspapers)



By Mike Ghose

JOYS OF VOLUNTEERING

Before I could do anything, the senior ladies jumped in and started picking two boxes at a time... I could not bear, my culture did not allow me for my seniors to carry that load, and I had to do it. I believe it was Sandra, wife of Judge Barefootsanders who questioned me, young man, I am healthy and active because I do the work and will remain active.... She was awesome! They would not listen and the suburbans were loaded in no time.

As we were driving back to the hotel, what I heard was an incredible conversation. The ladies were talking about how many hours they served in a Church, Hospital or a School.... I will never forget that conversation and made the determination that I will always be a volunteer

till my last breath.

I read a new piece on Asma Jahangir today (<http://centerforpluralism.com/asma-jahangir-human-rights/>) the human rights activist. What made her stand up against powers to protect the rights of people who were not related to her? Then I started thinking about Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Mother Teresa and others, why did they not enjoy their lives and were hell-bent on repairing the world? You may be one too constantly serving others for no gain. Then I ask myself, why do I volunteer? Why do I stand up for others? I have gotten threats against my life, screamed at, attacked but never was I discouraged. I don't get a penny either, rather I lose it. My late wife Najma used to say, if you

spend half your time working your business, we can live a great life with that money.... There is no answer to it, each one of us is driven by our calling. Different things are important to different people. Money drives some and other things drive others. Those who are driven by money will never understand volunteerism

So, I salute the volunteer you, it is a great feeling to serve others, particularly those whom you don't know and will never see again and never get paid to serve. If you are one, share a note.

(The author is an Indian-American committed to building cohesive societies and offers pluralistic solutions on issues of the day. As we learn to respect the "otherness" of others and accept the God-given uniqueness of each one of us, conflicts will fade, and solutions emerge. He is the president of the Center for Pluralism in Washington, DC.)

1963-2018

SRIDEVI: A SUPERSTAR TILL THE END

Throughout the 1980s the Bollywood film star Sridevi, who has died aged 54 after drowning in a bath in a Dubai hotel, was the undisputed queen of Indian cinema, often eclipsing the male actors she starred with.

In breaking through this glass ceiling she became one of the highest paid actors of her time, demonstrating great versatility in roles that ranged from clown to femme fatale – no one else could have played her half-woman, half-snake character in *Nagina* (1986) with such seductive aplomb.

Her 300 films made in the course of half a century of acting began when she was a toddler, with roles in devotional films such as *Kandhan Karunai* (1967) and *Thunaiyan* (1969), in both of which she played the childhood incarnation of Lord Murugan, a south Indian deity. In her most recent release, the thriller *Mom* (2017), she played an avenging stepmother who destroys the lives of the four men who raped her stepdaughter. Her career bore witness to the changing currents of Indian cinema, from conservative family-oriented mid-century movies to the socially engaged woman-power cinema of contemporary times, while always remaining the nation's primary spectacle.

Born in Sivakasi, a small town in Tamil Nadu famous for its firecracker factories, she was the daughter of K Ayyappan, a lawyer, and his wife, Rajeshwari. The family ran a small plastic manufacturing unit. Sridevi's mother and her sister Srilata often accompanied her on film shoots. While Bollywood remains the biggest film industry in India, the country also has rich cinema cultures in its regional languages. Adept in several South Indian languages, in her early career, Sridevi was involved in the Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam cinema industries. But she also managed what was for her time a rare crossover from the southern film industry, thereby gaining nationwide recognition and appeal. In fact, many of the early roles that set her on the path to becoming Bollywood's first female superstar were remakes in Hindi of regional-language hits, including the films *Himmatwala* and *Sadma* (both 1983).

Sridevi retained her striking good looks, and in her most popular roles portrayed strong, funny women: the investigative journalist in *Mr India* (1987) who is not above going under cover as a cabaret dancer; the street-smart dancer in *ChaalBaaz* (1989), whose stunt scenes are also comic ones; and the Afghan warrior in *Khuda Gawah* (1992) who rides a horse into battle. She was not just funny; she was also willing to look funny. Her mercurially comic facial expressions, her over-the-top outfits, the dance moves that earned her the sobriquet Thunder Thighs were all of a piece with the gusto and spontaneity of her acting.

Sridevi was extremely discreet about her personal life. In the 1980s she was reported to have married her fellow actor Mithun Chakraborty, but the relationship did not last. In 1996, she married the producer Boney Kapoor.

Kapoor, who had produced several movies that starred Sridevi and also his actor brother Anil, was one of the kingmakers of Bollywood. Together the Kapoors and Sridevi demonstrated an outstanding grasp of the popular imagination. After her marriage to Boney, Sridevi put her acting career on hold for more than a decade, apart from a brief foray into television.

In the loud, colourful movies that she made in her heyday, Sridevi was neither studied nor

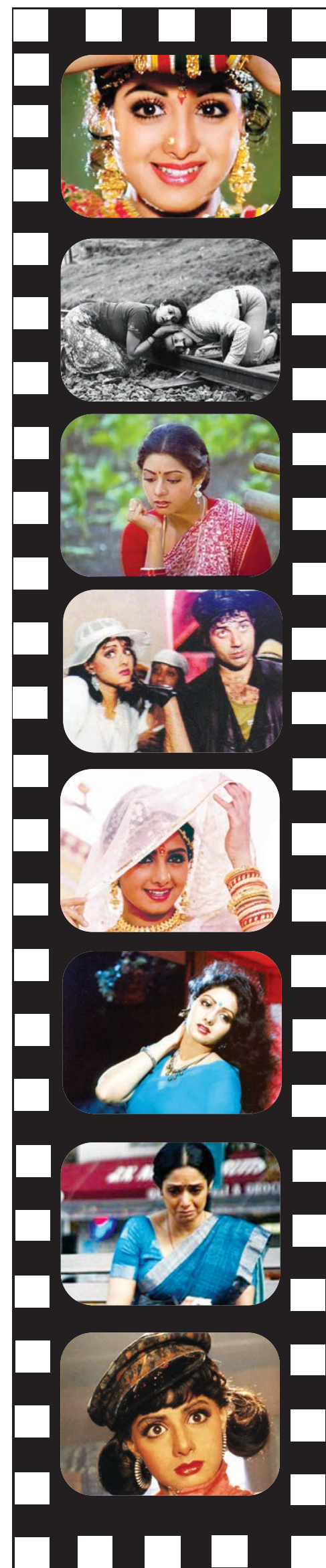


much concerned with nuance. When she was on the screen, it was clear that she was having a good time. But when she returned to the cinema in 2012 as the shy housewife in English Vinglish who sets out to teach herself English for a trip to see her sister in New York, it was clear that her craft was much more sophisticated. She had reached a point in her career where she was able to balance her comic playfulness with subtlety and good judgment. In addition to numerous awards for acting, in

2013 Sridevi was awarded the highest civilian honour in India, the Padma Shri.

Female Bollywood stars, especially those with adult children who follow them into acting careers, typically make do with smaller and smaller parts while fading into oblivion. Sridevi was poised to change that trajectory. Her charisma and her family's producing power could have combined to create a new path for her as a senior figure in Bollywood.

Source: *The Guardian*



Vladimir Putin, before election, unveils new nuclear weapons to counter West

MOSCOW (TIP): President Vladimir Putin unveiled an array of new nuclear weapons on March 1, in one of his most bellicose speeches in years, saying they could hit almost any point in the world and not be intercepted.

Speaking weeks before an election he is expected to win, Putin also said that a nuclear attack on any of Moscow's allies would be regarded as an attack on Russia itself and draw an immediate response.

Putin, who polls indicate should be easily re-elected on March 18, backed his tough rhetoric with video clips of some of the new missiles he was talking about, which were projected on a giant screen behind him at the conference hall in central Moscow where he was addressing Russia's political elite.

"They have not succeeded in holding Russia back," said Putin, referring to the West.

"Now they need to take account of a new reality and understand that everything I have said today is not a bluff."

Among the new weapons that Putin said were either in development or ready: a new intercontinental ballistic missile, a small nuclear warhead that could be attached to cruise missiles, underwater nuclear drones, a supersonic weapon and a laser weapon.

The audience, made up of Russian lawmakers and other leading figures, frequently stood up and applauded his presentation, which culminated with the Russian national anthem being played.

NATO MEASURES "USELESS"

Putin, who has dominated his country's



political landscape for the last 18 years and often used anti-Western rhetoric to mobilise support, said the technological advances meant that NATO's build-up on Russia's borders and the roll-out of a US anti-missile system would be rendered useless.

"I hope that everything that was said today will sober up any potential aggressor," said Putin.

"Unfriendly steps towards Russia such as the deployment of the (US) anti-missile system and of NATO infrastructure nearer our borders and such like, from a military point of view, will become ineffective."

Steps to contain Russia would also become

unjustifiably expensive and pointless, he forecast. The Russian leader also voiced concerns about a new US nuclear doctrine, saying that Russia's own doctrine was defensive and only envisaged the use of nuclear weapons in response to an attack.

Russia has repeatedly said it is keen to hold talks with the United States about the balance of strategic nuclear power.

"We will view any use of nuclear weapons against Russia or its allies, be it of small, medium or any force, as a nuclear attack on our country," said Putin.

"Our response will be immediate. Nobody should have any doubts about that." (Reuters)

Prince William to make 1st official UK royal visit to Israel

LONDON (TIP): Officials say Prince William will make the first official visit by a member of the British royal family to Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Kensington Palace says the prince will also visit Jordan during the trip this summer. No dates have been announced.

Overseas royal visits are made at the request of the British government. No British royal has made an official visit to Israel, whose occupation of the Palestinian territories the UK considers illegal.

Prince Charles attended the 2016 funeral of former Israeli President Shimon Peres in a private capacity.

Kensington Palace said Thursday that the trip "has been welcomed by the Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian authorities."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that "this is a historic visit" and William "will be received here with great affection." (AP)

China plans first sea-launch of satellites

BEIJING (TIP): China is planning its first sea-launch of satellites, a Chinese aerospace official said on Feb 28.

Yang Yiqiang, commander-in-chief of the Long March-11 rockets project of the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation, said that 2018 would see five launches of Long March-11 rockets, with four missions for commercial payloads on land, and one at sea.

"The sea launch will meet the growing needs for launching near-equatorial and low-inclination satellites, and improve the rockets' adaptability," Yang said.

"The solid-propellant Long March-11 rockets have strong quick-response ability with low prices, which provide better, competitive services in space commerce," state-run Xinhua news agency quoted him as saying.

Launches in the equator region are more fuel-efficient. They cost less but demand a more stable rocket performance, which is affected by sea waves and high temperatures.

Wenchang, cantered at 11 degree east longitude and 19 degrees north latitude, in south China's Hainan Province, is the only launch centre near the sea. As for missions with an inclination of zero to five degrees, the sea launch will fill the gap, the Xinhua report said.

China started developing modern carrier rockets in 1956, and the Long March rockets have become the main carriers for China's satellite launches. (PTI)

13 dead in Christian-Muslim violence in Nigeria: Police

LAGOS (TIP): At least 13 people have been killed in clashes between Christian and Muslim youths in central Nigeria, police said today, in the latest violence to hit the region.

Fighting broke out on Monday in Kasuwan Magani community in Kaduna state, about 45 kilometres by road from the state capital, Kaduna city.

"The mayhem led to the death of 13 people with many houses and shops burnt," Kaduna state police commissioner Austin Iwar told AFP by telephone.

Local reports gave a higher death toll. Iwar said 20 suspects have been arrested, and troops and police had been deployed to quell the violence. (AFP)

NINE KILLED IN SAUDI-LED AIR STRIKE ATTACKS IN YEMEN, RESIDENTS SAY

DUBAI (TIP): Air strikes killed nine civilians and wounded at least 6 on Wednesday in two separate attacks in north and west Yemen by the Saudi-led coalition fighting against the Houthi movement, residents told Reuters.

The Saudi-led coalition, which has intervened in Yemen's war since 2015 to try to restore president Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi to power, has conducted frequent air strikes and has often hit civilians, although denies ever doing so intentionally.

The Houthis, a movement derived from northern Yemen's Zaidi Shi'ite Muslim community, have controlled much of Yemen including the capital Sanaa since driving Hadi out three years ago. Saudi Arabia and its Sunni Muslim allies say the Houthis are aligned with Shi'ite Iran and pose a threat to the region.

Residents said four civilians had been killed in an airstrike in the suburbs of the northern city of Saada, the main Houthi stronghold. Five girls were killed in another airstrike that targeted a field in the west of the country, in the western Hodeidah district.

On Tuesday, airstrikes killed five civilians in north of the country.

The war has killed more than 10,000 people, displaced more than 2 million and driven the country - already the poorest on the Arabian Peninsula - to the verge of widespread famine. (Reuters)

China lashes out at US over bill promoting Taiwan ties



BEIJING (TIP): China lodged an official protest with the United States today, saying it was "strongly dissatisfied" after the US Senate passed a bill promoting relations with self-governing Taiwan.

The US Senate passed the Taiwan Travel Act, intended to encourage visits between the United States and Taiwan "at all levels", by unanimous consent on Wednesday, following its approval in the House of Representatives in January.

The bill adds that it should be US policy for high-level Taiwanese officials to enter the United States, meet with US officials and conduct business in the country.

President Donald Trump's signature is now all that is needed for the bill to become law -- something that is not likely to be an obstacle, given that the bill was passed unanimously.

Washington cut formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan in 1979, recognising the Communist mainland rulers in Beijing as the sole government of "One China."

Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said that while some of the new bill's provisions are not legally binding, it "seriously violates" the One China principle.

"China is strongly dissatisfied and firmly opposes it," Hua told a regular news briefing, adding that Beijing had made "solemn representations" to the US -- a diplomatic protest.

The United States, she said, should stop official exchanges with Taiwan and handle Taiwan issues "prudently and properly" to avoid "damaging Sino-US relations".

Under the terms of the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, Washington maintains an ambiguous approach to the island, maintaining trade relations and selling Taipei weapons.

Trump sparked protest from China shortly after his election in 2016 by accepting a phone call from Taiwan's leader Tsai Ing-wen, an action seen as breaking the protocol of the One China policy.

He made amends by vowing to uphold the One China policy shortly before Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to his Florida Mar-a-Lago resort -- but infuriated Beijing again last summer by approving a USD 1.3 billion arms sale to Taiwan. (AFP)



MANDIRA BEDI OPENS UP ABOUT WHY SHE HAD TO 'COVER UP' HER TATTOO

Along with making quirky style statements — noodle strap blouses, bob hairdo and religious tattoos on navel and nape — actor Mandira Bedi is known for apologetically following her heart. However, it has not been a smooth ride.

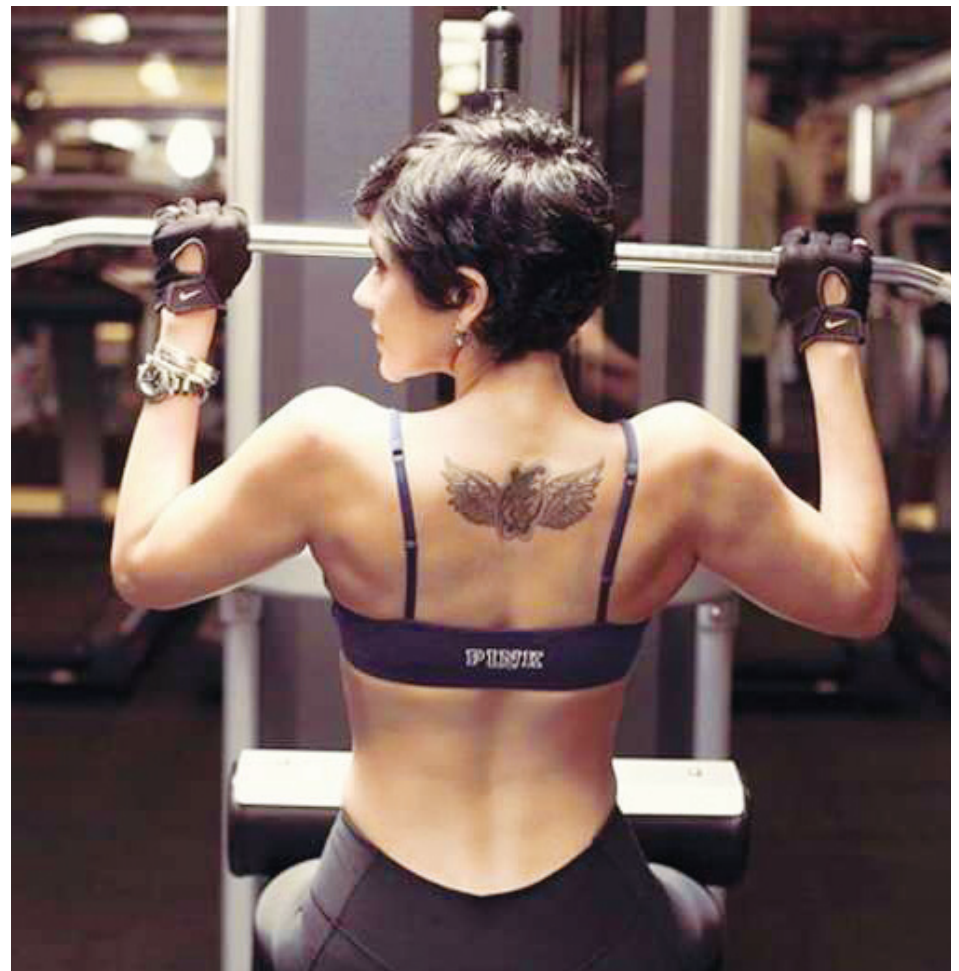
In 2010, the actor got into trouble when her Ek Onkar tattoo — that she got made on the back of her neck in 2004 — left some fringe groups fuming.

Mandira recalls, “It all started during the 2007 Cricket World Cup tournament. And people in Punjab [after noticing the tattoo on TV] were burning my effigies. I had to put an apology in newspapers, and things became calm for a while. But, a couple of years later, when I had worn a sari for an event in Ludhiana, some photographer clicked a photo and tried to incite things. Then around election time [in 2010], a criminal case was filed against me.” She adds that she felt bad for her parents who had to go through so much “as the apology was put in all vernacular papers in Punjab.”

It was then that she decided to cover it up in 2014. She says, “Although I found out later that there’s no case as such but I decided I’m not going to fight it now. If there are people who are narrow minded and having a problem with something like this, I wanted to get done with them.”

About its new version, she shares, “The central element is an African symbol that means ‘God is great’ and the wings symbolise: ‘now I am free’. Otherwise, whenever I used to go to Punjab, I had to hide my previous tattoo with a bandage or conceal it with makeup.” She also reveals that she went with tears in her eyes to the tattoo artist and asked him to cover it up.

Mandira maintains that it was



unfortunate that her beliefs were questioned and taken out of context. “The idea was never to hurt anyone’s sentiment. It’s my body and I am not disrespecting it in any way. The reason I got it in first place was because it meant [and still means] so much to me. Ek

Onkar [God is One] is a beautiful philosophy, and I thought there’s nothing more permanent in my life than this. My grandmother used to have it on her hand and it’s something I’ve grown up with since I was a child,” she says. *Source: HT*

Batti Gul Meter Chalu is entertaining, has substance: Yami Gautam

Yami Gautam says her next film Batti Gul Meter Chalu is entertaining and has a lot of substance.

“Batti Gul Meter Chalu is a social drama on the electricity issue faced by people in the country, especially in small towns,” said Yami.

“And given the kind of films that producer Prerna Arora (KriArj Entertainment) has been doing and what Shree Narayan Singh (director) has done with Toilet: Ek Prem Katha“... you can expect a very fine amalgamation of entertainment and a relevant social issue which has been talked about for the very first time,” she added.

The actor is excited to play a lawyer for the first time. “I think it is very interesting, quirky, entertaining and has a lot of substance at the same time. I am extremely happy to be working with the team. I play a lawyer in a film for the first time. So, I am very happy,” she said.

The film also features actors Shahid Kapoor and Shraddha Kapoor. *Source: IANS*

PRIYANKA CHOPRA TERMINATES CONTRACT WITH NIRAV MODI, NOT SUING HIM YET

Priyanka Chopra has decided to cut ties with billionaire diamond trader Nirav Modi’s brand following the news about the alleged banking fraud carried out by him. “In the light of recent allegations, Priyanka Chopra has chosen to terminate her contract with the Nirav Modi brand,” a spokesperson of Priyanka, who was the global brand ambassador for Nirav Modi, said in a statement issued on Friday.

As the news about the multi-crore scam involving Nirav Modi came to light earlier this month, a statement from the actor read that she was seeking legal opinion on her contract. There were also speculations that she is suing the brand for non-payment of dues. But her spokesperson denied this.

The termination news comes in the wake of after Kangana Ranaut and Bipasha Basu accusing Mehul Choksi-owned Gitanjali Group of breaching the contracts with them and not paying their dues.

Nirav Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi, along with the directors of the Nirav Modi and Gitanjali groups, are under investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for an alleged Rs 11,300 crore fraud on Punjab National Bank through illegal use of Letters of Undertaking and Foreign Letters of Credit to raise and roll over money.

Both Nirav Modi and Choksi are said to have left the country, along with their family members, in early January. *Source: IANS*





JENNIFER LAWRENCE ANGRY AT TABLOIDS CALLING HER ANTI-FEMINIST

Jennifer Lawrence on Wednesday blasted a controversy over a photo of her wearing a plunging black dress outside on a cold London day as sexist, ridiculous and “not feminism.”

The Oscar-winning star, 27, said in a Facebook posting that she was also “extremely offended” by what she called the “utterly ridiculous” reaction on social and mainstream media to the photo, taken as part of promotions for her upcoming movie *Red Sparrow*.

The picture, taken outdoors on a bitter winter’s day in London earlier this week, showed a bare-shouldered Lawrence wearing a black gown, while actor Jeremy Irons and three fellow cast members donned thick wool coats.

Many commentators saw the photo as a reflection of the pressure on women in Hollywood to look good, particularly given Lawrence’s previous outspoken criticism of the gender pay gap in the movie industry.

“True equality means either Jennifer Lawrence getting a coat, or Jeremy Irons having to pose for a photo call in assless chaps,” tweeted London journalist Helen Lewis.

Australian journalist Stephanie Peatling remarked on Twitter that it was “cold enough that the bloke actors have to wear coats and scarves to their press call and yet poor Jennifer Lawrence is wearing a small amount of fabric some might call a dress.”

Lawrence, one of the most sought-after actresses in Hollywood, was having none of it.

“That Versace dress was fabulous, you think I’m going to cover that gorgeous dress up with a coat and a scarf? I was outside for 5 minutes. I would have stood in the snow for that dress because I love fashion and that was my choice,” she wrote on Facebook.

“This is sexist, this is ridiculous, this is not feminism,” she added. “It’s creating silly distractions from real issues. Get a grip people!”

Red Sparrow, a thriller in which Lawrence plays a Russian spy, opens worldwide next week.

Source: Reuters



WHAT MADE RUTH WILSON TURN DOWN A ROLE IN A MARVEL MOVIE?

Actor Ruth Wilson has said that she once turned down a role from Marvel Studios as she found the character “boring”

The 36-year-old actor said she still looks forward to be a part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe and wants to play a “baddie” in a film.

“I did have an interview for a Marvel thing ages ago. They wouldn’t say what the part was, so I made a questionnaire for the two directors. ‘Is she a baddie?’ They said she was a bit of both. ‘Does she wear leather or latex?’ They said no. I was like, ‘EER-EEER!’” Wilson said, according to *FemaleFirst*.

“I said, ‘How many days filming is it?’ They said 14. I said, ‘14? That’s not very long... EER-EEER!’ So I said no. If you want to be in a Marvel movie, you’ve got to be a baddie or a superhero. Just being the girl on the side is boring. I’d be up for being a baddie,” she added.

The only time a Marvel movie has been directed by a duo is *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and *Captain America: Civil War*. Both films were helmed by Joe & Anthony Russo, who will return to direct *Avengers: Infinity War*. The forthcoming *Captain Marvel* movie will also be directed by a team - Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck.

Source: PTI

Lindsay Lohan attends Fashion Week wearing a hijab

Actor Lindsay Lohan, who has fielded rumours of having converted to Islam for months, was seen wearing a hijab at the recent London Fashion Week. Pictures of the star, who now lives in Dubai, have been doing the rounds online.

Before her appearance at the show, Lohan posted a live Instagram video in which she was learning to tie a hijab. “I think it needs (to be) a little bit more tighter in the (back). I don’t want it to come off and show too much,” she said.

She also spoke to the BBC about her new avatar. Lohan was once considered a sex symbol. “Fashion doesn’t always have to be so naked and can be adventurous and still beautiful, with a strong group of women behind it,” Lohan said.

In addition to the traditional attire, Lohan also wore halal makeup to the event. According to a post by halal/vegetarian/vegan makeup retailer *HawaCosmetics*, Lohan stopped by their booth and told them “how she’s into halal cosmetics and what she’s actually wearing on her face today was all halal!!!”

Lohan’s choice was met with mixed reactions online. One person on Twitter commented, “It amazes me how the western civilization sees wearing the hijab as an act of liberation and empowerment while women in Iran are removing their hijabs off as a protest, meaning the hijab is actually a sign of oppression in muslim countries.”

Another person replied to the BBC’s tweet by saying, “Since when did promoting oppressive articles of clothing become a thing? Especially when women take off their hijab’s in protest...seems counter-productive...”



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

International Women's Day (March 8) is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity.

International Women's Day (IWD) has been observed since the early 1900's - a time of great expansion and turbulence in the industrialized world that saw booming population growth and the rise of radical ideologies. International Women's Day is a collective day of global celebration and a call for gender parity. No one government, NGO, charity, corporation, academic institution, women's network or media hub is solely responsible for International Women's Day. Many organizations declare an annual IWD theme that supports their specific agenda or cause, and some of these are adopted more widely with relevance than others.

"The story of women's struggle for equality belongs to no single feminist nor to any one organization but to the collective efforts of all who care about human rights," says world-renowned feminist, journalist and social and political activist Gloria Steinem. Thus International Women's Day is all about unity, celebration, reflection, advocacy and action - whatever that looks like globally at a local level. But one thing is for sure, International Women's Day has been occurring for well over a century - and continues to grow from strength to strength.

Internationally, purple is a colour for symbolising women. Historically the combination of purple, green and white to symbolise women's equality originated from the Women's Social and Political Union in the UK in 1908. Purple signifies justice and dignity. Green symbolises hope. White represents purity, but is no longer used due to 'purity' being a controversial concept. The introduction of the colour yellow representing a 'new dawn' is commonly used to signify a second wave of feminism. Thus purple with green represents traditional feminism, purple with yellow represents progressive contemporary feminism.

When did it all start?

International Women's Day grew out of the labour movement to become a UN-recognised annual event.

The seeds of it were planted in 1908, when 15,000 women marched through New York City demanding shorter working hours, better pay and the right to vote. It was the Socialist Party of America who declared the first



National Woman's Day, a year later.

The idea to then make the day international came from a woman called Clara Zetkin. She suggested the idea in 1910 at an International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen. There were 100 women there, from 17 countries, and they agreed unanimously.

It was first celebrated in 1911, in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. The centenary was celebrated in 2011, so this year we're technically celebrating the 107th International Women's Day.

Things were made official in 1975 when the United Nations (UN) started celebrating the day and later set an annual theme. The first one (in 1996) was "Celebrating the past, Planning for the Future".

International Women's Day has become a date to celebrate how far women have come in society, in politics and in economics, while the



International Women's Day being marked in Tokyo last year as protesters gathered to march against the gender pay gap and sexual harassment. Pic courtesy: Rex Features



political roots of the day mean strikes and protests are often organised to raise awareness of continued inequality.

Clara Zetkin's initial idea for an International Women's Day had no fixed date and it wasn't formalised until a war-time strike in 1917 when Russian women demanded "bread and peace". Four days into the women's strike the Tsar was forced to abdicate and the provisional government granted women the right to vote. The date when the women's strike commenced on the Julian calendar, which was then in use in Russia, was Sunday 23 February. This day in the Gregorian calendar was 8 March - and that's when it's celebrated today.

How is Women's Day celebrated around the world?

International Women's Day is a national holiday in many countries including Russia, where the sales of flowers doubles during the three or four days around 8 March as men and women give flowers to their female loved ones and co-workers. In China, many women are given a half-day off work on 8 March, as advised by the State Council, although employers don't always observe the tradition.

In Italy, International Women's Day or la Festa della Donna is celebrated by the giving of mimosa blossom. The origin of this tradition is unclear but it is believed to have started in Rome after World War Two.

Located 35 kilometres from Dehradun, Mussoorie is a picturesque hill station in the Indian state of Uttarakhand. The hill station is located at the foothills of the Garhwal Himalayan ranges, and is also known by its nickname "The Queen Of Hills". The place is also known as the gateway to the "Gangotri and "Yamunotri" shrines. The best time to visit the place is between mid-March to mid-November as the rains during monsoons and cold during the winters make it pretty inaccessible.

Mussoorie was originally chosen by the British as a sanatorium, with the construction of the first European house dating back to the 1820s by Captain Young. Its landscape is thus dotted with prominent, grand, heritage structures of Colonial descent.

PLACES TO VISIT

Mall Road

The aforementioned carnival pretty much defines Mall Road. You start from the Library Chowk, which marks the beginning of Mall Road. With a public library established in 1843, just at the beginning of the thoroughfare and an ornate gazebo called Band Stand (built in 1850, it was the venue for jazz artistes and military bands during the Raj era) set on the corner for shoppers and trekkers, the road zigzags its way until the Tehri Road begins. It's a long road, which overlaps with areas such as Camel's Back, Landour or Kulri Bazaar, and is the most comfortable walk-through as compared to the steep slopes of a quaint Mussoorie a few kilometres away. There are endless shops selling clothes, utility items, candles, Tibetan teapots and wickerwork among others; gaming parlours keep kids entertained and photographers parade around with local costumes for you to pose in. Kulri Bazaar falls in the fringes of Mall Road. Once done with the commercial attractions, enter the premises of Central Methodist Church, dating from 1885, a stunning building in grey stone and white, adorned with arched doorways and angular roofs. Then you can take the ropeway to Gun Hill, the second highest peak in Mussoorie, instead of walking the 2km stretch up there.

Gun Hill

A strategic location during Colonial times, from where a cannon was once fired at noon everyday, Gun Hill boasts a great view of Dehradun and its surrounding ranges.

Camel's Back Road

Named after the hump-shaped rock formations, this road spreads out in an even, serpentine concrete path, twisting and turning alongside lush forests. The 3-km walk offers an uninterrupted quietude that one can usually only dream of. Horse rides and rickshaw services are available at the beginning of the route, both excellent options.

Landour

Landour is characterised by a gradual waning of Mall Road's joie de vivre and exemplifies the oft-heard aphorism, 'quiet of the hills'. The only stalls belong to vegetable and fruit vendors, along with an odd antique store or two, shops selling walking canes and shoemakers selling bespoke footwear. A spacious chowk, with the landmark Clock Tower Café towards the right, hints that there used to be a Clock Tower in Landour.

Landour has been a military cantonment since 1827 and was a health resort for wounded soldiers who were looked after by nurses, thus giving the main Landour cantonment its name, Sisters' Bazaar. Cosy houses appear cuddled up against the backdrop of dense pines and moss-laden cemented railings as you stroll towards Sisters' Bazaar.

Lal Tibba

The view of the postcard-perfect snow-capped peaks and the evanescent misty

MUSSOORIE: HOME IN THE HILLS



horizon will not fail to enchant. A lighthouse tower offers a telescope to get a closer look of the Himalayas, Banderpunch, Badrinath and Kedarnath. A word of advice: with monsoons come the leeches, so be covered and prepared if you can't avoid the season.

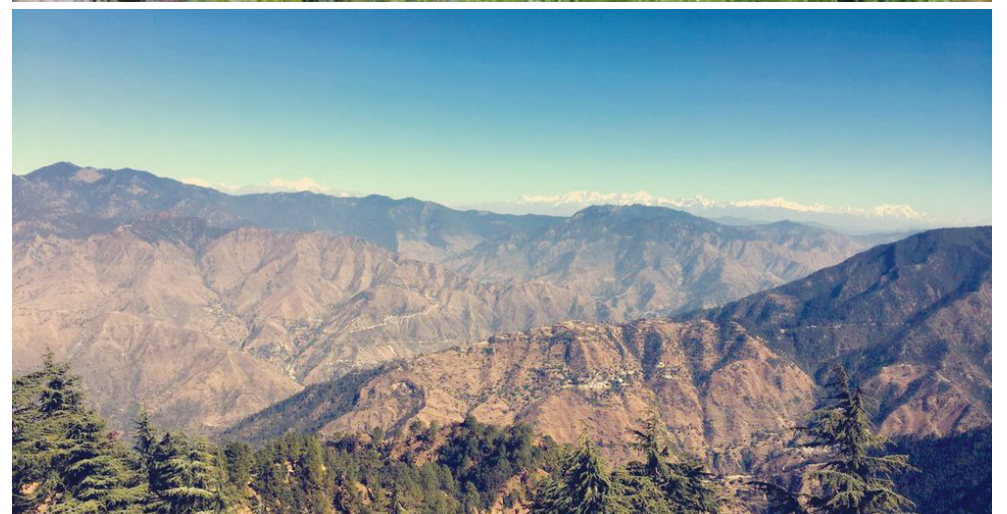
Hathipaon: Cloud End and Park Estate

Hathipaon is the hidden treasure of Mussoorie. Hathipaon is known for mainly two attractions: Cloud End and the Park Estate. Marking the end of Hathipaon, Cloud End is enveloped by woods and has several trekking trails. More significantly though, there is a fascinating in-house museum, which comprises memorabilia such as paintings, crockery and books, among other artefacts. Further up is Benog Wildlife Sanctuary, a part of Rajaji National Park, which offers a chance to spot rare Himalayan birds, such as the Red Billed Blue Magpie or the near-extinct Mountain Quail, which reportedly inhabit the area.

Kemty Falls

Kemty Falls is a magnificent waterfall and recreation area set in the lap of a green valley. It's a favorite hangout of local residents, who come to cool off in waterholes, have fun with relaxed boating activities and enjoy scenic picnics. A British officer established Kemty Falls in the 1830s as a place for the British Raj to hold tea parties. The waterfall's name is rumored to stem from the colloquial name of Camp Tea. Follow the walkways and bridges that lead from the falls' entrance to vantage points. Marvel as the milky-white water cascades down a cliff face before bouncing off rocks and into a manmade waterhole. Admire the verdant foliage that frames both sides of the waterfall. Listen to the invigorating sounds of the rushing water, which mingles with the excited cheering of visitors.

Mussoorie has a host of shopping options for keen buyers. Connected by the serpentine Mall Road, which is the busiest shopping area, you can make your way to Kurli Bazaar and Landour Bazaar to find the usual branded



stores and tiny shops selling trinkets and knick-knacks. Owing to its British legacy, the various antique shops become an interesting stop for those who treasure postcards, furniture, advertisements on tinned cans and

maps from that era. You will also find army memorabilia, books, silver jewellery as well as toys. Wooden items can be found at a bargain, and the famous handcrafted oak walking sticks make good gifts.

SKINCARE AND HAIRCARE: PRE AND POST-HOLI

The festival of colours of Holi can be a bit harsh for your beauty routine. While the colours damage your skin, harsh sun rays and chemicals present in colourful foams damage your hair.

Here are some of the tips to be followed for a complete beauty care to be performed before and after the playful celebration.

BEFORE-CARE TIPS

- To avoid the unwanted skin tanning and skin problems from your end, it's best to apply a sunscreen 20 minutes before stepping out of your house. It is advisable to use a sunscreen that contains an SPF higher than SPF 20. The built-in moisturisers will protect your skin from the sun as well as colours.
- You should not forget about your fingernails on Holi, according to Shikhee Agrawal, Head-Training, The Body Shop India. It is best to ensure attention to cuticles and nails, minding the sensitivity of these areas. Apply transparent nail varnish and petroleum jelly for protective coating.
- For hair care, slather your hair with oil. Holi colours can presumably damage your hair to a great extent. Applying Coconut or even a normal hair oil, half an hour before stomping out can cut back the damage scope to a nominal level. Also, it's best to tie your hair down rather than leaving them open during the festivities.
- Don't miss to apply lots of lip balm to lips to ensure the least harm. It would be better to apply a thick



layer of lip balm jelly generously over them so that the Holi colour does not get stuck to your mouth.

AFTERCARE TIPS

- Once all the celebration gets over, there comes the real problem of removing the colors from your face. Rinsing your face with clean water, followed by a hearty application of face lotion is suggested. It is important that all the impurity and toxic substances release out of your skin-pores. So it is suitable to use a cleanser containing less of chemical elements and more of natural ingredients like Tea Tree.
- Wash off the impurities and colours with a good hair shampoo, such as green tea one, having natural vitality to wash away the noxious substances from your hair. Also once you are done with the washing part, don't forget to apply conditioner.
- After, all the exposing to the sun, harmful hues and toxic elements flying in the air all throughout the day, it is important to apply a good and efficient eye cream full of vitamin E before dozing off to sleep. This will make you feel fresh in the next morning and will clear your dark circles and patches overnight.

Source: ANI



Beauty Benefits of Baking Soda

Baking Soda carries antibacterial, antifungal, antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties which balance the pH level of skin to make it smooth, soft and radiant and brings new freshness in the skin.

It is also a powerful medical tool effective at combating everything from colds to oral problems to skin issues when used for short periods. Apart from cooking and cleaning, baking soda also has amazing beauty benefits, which can help you to look best from head to toe.

Baking soda, also known as soda bicarb or sodium bicarbonate has so many uses, that it can be called a wonder ingredient. It has myriad uses at home, like cleaning certain surfaces, relieving problems of digestion, removing odour, treating rashes, itching and even stings.

Apart from these, baking soda can also be used for beauty treatments. Bicarbonate of soda, or baking soda, is known to prevent body odour. During the hot and humid season, body odour can form easily due to perspiration. To remove odour, make a paste of baking soda and water and apply under the arms. You can also add lemon juice to this paste.

Leave on for 10 minutes and wash off with water. Or, mix a little baking soda with your talcum powder and apply under the arms, or on the feet.

Baking soda is also very useful for oily skin and problems related to it, like blackheads, pimples and acne. Mix a little water with bicarbonate of soda and make a paste. Apply this on areas with blackheads and open pores. Wash off after 5 minutes.

This not only reduces oiliness but also cleanses the pores. It has a slight skin-peeling effect, which helps in the removal of blackheads. In other words, it helps exfoliation, removing dead skin cells. But, it has a mild and gentle effect and does not cause skin irritation or sensitivity. It can also be applied on acne prone skin, to help dry the eruptions.

FOOD CORNER

ROGAN JOSH

Ingredients

- 1 kg meat
- 1 cup mustard/refined oil
- 3 tsp red chili powder
- 3 tsp fennel powder
- 2 tsp ginger powder
- 2 tsp cumin powder
- 3 tsp brown cardamom powder
- 1 tsp asafoetida
- 4 pieces of green cardamom
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 cloves
- 1/3 tsp saffron - optional 1 cup curd salt to taste

Method

Wash the meat properly. Heat oil in a pressure cooker. Put cinnamon, bay leaves, green cardamom, cloves, 1 tsp salt, asafoetida, and meat together.



Fry meat till it turns brown.
Once browned, pour a cup of water.
Add the red chili powder and saffron into the meat.
Keep stirring for about a minute.
Mix the curd nicely in the mixer and pour it into the pressure cooker.
Keep on stirring till you get a reddish tinge.
Add 2 cups of water, fennel powder, ginger powder, and pressure cook for 2 minutes.
Check if the meat is tender. Peel and grind green and brown cardamom and add to the meat dish.
Finally sprinkle cumin powder and simmer for a minute and serve.

BANJARI GOSHT

Ingredients

- 150 gm oil, 600 gm mutton- cleaned and cut, 200 gm onions, 50 gm whole garam masala, 80 gm ginger-garlic paste, 25 gm red chilli powder, salt to taste, 15 gm turmeric, 20 gm coriander powder, 15 gm coriander seeds- roasted and crushed, 150 gm yogurt, 6 whole red chillies.

Method

Heat oil, add sliced onions and saute till they turn brown. Then add ginger-garlic paste, garam masala, red chilli powder, salt, turmeric, coriander powder.
Add yogurt and mutton.
Add coriander seeds and allow them to cook.
Garnish with pounded coriander seeds and whole red chillies.



WHO RECOMMENDS SCALING UP ACCESS TO TESTING, TREATMENT FOR TB

NEW DELHI (TIP): The World Health Organisation (WHO), in its latest set of guidelines for combating tuberculosis, has recommended scaling up access to testing and treatment for the disease, especially among groups who are at risk, such as children and people with HIV.

The recommendations also include two new shorter treatment regimens for latent TB infection (LTBI).

The move is aimed at expanding access to testing and care for people with LTBI as they may develop active tuberculosis in the future if they do not receive appropriate treatment.

The global health body said health practitioners have to prioritise testing and treatment of people living with HIV and children under the age of five who have been in contact with people who have TB.

"WHO has now identified HIV-negative children aged more than or equal to five years, adolescents and adults who are contacts of TB patients, as well as contacts of patients with multi-drug-resistant TB (MDR-TB), as additional high-risk groups," the global health body said.

It has recommended scaled-up testing for latent TB infection in both high and low TB-burden countries.

According to WHO guidelines, a tuberculin skin test or interferon-gamma release assay can be used to test for latent TB infection and active TB disease should always be ruled out before prescribing preventive treatment.

About the two new shorter treatment regimens for latent TB infection, WHO said, "Rifampentine and isoniazid weekly for three months may be offered as an alternative to six months of isoniazid monotherapy as preventive treatment for both adults and children."

"Rifampicin plus isoniazid daily for three months should be offered as an alternative to six months of isoniazid



monotherapy as preventive treatment for children and adolescents aged less than 15 years. These shorter regimens will help patients adhere to their treatment and complete it," the world health body said.

It is also releasing a mobile application to support programmatic management of latent TB infection.

Dr Tereza Kasaeva, the director of WHO's Global TB Programme said, "The new guidelines will help countries catalyse TB prevention and contribute to end the tuberculosis epidemic. Making sure everyone can obtain the treatment they need to prevent latent TB developing into active TB, will save lives and reduce suffering."

Scale-up of treatment to prevent has been slow and only 12 of the 30 countries with a high burden of HIV-associated TB, reported provision of tuberculosis preventive treatment among people living with HIV, said Dr Haileyesus Getahun, Coordinator for TB/HIV and community engagement, WHO Global TB Programme.

Only 13 per cent of the 1.3 million

eligible children received preventive treatment in 2016, Dr Getahun said.

According to a WHO report last year, India topped the list of seven countries, accounting for 64 per cent of the 10.4 million new tuberculosis cases worldwide in 2016.

India has last year pledged its commitment to eliminate tuberculosis by 2025, five years ahead of the global goal to reduce the number of such deaths by 90 per cent by 2030.

"We hope the new guidelines will disrupt the status quo in many countries and leapfrog global implementation of TB prevention efforts," Dr Getahun said.

It would also contribute to global and national responses in finding and reaching those TB patients not in care, through systematic screening and testing. The guidelines are to be used primarily in national TB and HIV control programmes, or their equivalents in ministries of health, and for other policy-makers working on TB and HIV and infectious diseases, WHO said.

Source: PTI



'MINI-TUMOURS' CREATED TO BATTLE CANCER

LONDON (TIP): Scientists have successfully grown mini versions of patients' tumours in a lab—and tested them against dozens of drugs to find the best possible treatment.

In the study published in the journal *Science*, researchers treated the lab-grown 'mini tumours' with a range of drugs.

They then looked to see how this compared to how successful treatment was in those patients.

The approach found a drug that had a chance of shrinking a patient's tumour in almost nine in 10 cases.

Drugs that did not work in patients also had no effect on the mini tumours. This suggests they could help predict when drugs would not work, researchers said.

The study, led by scientists at The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR) in the UK, was carried out in bowel and stomach cancers, and other cancers of the digestive system.

The results of the study did not change how patients were treated. However, the approach could be used in the future to help choose treatment.

According to Nicola Valeri, who led the study, the technique needed to be tested in large clinical trials, but that it "has the potential to help deliver truly personalised treatment." Mini tumours, also called organoids, are tiny balls of cancer cells grown in the lab.

They can be grown from a tissue sample (biopsy). Scientists take cells from a tumour and place them inside a gel, where they are free to grow as a 3D ball.

Researchers believe that growing the cancer cells in this way can more closely mirror how they behave inside the body.

They grew mini tumours from biopsies taken from 71 patients with advanced bowel, stomach or bile duct cancer that had spread to other parts of the body.

The researchers tested 55 cancer drugs on the mini tumours, allowing them to compare the results to how each patient's cancer responded to the treatment they were given.

Mini tumours were more effective at predicting when drugs would be effective than looking for gene faults (mutations) in the cancer cells' DNA.

The study focused on stomach and bowel cancer, but Valeri said that "the technique could be applied to a wide variety of cancer types".

Organoids have already been grown from a variety of different cancers, including liver, pancreatic and oesophageal.

Source: PTI

Wine may be good for oral health

LONDON (TIP): Sipping wine may be good for your oral health, say scientists who found that certain compounds in the drink can fend off harmful bacteria in the teeth and gums.

Traditionally, some health benefits of polyphenols have been attributed to the fact that these compounds are antioxidants, meaning they likely protect the body from harm caused by free radicals.

However, recent work indicates polyphenols might also promote health by actively interacting with bacteria in the gut. Plants and fruits produce polyphenols to ward off infection by harmful bacteria and other pathogens.

Researchers including M Victoria Moreno-Arribas from Institute of Food Science Research (CIAL) in Spain wanted to know whether wine and grape polyphenols would also protect teeth and gums, and how this could work on a molecular level.

The study, published in the *Journal of*



Agricultural and Food Chemistry, checked out the effect of two red wine polyphenols, as well as commercially available grape seed and red wine extracts, on bacteria that stick to teeth and gums and cause dental plaque, cavities and periodontal disease.

Working with cells that model gum tissue, they found that the two wine polyphenols in isolation - caffeic and p-coumaric acids - were generally better than the total wine extracts at cutting back on the bacteria's ability to stick to the cells.

Source: PTI

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FACEBOOK UNVEILS LOCAL NEWS ACCELERATOR FOR PUBLISHERS



SAN FRANCISCO (TIP): To help "metro newspapers" take their digital subscription business to a new level, Facebook has launched a local news accelerator for news publishers.

The \$3 million, three-month pilot programme titled "Journalism Project: Local News Subscriptions Accelerator" will begin in the US with 10-15 metro news organisations.

"We are working with Tim Griggs, a former New York Times executive and leading digital media consultant, to helm the programme's curriculum focused on understanding digital audiences and building marketing plans for digital subscriber acquisition," Campbell Brown, Head of News Partnerships at Facebook, said in a blog post on Wednesday.

Currently enrolled publishers include The Boston Globe, The Chicago Tribune, The Miami Herald, The Seattle Times and The San Francisco Chronicle, among others.

When it comes to the future of journalism, digital subscribers are critical to the long-term sustainability of the news business.

"We know Facebook is one part of the strategy to engage readers and ultimately drive paid subscriptions," added Brown, a former NBC and CNN anchor who joined Facebook to lead its news partnership team last year.

Participating publishers will convene in-person once a month, receive coaching from digital subscription experts and participate in weekly trainings covering a broad array of digital subscriptions marketing activities, including but not limited to the use of Facebook.

"Working with programme coaches, publishers will then design individual projects that tackle their unique business needs. Grant funding will empower each publisher to implement solutions that help elevate their subscription business," Facebook said.

"The Accelerator has been designed by publishers for publishers," said Jim Friedlich, Executive Director of The Lenfest Institute for Journalism. *Source: IANS*

Apple now using Google servers for storing iCloud data

SAN FRANCISCO (TIP): Apple has provided an acknowledgement for the first time that it is relying on rival Google's public cloud for data storage for its iCloud services, according to the latest iOS Security document that the Cupertino-headquartered giant updated on its website.

"The disclosure is fresh evidence that Google's cloud has been picking up usage as it looks to catch up with Amazon and Microsoft in the cloud infrastructure business," CNBC reported late Monday.

There have been some reports on Google's iCloud win in 2016 but Apple never provided confirmation.

"For years the document contained language indicating that iCloud services were relying on remote data storage systems from Amazon Web Services, as well as Microsoft's Azure," the report added.

The latest iOS Security document which gives a detailed explanation of the technology choices it makes to keep its users from getting hacked, the company disclosed it's using Google's Cloud-computing infrastructure to store iCloud data such as photos, files and data backup.

However, there is no indication if Apple is also relying on Google for additional computing work.

When phones powered by Google's Android software appeared on the market, Apple co-founder and then-CEO Steve Jobs was famously outraged by their similarity to Apple's competing iOS, according to CNET. *Source: IANS*



WHATSAPP TESTING FEATURE TO BLOCK SPAM MESSAGES

WhatsApp will start showing 'Forwarded Message' on spam posts

Whatsapp appears to be testing a new feature that lets users block spam messages. According to a report by WABetaInfo, WhatsApp will be able to identify spam messages that have been shared multiple times. The feature was spotted in the beta version of the app with the number 2.17.430. The report said WhatsApp is likely to roll out this new feature in the next update for Android and iOS.

At the moment, WhatsApp does block spam messages which have been forwarded over 25 times. Moving forward, the new feature will alert if a message has been forwarded more than 25 times through a label that reads "forwarded many times". And if a user needs to send a message to multiple contacts, WhatsApp recommends to use the Broadcast List feature, where only contacts that have your phone number in their address book will receive your message.

The messaging app has over 200 million active users in India, making it the biggest market for the Facebook-owned WhatsApp. Given the rise in the user base, there has been a lot of talk over the past few years over the increase in circulation of "spam" and "hoax" messages on the platform.

WhatsApp seems to be aware about the issue and has published tips for spotting spam and hoax messages. "If you've received spam from a contact, delete the message and do not click on any links or provide personal information. Tell the contact that the message they sent includes spam and point them to this WhatsApp safety page. You can also send reports of spam to WhatsApp by contacting us from inside the app," the company says.

By introducing the new feature, WhatsApp is continuing its quest to crack down on spam and hoax messaging being circulated on its messaging platform. It also gives a larger message among its users that WhatsApp is serious about tackling fraudsters from sending out fake emails, photos and videos in order to steal highly sensitive banking and personal information.



WhatsApp is reportedly testing a new feature that lets users block spam messages. The feature will be rolled out in the next update for Android and iOS

Moon to get 4G mobile network next year to stream HD videos to earth

The moon will get its first 4G mobile network next year, enabling HD video to be streamed from the lunar landscape to the earth, part of a project to back the first privately funded moon mission.

Vodafone Germany, network equipment maker Nokia and carmaker Audi are working together to support the mission, 50 years after the first American astronauts walked on the moon.

The companies are working with Berlin-based PTScientists, whose privately funded Mission to the Moon is due to launch in 2019 from Cape Canaveral on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket.

The 4G network will enable two Audi lunar quattro rovers to communicate and transfer scientific data and HD video while they approach and study NASA's Apollo 17 lunar roving vehicle that was used by the last astronauts to walk on the moon, Eugene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt, in December 1972.

The rovers cannot send the scientific data, HD video and photos they collect directly to earth because it takes too much power. Instead, they will use the 4G network to stream the data to a base station, which will beam it back to earth. Vodafone's network expertise will be used to set up the 4G network, while Nokia Bell Labs will create a space-grade ultra compact network that will be the lightest ever developed – weighing less than one kilo.

'Happy space suits' may prevent depression in astronauts

WASHINGTON (TIP): Scientists are developing 'happy space suits' that can monitor symptoms of depression in astronauts, and provide real time feedback to improve the atmosphere of the spacecraft as well as boost the occupants' mood.

Depression is a major problem in space, as astronauts can be adversely affected by factors like insufficient exercise, excessive exposure to light and lack of sleep, according to researchers from Florida Polytechnic University in the US.

The technology, called Smart Sensory Skin (S3), will detect emotional and physical deficiencies in astronauts through wireless sensors that will then send an immediate response to improve the "atmosphere", and adjust the astronauts' environment to fit their individual needs.



The adjustments include changes in temperature, light exposure, light colour, and oxygen levels.

"It's vital for astronauts to be mentally healthy during missions and right now there's no active, real-time solution to help them when they feel stressed or

anxious," said Arman Sargolzaei, professor of at FPU.

"This technology would provide them with immediate relief to their state of mind," Sargolzaei added.

The eventual product will incorporate the wireless sensors into astronaut clothing, so that physicians on Earth can also monitor the person's pulse rate, blood pressure and joint angles.

Similar technology already exists, but it is cumbersome, often uncomfortable, and data collection is passive.

This means the data must be reviewed by a physician and the user can only make appropriate actions after his or her recommendation.

The S3 will be a step forward by making it an active technology, also lighter and more ergonomic, increasing mission effectiveness by reducing distractions. *Source: PTI*

Moody's says India recovering from GST, DeMo; sees 7.6% growth rate

NEW DELHI (TIP): Moody's Investors Service said on Wednesday Indian economy is starting to recover from the negative impact of demonetisation and disruption caused by GST roll out, but kept GDP growth estimates unchanged at 7.6% for 2018.

In its global growth forecasts for 2018 and 2019, Moody's said the Budget for fiscal year beginning April 1 (2018-19) includes some measures to stabilise rural economy that was disproportionately hit by scrapping of high denomination 500 and 1000 rupee notes.

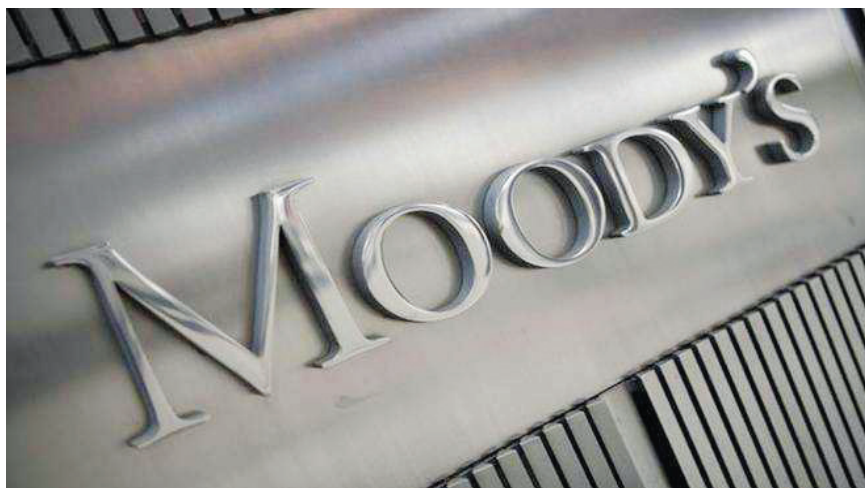
"There are some signs that the Indian economy is starting to recover from the soft growth patch attributed to the negative impact of the demonetisation undertaken in 2016 and disruption related to last year's rollout of the Goods and Service Tax (GST)," Moody's said.

It kept the growth forecast for India in the calendar year 2018 unchanged at 7.6% and for 2019 at 7.5%. "Among the other major emerging market countries, we have left our growth expectations for India and Indonesia unchanged."

In November last year, Moody's had raised India's sovereign rating for the first time in 13 years, saying growth prospects have improved with continued progress on economic and institutional reforms. The US-based agency had upped India's rating to Baa2 from Baa3 and changed its rating outlook to 'stable' from 'positive', saying the reforms would help stabilise rising levels of debt.

At that time, it had projected India's real GDP growth to moderate to 6.7% in the current fiscal year ending March 31 (2017-18), from 7.1% last year, and put the growth at 7.5% for 2018-19 fiscal.

"The 2018 budget includes some



measures that could stabilise the rural economy that was disproportionately hit by the demonetisation policy and is yet to recover," Moody's said today.

"As we have said before, the bank recapitalisation plan should also help credit growth over time, thereby supporting growth," the agency added.

Moody's Investors Service revised its global growth forecasts for 2018 and 2019, incorporating stronger than expected economic data and reflecting the likely pick up tied to additional US fiscal stimulus.

It revised real GDP growth forecasts upwards for the US, Japan, Germany, France, UK, South Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Turkey for 2018.

The rating agency raised its projections of real GDP growth for the US to 2.7% in 2018 and 2.3% in 2019, from a prior forecast of 2.3% and 2.1%, respectively. "These revisions account for stronger than expected momentum going into 2018 and additional fiscal

stimulus from the February 2018 congressional budget deal. The recent financial market selloff does not alter Moody's US and global growth outlook," it said.

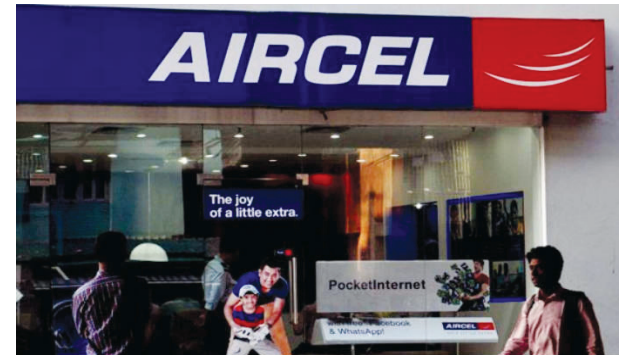
G20 economies will collectively grow 3.4% in 2018 and 3.2% in 2019, up from prior forecasts of 3.2% and 3.1%, respectively, Moody's says. "Notably, the euro area is exhibiting the best economic performance since the 2012 sovereign debt crisis."

Moody's said stronger inflationary pressures would lead to a steady convergence of the monetary policy outlooks of global central banks over the next two to three years.

The current "goldilocks" period of synchronised upward growth momentum, low inflation, low interest rates, steadily rising asset prices and historically low volatility will gradually wane, it said adding the recent return to financial market volatility is likely here to stay.

Source: PTI

AIRCEL FILES FOR INSOLVENCY AFTER 'NEGATIVE BUSINESS AND REPUTATIONAL IMPACT'



NEW DELHI (TIP): Telecom operator Aircel said on Wednesday it has filed for bankruptcy as the company has been facing "troubled times" in "highly financially stressed" industry.

In a statement in New Delhi, Aircel said that intense competition following the disruptive entry of a new player, legal and regulatory challenges, high level of unsustainable debt and increased losses had together caused significant "negative business and reputational impact" on the company.

"The Board of Directors of the Corporate Debtor today announced that they have filed an application under Section 10 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016 for undertaking Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process for the respective companies: Aircel Cellular, Dishnet Wireless, Aircel Ltd," the the statement said.

Sources said that the filing was made in National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) Mumbai.

The company statement also noted that efforts to merge wireless business with another operator did not yield any results and had ultimately lapsed in September 2017.

"Post detailed discussions with the financial lenders and shareholders, the company could not reach consensus with respect to restructuring of its debt and funding. Despite these discussions and the invoking of a Strategic Debt Restructuring scheme in January 2018...no agreement could be reached," Aircel said.

The company also said it believes that in the current circumstances, resolution process under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code is an "appropriate recourse".

"The Company would like to emphasise that CIRP is not a proceeding for liquidation, rather is a process to find best possible resolution for the current situation and that would be in the best interest of everyone (vendors, distributors, employees, etc) to protect and preserve the value of the company and manage the operations," it added.

Aircel said it will strive to provide uninterrupted service connectivity to its customers and sought their support in the "current difficult period".

Source: PTI

Nirav Modi's Firestar Diamond files for bankruptcy in US

NEW YORK (TIP): Firestar Diamond Inc., PNB fraud accused Nirav Modi's international jewellery business, has filed for bankruptcy in the US.

Firestar Diamond filed the Chapter 11 voluntary petition in the New York Southern Bankruptcy Court on Monday, according to the court filing. The bankruptcy case has been assigned to Judge Sean H. Lane and an "order for relief entered".

Firestar Diamond, which on its website states that its operations span the US, Europe, the Middle East, the Far East and India, blamed liquidity and supply chain challenges. It listed up to \$100 million in assets and debt, the court document said.

In its eight-page petition filed by its sole director Mihir Bhansali, Firestar Diamond said that in the judgement of the director, "it is desirable and in the best interests of the Company, its respective creditors, and other interested parties that a petition be filed by the company seeking relief under the provisions of Chapter 11 of Title 11 of the United States."

The court papers do not mention the name of its founder Nirav Modi or his uncle Mehul Choksi, both of whom are charged with the \$2 billion PNB fraud.

An email sent to the company's



HIGHLIGHTS

- Firestar Diamond Inc has listed assets and liabilities in the range of \$50 million to \$100 million, according to a court filing
- Punjab National Bank had earlier this month unearthed fraudulent transactions at one of its Mumbai branches

attorney Klestadt Winters Jureller remained unanswered.

On its website, Firestar Diamond states that it was founded in 1999 as a loose diamond supplier and expanded into jewellery manufacturing in 2001. It acquired Frederick Goldman diamond jewellery to get a private label and enter the US national retail market. Thereafter, it expanded US distribution and set up a Belgium unit in 2009. In 2010, the firm launched "Nirav Modi ultra-luxury diamond jewellery brand", it said.

The website did not provide ownership pattern of Firestar Diamond.

Modi, his uncle Mehul Choksi and firms linked to them are alleged to have defrauded Punjab National Bank (PNB) of close to \$2 billion (Rs12,717 crore). The jewellers and companies linked to them had allegedly colluded with PNB officers to obtain fake letters of undertaking (LoUs) to get loans from overseas branches of Indian banks, including Allahabad Bank, Axis Bank and UCO Bank.

The bankruptcy filing includes Firestar's A. Jaffe Inc. wedding jewellery affiliate and Fantasy Inc. affiliate, and estimates the numbers of creditors at between 50 to 99.

Australia recalls 2.3 million vehicles over airbag problems

SYDNEY (TIP): Australia announced the compulsory recall of 2.3 million vehicles on Wednesday due to problems with faulty Takata airbags that have caused at least 23 deaths worldwide.

The government intervention — one of the country's biggest-ever consumer recalls — follows consultations with affected manufacturers and industry stakeholders.

It affects vehicles made by Ford, GM Holden, Mercedes-Benz, Tesla, Jaguar, Land Rover, Volkswagen, Audi and Skoda. Similar action has taken place around the world.

"The compulsory recall will capture approximately 2.3 million vehicles that still have a defective airbag that needs replacement," said assistant treasurer Michael Sukkar.

"Absolute priority will be given to replacing alpha airbags, which pose an immediate and critical safety risk." Given the scale of the task, suppliers have until the end of December 2020 to progressively replace all defective airbags made by the Japanese group. A total of four million vehicles in Australia are affected. Some have already been voluntarily recalled by manufacturers, with Wednesday's action concerning those that have yet to be fixed.

An investigation by Australia's Competition and Consumer Commission found that Takata airbag inflators without a desiccant—a drying agent—or with a calcium sulphate desiccant had a design flaw.

It said that over time the ammonium nitrate propellant could degrade, potentially leading to the airbags being deployed in error.

Source: AFP

contd from Page 1

Trump calls for a comprehensive approach to Gun Laws

strategy that has stalled action in Congress. Giving hope to Democrats, he said he favored a "comprehensive" approach to addressing violence like the shooting at Florida school earlier this month, although he offered no specific details.

Instead, Trump appeared to support expanded background checks. He endorsed increased school security and mental health resources, and he reaffirmed his support for raising the age to 21 for purchasing some firearms.

Trump also mentioned arming teachers, and said his administration, not Congress, would ban bump-stock devices that enable guns to fire like automatic weapons.

"We can't wait and play games, and nothing gets done," Trump said as he opened the session with 17 House and Senate lawmakers.

"We want to stop the problems."

The president has previously backed ideas popular with Democrats, only to back away when faced with opposition from his conservative base and his GOP (Grand Old Party) allies in Congress. It was not clear whether he would continue to push for swift and significant changes to gun laws, when confronted with the inevitable resistance from his party.

Still, the televised discussion allowed Trump to play the role of potential dealmaker, a favorite for the president. Democratic lawmakers made a point of appealing to the president to use his political power to persuade his party to take action.

"It is going to have to be you," Senator Chris Murphy told Trump.

Trump's call for stronger background checks, which are popular among Americans, has been resisted by Republicans in Congress and the NRA.

Republicans have instead been leaning toward modest legislation designed to improve the background system already in place. Trump made clear he was looking for more and accused lawmakers of being "petrified" of the gun lobby.

"Hey, I'm the biggest fan of the Second Amendment," Trump said, adding that he told NRA officials it's time to act.

"We have to stop this nonsense."

The White House meeting came amid fresh public debate over gun laws, fueled by student survivors of the massacre at Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, who have been meeting with lawmakers on Capitol Hill. The school reopened yesterday for the first time since a Valentine's Day assault killed 17.

Gun legislation has lost momentum in Congress as Republican leaders showed little interest in pursuing stricter gun control laws.

Democrats said they were concerned Trump's interest may fade quickly. After the meeting, Murphy, D-Conn., told reporters: "I'm worried that this was the beginning and the end of the president's advocacy on this issue. The White House has to put some meat on the bones. The White House has to send a proposal to Congress." The White House is expected to reveal more on the president's plans for school safety this week, though it has not announced any plans.

That announcement will likely include goals for background checks and bump stocks, though whether age restrictions will be specifically addressed remains unclear, according to an administration official who sought anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Trump rejected the way Republican leaders in Congress have framed the debate, saying the House-backed bill linking a background check measure with a bill to expand gun rights by allowing gun owners to carry concealed weapons across state lines was not the right approach.

The concealed carry measure is the gun lobby's top legislative priority. But "you'll never get it passed," Trump told lawmakers, reminding them that Democratic senators, including some in the room, strongly oppose it.

Instead, he suggested Republicans should focus on the background check bill, then load it up with other gun control and safety measures.

Ever the marketer, Trump suggested that the leading bill adjusting the National Instant Criminal Background Check System-now known as "Fix NICS"-could use a new name. "Maybe you change the title, all right? The US Background Check Bill, or whatever," Trump said.

The hour-long meeting with lawmakers was reminiscent of one in January on immigration, when he told lawmakers to come up with a good bill and he would take the "heat" from critics.

That effort, however, ended in failure in Congress amid Trump's shifting views and priorities in the debate.

Among those at the White House yesterday were Sens. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., and Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., who are pushing their bill-which failed twice in the Senate after the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting-to broaden background checks to include pre-purchase reviews at online and gun show sales.

Trump asked Toomey if his plan to expand background checks included raising the minimum age for young people to buy an assault weapon. Toomey told the president it did not.

"You know why," Trump scoffed.

"Because you're afraid of the NRA."

The meeting came after one major retailer, Dick's Sporting Goods, announced it was halting sales of assault-style rifles and high-capacity magazines at all of its stores and banning the sale.

Meanwhile, US retail giant Walmart announced on Thursday that it was raising to 21 its minimum age to buy firearms and ammunition, the latest US company to recalibrate its stance on weapons after a deadly Florida school shooting.

"In light of recent events, we've taken an opportunity to review our policy on firearm sales. Going forward, we are raising the age restriction for purchase of firearms and ammunition to 21 years of age," it said in a statement.

(Source: AFP)

(Read the related story-Walmart raises to 21 minimum age to buy firearms and ammo)

Queen of silver screen Sridevi cremated with state honors

The couple's daughters, Jahnvi and Khushi, were by his side, said sources close to the family.

Sridevi, who gave hit Bollywood movies, including Sadma (1983), Nagina (1986), Mr. India (1987), Chaalbaaz (1989), Chandni (1989), Lamhe (1991), English Vinglish (2012) to name a few, died following accidental drowning in the bathtub in her hotel room in Dubai around 11 pm on Saturday, February 24 night, plunging millions of Indians and her fans all over the world in gloom as the news emerged the next morning.

The actor's body was brought to the crematorium in an open, flower-bedecked hearse.

The state honors for the actress, who was conferred Padma Shri in 2013, included draping her body in the Tricolor, elaborate arrangements by the Mumbai police, and a gun salute before the cremation.

According to a statement issued on behalf of the Kapoor and Ayyappan families, Sridevi's body was kept for three hours at the Celebrations Sports Club to enable people to pay their last respects.

The final journey commenced around 2 pm to the Vile Parle Seva Samaj Crematorium and Hindu Cemetery at SV Road in Vile Parle west, where it reached around 3.30 pm.

Meanwhile, several thousands of mourners, including celebrities, Bollywood personalities, politicians and business persons, grieved for the queen of the silver screen.

Since dawn of February 27, thousands of teary-eyed fans and admirers of the late actress, many carrying flowers, had started queuing up outside the Celebration Sports Club at Lokhandwala Complex for a final 'darshan' of their idol.

After the flower-bedecked body was brought to the club premises, a steady stream of celebrities started alighting from their vehicles and were whisked inside to pay their last respects.

Among the early callers were Rekha, Aishwarya Rai-Bachchan, Arbaaz Khan, Madhuri Dixit-Nene, Akshaye Khanna, Tabu, Farah Khan, Nitin Mukesh, Neil Nitin Mukesh, Vidya Balan, Sushmita Sen, Shabana Azmi, Javed Akhtar, Madhur Bhandarkar, Deepika Padukone, Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Jackie Shroff, Farhan Akhtar, Hema Malini, Jaya Bachchan, John Abraham, Sulabha Arya, Ajay Devgn and Kajol, among many others.

Earlier, in the past four days since her demise, the Kapoor household had witnessed a steady stream of visitors, including Rajinikanth, Kamal Haasan, Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan and Krishna Raj Kapoor, among others.

Most visitors on February 27 were sporting dark sunglasses to ward off the harsh early-summer glare, and carrying flowers or small bouquets. They embraced and consoled the bereaved family members, fleeting in from the main entrance and out from the other side as fans tried to catch a glimpse.

Sridevi's body was flown to Mumbai from Dubai, and from the airport was taken to the Kapoor residence in Green Acres at the posh Lokhandwala Complex.

Despite the late hour, several hundreds of fans kept vigil outside the residence when a motorcade, including an ambulance, reached there late on Tuesday.

For three days, the Dubai police authorities completed various legal and medical formalities before the body was finally handed over to the Kapoor family on Tuesday afternoon. (Source: IANS)

Indian government introduces law to impound properties of Fugitive Economic Offenders

The Union Cabinet meet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi also approved setting up of a National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) as an independent regulator for the auditors.

The proposed fugitive law aims to impound and sell assets of Nirav Modi-type escapees with a view to quickly recover dues. It also will apply to defaulters who have an outstanding of Rs 100 crore or more and have escaped from the country.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said the Bill, which will be taken to Parliament for approval in the second half of the Budget session beginning March 5, defines a fugitive offender as someone against whom a court has issued an arrest warrant for a scheduled offence and who leaves or has left India so as to avoid criminal prosecution, or refuses to return to India to face trial.

The new law is different from the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, which also provides for confiscation of assets of economic offenders, he said.

Under PMLA, only profit of crime is confiscated and that too upon conviction. The new law extends to all assets irrespective of whether it is acquired as a result of crime or not, he said. "This is triggered by the offender being a fugitive."

"A trial of fugitive will never be complete," he said, reasoning why confiscation of assets has been provided for. The new law will apply "the moment warrant is issued (and) the court decides the man is not submitting," he added.

It provides for an application being made before a special court for a declaration that an individual is a fugitive economic offender; attach and confiscate his properties in India and abroad, including benami property, and disposing them off to recover dues. It provides for disentanglement of the fugitive economic offender from defending any civil claim.

"If at any point of time in the course of the proceeding prior to the declaration, however, the alleged Fugitive Economic Offender returns to India and submits to the appropriate jurisdictional Court, proceedings under the proposed Act would cease by law," an official statement issued after the Cabinet meeting said.

The Bill has been proposed to address the lacunae in the present laws and lay down measures to deter economic offenders from evading the process of Indian law by remaining outside the jurisdiction of Indian courts.

The Bill makes provisions for a Court ('Special Court' under the Prevention of Money-laundering Act, 2002) to declare a person as a Fugitive Economic Offender.

The law, though it was announced in the Budget for 2017-18, has been hastened after Nirav Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi allegedly defrauded state-owned Punjab National Bank (PNB) of Rs 12,700 crore and left the country and are refusing to cooperate with law enforcement agencies.

The new law will allow quicker recovery of dues through a special court from such absconding offenders.

"In the last Budget, there was an announcement that the government bring law to confiscate assets of fugitives under economic offences. That has been approved by (the) cabinet today," Jaitley said.

He said the law will apply to new and old cases of persons who have fled the country to avoid prosecution.

All assets, not just proceeds of crime, will be confiscated of an offender fleeing the country, he said, adding that offender cannot pursue any civil case in the country.

"There have been several instances of economic offenders fleeing the jurisdiction of Indian courts, anticipating the commencement, or during the pendency, of criminal proceedings. The absence of such offenders from Indian courts has several deleterious consequences -- first, it hampers investigation in criminal cases; second, it wastes precious time of courts of law, third, it undermines the rule of law in India," the statement said.

Most such cases of economic offences involve non-repayment of bank loans thereby worsening the financial health of the banking sector in India. The existing civil and criminal provisions in law are not entirely adequate to deal with the severity of the problem and so the new law provide an effective, expeditious and constitutionally permissible deterrent to ensure that such actions are curbed.

The jurisdiction of NFRA for investigation of Chartered Accountants and their firms would extend to listed companies and large unlisted public companies, the thresholds for which shall be prescribed in the Rules. The Central Government can also refer such other entities for investigation where public interest would be involved. (With inputs from PTI)



Shree Ganeshaya Namah

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

WEEKLY HOROSCOPE MARCH 5 - MARCH 11, 2018

Aries:

Ganesha says with your restored and enhanced perception of life you will take it easy, be relaxed, a bit laid-back too. You are happy and optimistic and take time away from work with your lover / social outings with friends, children and parents. You find joy in building and maintaining valuable partnerships and have a gentle loving attitude which helps foster intimate bonds. It is not all as rosy as it sounds and you could face hurdles, setbacks and delays coupled with sluggish funds and unexpected expenses.

Taurus:

There has been a steadily increasing awareness of the importance of relationships in your life for the past period. So, a further strengthening and bonding, at work and at home, can be achieved through mutual care and respect. Strife and friction, when they occur, should be tactfully and diplomatically handled. As we all know, peaceful solutions will lead to greater growth and progress. Control your ego and allow wiser counsel to prevail.

Gemini:

You are determined to sustain the growth you have achieved and even build further on it. This is an action-packed period as you find your hands full at work, much more than you can handle. The rewards are immediate and, buoyed, you push ahead frenetically. This could lead to a burnout, causing more harm than good. So, use available resources judiciously to avoid such an eventuality. Spending time in the company of small children / pets and on hobbies / leisure pursuits could energize you.

Cancer:

The hectic work situation slows down to some extent in this period. You are satisfied with the way your projects have turned out and now you feel relaxed enough to spend time with your loved ones. Home matters occupy your mind and you may even delve deep into the history of your family. Family trees, older relatives, extended family, visits to the ancestral home, even taking shock of ancestral property are some of the ways the current trend may manifest in your life.

Leo:

You now allow yourself to become more relaxed and enjoy a "chilled out" time, as they say, with your loved ones. The married may want to renew their marriage vows or go on a second honeymoon. This intensely passionate time also affects your money angle. So, get your account books out and keep track of expenses. You do have to pay for all your indulgences and so a tab on expenses will be prudent. It may be a good idea to avoid any new undertakings at this time.

Virgo:

Having all aspects of your life running smoothly like the well-oiled wheels of an engine, you feel content as acknowledgement and appreciation pour in for your brilliant performances at work. You now enjoy an enhanced stature in society, and this is very gratifying, especially if you look back at the hard work and sacrifices you have made to get there. But now there is a complete contrast, a veritable volte-face, as you move away from the absolute grind of the past period to the present mood of pure elation.

Libra:

Your confidence as well as the caring side of your nature will be at an all-time high as you give and get love and affection in equal measure from your family and loved ones. The past period has given you some exceptionally special moments, heart-warming and thoroughly enjoyable, with your spouse / lover and children / parents. The temptation of going overboard and showering them with the most precious gift of all - your time - will fill you with pure joy and happiness.

Scorpio:

Happiness and contentment come into your personal life through the blessings of Ganesha. There is closeness and warmth in all your relationships leading to greater pleasure and cheer. Your spouse / lover showers you with love and you reciprocate. It is a lucky period in which unexpected profits flow in and allow you to enjoy the fruits of your labor. There is exultation and exuberance in your life as material success pale in front of the ecstasy of soul-stirring relationships.

Sagittarius:

Professional pursuits hold your interests. You set gargantuan goals and expect to achieve them. Each and every aspect of your life is at its peak and fills you with a heightened sense of self-worth. There are monetary gains too. Your accomplishments fill you with pride and you are on a roll but the tendency to neglect intimate relationships, children and health issues could gain cause roadblocks in your progress.

Capricorn:

You will experience true inner peace and contentment this period. You have worked hard, conscientiously and consistently, and the results have been superlative; you were absolutely deserving of the awards and rewards that come your way. Your performance at the work place has been stellar, to say the least, but now you look at issues far removed from the workplace. You are less fiery and ambitious and are more complacent and calm in your interactions.

Aquarius:

You will be closer to people now and enjoying the new bonds you have forged in the past period. You look forward eagerly to widen your personal horizons and the scope of your interactions and relationships. All kinds of gains have come to you but now a completely different dimension of connections, communications and collaborations opens up. Geographical / physical boundaries and limitations are no longer a hindrance as a fresh universe virtually opens up before you as you make full use of the latest networking tools.

Pisces:

Ganesha gives you just about everything that you wish for. But your focus will continue to remain on your work. A strong network of friends / relatives, in-laws is your lifeline as you immerse yourself completely into professional commitments. Your efforts are scintillating, sparkling and truly divine. You plumb the depths of your inner being to bring forth creations of supreme innovation, novelty and originality. This is an excellent time for those in artistic professions.



Special Report by
Prabhjot Singh in
PyeongChang

23rd Olympic Winter Games at PyeongChang end on a bright note, as Norway heads tally with a record number of medals



CONTD FROM PAGE 1

The 2018 Olympic Games had many highs and lows as politics took the center stage at the start with the North Korea joining South Korea in fielding a unified Women's Ice Hockey team besides sending a strong contingent, including cheer leaders, besides a high-powered political delegation.

While many participating nations, including Norway, Canada and the hosts Korea had every reason to cheer about, it was not so sweet for the US, both on sports and political fronts. Its athletes could not perform that well as was expected and politically, the North Korean presence in the Games at every forum was perhaps a thorn in its flesh.

While the Vice-President of the United States, Governor-General of Canada, Prime Ministers of Japan, Norway and the Netherlands witnessed the opening ceremony, it was Ivanka Trump, daughter of the US President, who was cynosure of all eyes at the closing ceremony.

Participation of North Korea may have stalled the threats of a global nuclear confrontation emanating from the war of words between the US and North Korea, the situation threatened to relapse into pre-Olympic times as the US insisted on imposing strong sanctions against the North Koreans.

There was, however, a bright spot when North Korea offered to have a dialogue with the United States. How the Trump Administration reacts to the offer will be known in coming days.

Whatever be the political outcome of the barbs of the World leaders, the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympic Games were not without controversies. Starting with suspension of the Russian Olympic Committee and imposition of ban on 50-odd Russian athletes for being part of a concerted campaign to evade Doping control violations during the 2014 Olympic Winter Games at Sochi, two Russian athletes, including a bronze medalist in mixed Curling, were banned after testing positive for banned substances.

The Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), that has its headquarters in Montreal, Canada, had set up two special Commissions in PyeongChang that heard appeals of 50-odd banned Russian athletes and rejected all upholding the right of the International Olympic Committee to decide the eligibility criteria for participation in the Games.

The Games were perhaps the coldest after Lillehammer. The last two editions - Sochi (2014) and Vancouver (2010) were held in a little warmer weather than freezing cold and windy PyeongChang.

Norway finished at the top of the medals tally.

The 39 medals won by it is an all-time Winter Games record by any country. With 14 gold medals, they matched Germany's first place totals, and by virtue of another 14 silver and 11 bronze, the Games of PyeongChang 2018 belonged to Norway.

Unsurprisingly, the Norwegians were most prolific in cross-country skiing - the nation's top medal contributor with 14 - led by Marit Bjørgen. She took five in Korea (two gold, a silver, and two bronze) for 15 overall in her career. The 37-year-old is the most decorated winter Olympian of all-time, and rightly it was her win in the very last event at PyeongChang that lifted Norway over Germany.

The official Olympic medal table ranks countries in order of most gold acquired. To that end, Germany had top spot in its grasp but for conceding a shorthanded goal to Olympic Athletes from Russia in the men's hockey final with less than a minute to go. The Russian team went on to win the hockey final, leaving Germany second in the medal standings.

With 14, Germany tied Norway, and Canada's record from Vancouver 2010 for most gold medals won by a country at a single Winter Games. They added 10 silver and seven bronze medals for 31 overall. Massive contribution to the German cause came from Francesco Friedrich (bobsleigh) and Natalie Geisenberger (luge), each winning two gold medals.

Canada has every reason to be pleased with its performance here as it also has a record haul of medals. Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir team were the darlings of the Canadian contingent with their golds both in Team Figure Skating and Ice Dancing. Kim Boutin with three medals became the only Canadian



President of the International Olympic Committee Thomas Bach, President of South Korea Moon Jae-in, North Korea's delegation leader Kim Yong Chol and Ivanka Trump, senior White House adviser, attend the closing ceremony.
Photo /courtesy Reuters



Exquisite Fireworks

Photo/ Courtesy CNN



Bye, Bye 2018 Winter Olympic Games at PyeongChang

athlete in PyeongChang to end with three medals, a silver and two bronze medals.

The Netherlands won all its 20 medals (eight gold, six silver and bronze) in speed skating (16 on the big oval, and four in short track). Of note, Jorien ter Mors made the podium in both disciplines, winning gold in the women's 1000m on the oval, and joining her short track teammates to take the 3000m relay bronze.



Will meet again in 2022 in Beijing

Photo / courtesy Olympic

The South Koreans had their best-ever medal haul at the Olympic Winter Games with 16 (five gold, seven silver, four bronze). As expected, Korean speed skaters were most effective winning 13 of the medals, seven long track, six in short. In the latter Choi Minjeong was a double gold medalist.

As mentioned earlier, Japan, the host of the next Olympic summer Games in 2020, did well to win 13 medals (four gold, five silver, four bronze). It is perhaps the best-ever show by Nippon as it was helped by Yuzuru Hanyu becoming the first back-to-back Olympic men's figure skating champion since American Dick Button did it in 1948 and 1952.

Athletes from the United States may not like to remember these Games for their laurels. Though they dethroned their neighbors and arch rivals Canada in women's Ice Hockey final in a shoot out, their medal count down from 28 four years ago to 23 in Korea. Nonetheless, nine gold medals cannot be discounted, including two Olympic titles that Canada held since Turin 2006: men's curling and women's hockey.

Though the Russians remained in spite of controversies throughout the Games, they had something to cheer about too.

At these Games their biggest highlight by far was the women's figure skating showdown between Alina Zagitova and Evgenia Medvedeva. The two teens finished first and second, respectively, with Zagitova becoming the second youngest Olympic women's figure skating champion at 15 years and 281 days, just 26 days older than Tara Lipinski of the United States who still holds that record. The Olympic Athletes from Russia leave Korea with 17 medals.

They had requested the IOC for permission to participate in the closing ceremony with Russian flag. The Russians were allowed to compete here as a neutral team and the IOC flag under the banner of Olympic Athlete Russia. Their request to participate in closing ceremony with Russian flag was, however, turned down and the IOC reiterated with the suspension.

Arguably the most impressive individual performance of PyeongChang belonged to Ester Ledecka. The Czech Olympian shocked the winter sports world by winning the women's super-G on skis reportedly borrowed from American Mikaela Shiffrin (herself a gold medalist in the giant slalom). Primarily a snowboarder, Ledecka doubled her golden tally taking the women's parallel giant slalom, becoming the first woman to win gold in two different sports at one Olympic Games. Hers were the only two gold medals for the Czechs.

Some non-traditional winter sports countries often manage to find one athlete who can dominate a particular discipline. For the Brits, that's Lizzy Yarnold. The skeleton racer repeated as Olympic champion, in the process becoming the nation's first winter athlete to win two Olympic gold. Britain also saw its first-ever winter double podium with Laura Deas delivering skeleton bronze.

Martin Fourcade won a hat-trick of gold medals in biathlon. The most impressive athlete on the planet in this discipline, the Frenchman has been on top of the podium five times (a French Olympic record) counting a double gold at Sochi 2014. He's now up to seven Olympic biathlon medals at the age of 29.

Other notable national achievements included New Zealand and Spain ending winter medal droughts dating back to 1992, while Hungary ended an even longer wait going back to 1980 by taking the 5000m short track relay gold.

Staying with short track, Italy's Arianna Fontana became the most decorated Olympic speed skater in her discipline with three more podiums taking her to eight, and Belarus' Darya Domracheva added to her illustrious career becoming the first woman to win four Olympic gold medals in biathlon.

India's two-member contingent returned home without a medal. Shiva Keshavan finished 34th in Luge while Jagdish Singh in cross country skiing was placed 103rd in a field of 119.

In all six new nations, including Malaysia, made their debut in Olympic Winter Games here. Besides, there were at least half a dozen athletes who earned the distinction of representing their countries both in summer and winter editions of Olympic Games. -

Courtesy PTC News

Pakistan says ready for mediation between Afghanistan govt and Taliban

ISLAMABAD (TIP): Pakistan on March 1 said it was ready for mediation between the Afghan government and the Taliban as it extended support to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's political process in the war-torn country.

Speaking at the second Kabul Process conference, Ghani yesterday said that his government was ready to recognise the Taliban as a political group and offered unconditional talks with the militant group to "save the country".

The Afghan Taliban are a political entity and Pakistan supports the dialogue between the Afghan government and the Taliban, Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif told journalists here.

"The talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government are actually discussions between two political forces, and Pakistan will support it...Pakistan is also ready for one-on-one mediation with the Afghan Taliban," he said.

He said Pakistan wants peace and stability in the neighbouring country, while stressing that there was no military solution to the Afghan conflict.

The foreign minister also asked Washington to strike a balance in its policy towards South Asia if it was interested in having a dialogue between Pakistan and India.

"The US can have an interest in Pak-India discussions, but before that it should create



some balance in its South Asia policy," he said.

He also talked about the so-called "institutional interests" in Pakistan and said that practice of portraying interests of institutions as the greater national interest "will also be changed soon".

Asserting that Pakistan will frame its foreign policy keeping in view the national interests, Asif said, "We will not sacrifice our own interests for the protection of the

interests of the United States."

"The effects of the 80s and the Musharraf era still exist, Pakistan will not make the same mistakes now to keep American interests above its own interests," he said.

He was referring to the military governments of General Zia-ul Haq and General Pervez Musharraf that allied with the US respectively in 1980s and after 9/11 to support it against erstwhile USSR and terrorism. (PTI)

Pakistan Hindu lawmaker moves court after prevented from taking oath

PESHAWAR (TIP): A Hindu lawmaker in Pakistan has moved the court after he was prevented from taking oath in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly for his alleged role in the murder of a Sikh legislator in 2016.

Member of the Provincial Assembly-elect Baldev Kumar, who is in jail in the murder case of Sikh lawmaker Sardar Soran Singh, moved the Peshawar High Court against the Speaker, treasury and opposition members of the provincial assembly for contempt of court.

In his petition, Kumar prayed that Senate elections which are due on March 3 should be stopped until his swearing in ceremony.

The petitioner further claimed that he was deliberately maltreated in the Assembly Hall on February 27.

Arbab Jehandad Khan, a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Member of the Provincial Assembly, threw his shoe at Kumar which landed close to him while some other members of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf threw copies of the assembly agenda towards Kumar. (PTI)

German captured by security forces in Afghanistan: local official

KABUL (TIP): An Afghan official says special forces have captured a foreign fighter claiming to be German during a raid on the Taliban in southern Helmand province.

The Defense Ministry's spokesman, Dawlat Waziri, said on March 1 that the Afghan commandos captured the man, whose name was not released, along with two other Taliban fighters in a nighttime raid earlier this week in Helmand's Gereshk district.

He says the special forces confiscated Kalashnikov automatic rifles and several grenades during the raid.

Helmand Governor Hayatullah Hayat says the suspected German had a long beard and wore a black turban. He couldn't speak either Dari or Pashto, the two main languages in Afghanistan. German authorities had no immediate comment. German fighters are known to have joined the Taliban and other militant groups in the past. (AP)

Nepal to have new President on March 13

KATHMANDU (TIP): Nepal will hold presidential election on March 13 to elect the new president who will succeed the Himalayan nation's first woman President Bidhya Devi Bhandari.

Though the president's term is for five years, the election this time is being held after two-and-a-half years as the country is implementing full federalism under the new Constitution, bidding farewell to the old centralized political system. The Election Commission announced the date for electing the country's third president after its officials yesterday held consultations with the government and various political parties. The EC has fixed March 7 for the nomination of candidates and the polling will be held on March 13. The vote counting will begin immediately after the polls on the same day.

A candidate must receive a majority of the 884 votes — 334 votes of parliament members and 550 of provincial assembly members — to get elected to the post. (PTI)

Afghanistan's Ghani offers peace talks with Taliban 'without condition'

KABUL (TIP): Afghan President Ashraf Ghani offered recognition of Taliban insurgents as a legitimate political group on Wednesday as part of a proposed political process that could lead to talks aimed at ending more than 16 years of war.

The offer, made at the start of an international

conference aimed at creating a platform for peace talks, adds to a series of signals from both the Western-backed government and the Taliban suggesting a greater willingness to consider dialogue.

Ghani proposed a ceasefire and a release of prisoners. He also said he would be ready to accept a review of the constitution as part of a pact with the Taliban, who have so far refused to accept direct talks with the government in Kabul.

"The government offers peace negotiations to the Taliban without any conditions," Ghani said in opening remarks to the conference attended by officials from around 25 countries involved in the so-called Kabul Process.

The comments represented a significant shift for Ghani, who in the past has regularly called the Taliban "terrorists" and "rebels" although he has also offered to talk with parts of the movement that accepted peace.

The Taliban, fighting to restore Islamic rule after their 2001 ouster by US-led troops, have offered to begin talks with the United States but have so far refused direct talks with Kabul. It was unclear whether they would be prepared to shift their stance, despite growing international pressure.

Ghani said a political framework for peace negotiations should be created with a ceasefire and the Taliban recognised as a legitimate political group with an official political office. In return, the movement would have to recognise the Afghan government and respect the rule of law.

In addition, Taliban prisoners could be released and their names removed from international blacklists, while security arrangements could be made for Taliban agreeing to join a process of reconciliation. Former fighters and refugees could be reintegrated and provided with jobs.

The United States last year stepped up its military assistance to Afghanistan, notably through a sharp increase in air strikes, with the aim of breaking a stalemate with the insurgents and forcing them to the negotiating table. (Reuters)



Bangladesh court extends bail for Khaleda Zia until March 13

DHAKA (TIP): A court in Bangladesh today extended the bail of imprisoned ex-prime minister and main opposition BNP chief Khaleda Zia until March 13 in a graft case, a day after the High Court deferred the judgement on a separate bail plea in a corruption case, media reports said.

The 72-year-old three-time former prime minister was jailed for five years on February 8 in connection with the embezzlement of 21 million taka (about \$250,000) in foreign donations meant for the Zia Orphanage Trust, named after her late husband Ziaur Rahman, a military ruler-turned-politician.

The Dhaka Special Judge's Court-5 set March 13 as the date for the next hearing of arguments in the Zia Charitable Trust graft case and extended the bail of Zia, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chief, until then, bdnews24 reported.

"The court has set March 13 and March 14 for the next two days of arguments. Zia's bail has been extended until March 13," her lawyer Nuruzzaman Tapan was quoted as saying in the report.

Yesterday, the High Court deferred the judgement on her bail petition, saying it would decide after receiving necessary papers from the lower court which sentenced her to five years in jail this month. The Zia Charitable Trust graft case, filed in August 2011, accuses four persons including Zia of abusing power to raise funds for the trust from unknown sources.

The three others are: Harris Chowdhury, political secretary of then prime minister Zia between 2001 and 2006; Ziaul Islam Munna, Assistant Private Secretary (APS) to Harris; and Monirul Islam Khan, APS of former Dhaka city mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka. The corruption case is one of dozens pending against Zia, who has been a rival to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for decades.

The charges against Zia had led to her boycotting polls in 2014, which triggered widespread protests at the time.

Currently, 34 cases are pending against Zia in various courts across the country, including the Zia Orphanage Trust and Zia Charitable Trust graft cases, the report said. The BNP has claimed that the cases are politically-motivated to keep its party chief out of the national elections, set for December. (PTI)





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