

Trump to declare national emergency to build border wall: Democrats say "will challenge the move in the Supreme Court"



President Trump is adamant on building the wall
(File photo)

WASHINGTON, DC(TIP): US President Donald Trump will sign an executive order declaring a national emergency, which will empower him to fund the construction of a massive wall along the US-Mexico border to prevent illegal immigrants from entering the country and curb drug smuggling.

The move would help Mr. Trump get \$5.6 billion for the construction of the wall that, he has asserted, is essential for national security.
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Terrorist Attack in J & K kills more than 40 Security Personnel

Many injured; worst terror strike since Uri

**India withdraws Most Favored Nation status given to Pakistan
United Nations and US condemn the attack**

Police say the 21-year-old suicide bomber driving the explosive-laden vehicle was Adil Ahmad from Kakapora in Pulwama who joined the JeM in 2018

SRINAGAR (TIP): At least 40 CRPF personnel were killed in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district on February 14 (Thursday) when a Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorist rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into the bus they were travelling in, one of the worst terror strikes in the state in recent years, officials said. More than 2,500 Central Reserve Police Force personnel, many of them returning from leave to rejoin duty in the Valley, were travelling in the convoy of 78
contd on Page 20



The scene of explosion

67 US lawmakers attend Capitol Hill reception for new Indian Ambassador Shringla

WASHINGTON (TIP): In a show of unprecedented bipartisan support, 67 lawmakers from both chambers of the US Congress attended a Congressional reception on Capitol Hill Feb 7 for new Indian Ambassador Harsh Shringla. Among the attendees at the invitation-only reception were TV Asia chairman and CEO, Padma Shri H R Shah,

contd on Page 4



At the Congressional reception. From left, Santosh Jha, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of India, Washington, DC; Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI); Padma Shri H R Shah, TV Asia chairman and CEO; Sanjay Panda, India's Consul General in San Francisco; Harsh Shringla, India's newly-appointed Ambassador to the US; Congressman Frank Pallone (D-NJ) and one of the co-founders of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans; TV Asia chairman and CEO Padma Shri H R Shah and Sandeep Chakravorty, India's Consul General in New York

3 Indian Americans convicted in Texas in multi-million money laundering scheme

DALLAS (TIP): Six people were found guilty in Laredo, Texas, by the federal jury for their involvement in a two-year multi-million-dollar black market peso exchange money laundering scheme.

Out of the six, three are Indian Americans: Ravinder Reddy Gudipati, Harsh Jaggi and Neeru Jaggi. All three are from Laredo, Texas, and were convicted on February 12, following a five-week jury trial.

Harsh Jaggi was convicted on two counts of money laundering and Neeru Jaggi was convicted on one count of money laundering. Gudipati was convicted on two counts of money laundering, along with other counts. The three along with their other accomplices were a part of a money laundering scheme where money obtained from the sale of drugs in the United States was laundered through businesses in Laredo. This was done in order to return the proceeds to Mexican drug dealers.

From 2011 to 2013, the accused helped to move millions of dollars derived from the sale of drugs throughout the United



States to Laredo. The modus operandi involved moving US dollars by couriers via cars, commercial buses, commercial planes and also a private plane. The money was transferred in heat sealed packs, uneven rubber-banded money stacks or even loose US currency, arrived in plastic bags, cloth bags, suitcases, backpacks and even cereal boxes.

The money was then distributed among downtown Laredo perfume stores, including stores owned by Gudipati, Harsh

Jaggi and Neeru Jaggi. Gudipati, though NYSA Impex LLC that he owned, and Harsh Jaggi and Neeru Jaggi, through El Reino International Inc., which they owned, would accept loose bulk-cash, even after being told it was "narco dinero," as per the evidence presented.

Apart from the Indian Americans, the other accused are Adrian Arciniega-Hernandez of Nuevo Laredo, Mexico; Adriana Alejandra Galvan-Constantini and Luis Montes-Patino, both from Irving, Texas.

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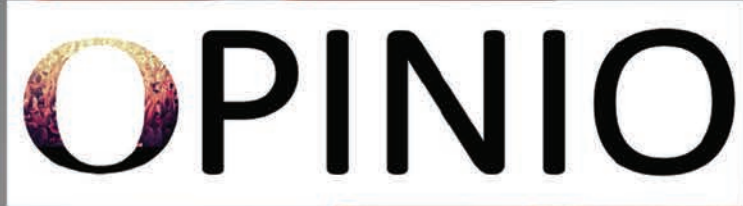
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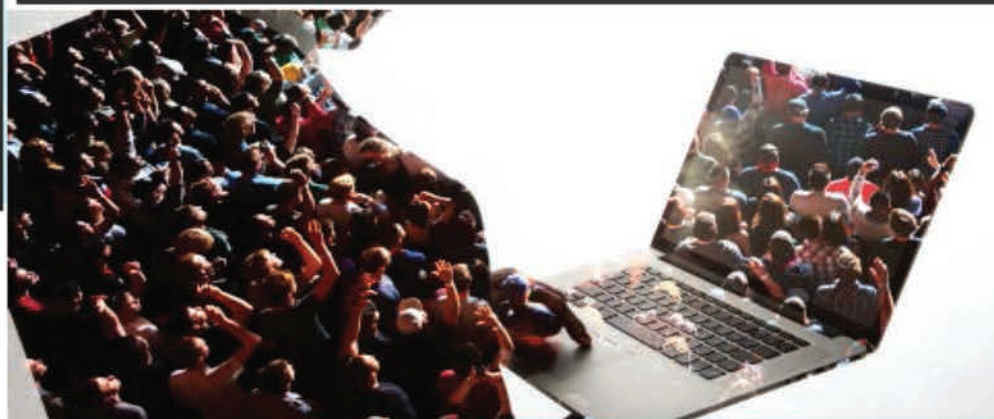
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Indian American Indra Nooyi named by Connecticut Governor as Co-Chair of Business Advisory Council

HARTFORD, CT (TIP): Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont recently unveiled key components of his vision to transform the state's economic development strategy and announced that Indra Nooyi, former PepsiCo chairman and CEO of Indian origin and former Webster Bank Chairman and CEO Jim Smith will serve as co-chairs of a business council in charge of economic development.

Governor Lamont announced that two of Connecticut's principal economic development entities - the nonprofit Connecticut Economic Resource Center, Inc. (CERC) and DECD - will form an innovative public-private partnership known as the Partnership to Advance the Connecticut of Tomorrow (PACT). Through this collaboration, CERC will function as the outward-facing recruitment arm on behalf of the state.

In addition, CERC's research will focus on competitive insights to help support business retention, expansion, and recruitment, and



The Indian American was ranked the second most powerful woman in business by Forbes in 2017

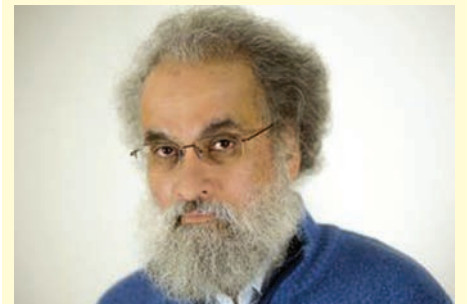
the municipal support program will be more specifically directed toward economic development and project management activities. Indra Nooyi of Greenwich and Jim

Smith of Middlebury will serve as co-chairs of the board and will help steer this transition.

"We look forward to expanding CERC's board, making it illustrative of the Connecticut we are, but more importantly, the Connecticut we want to be," Nooyi and Smith said in a joint statement. "The most visible change at CERC will be the redirection and exponential expansion of resources available to engage directly in business development activities. We'll recruit ambassadors from the business community to provide financial support and active participation in business development. We are excited to leverage our private sector relationships and experience as we aggressively attract businesses and market our state as a place with an educated workforce, a great quality of life, and a supportive state government."

Ranked the second most powerful woman in business by Forbes in 2017, Nooyi stepped down from her role at PepsiCo last August after leading the company for 12 years.

Indian American History Professor Wins \$500,000 Dan David Prize



Sanjay Subrahmanyam is professor of history at UCLA

LOS ANGELES (TIP): Sanjay Subrahmanyam, an Indian American professor of history at UCLA, whose scholarship focuses on the encounters between Asians, Europeans and indigenous and colonial Americans from 1400 through 1800, has been named a laureate of the Dan David Prize in recognition of his contributions to macro history.

The international Dan David Prize is awarded annually to figures who have made outstanding scientific, technological and humanistic accomplishments in fields representing the past, present and future of human achievement. Subrahmanyam is sharing the \$1 million prize with Kenneth Pomeranz, a renowned historian who is a professor at the University of Chicago.

Subrahmanyam has written 16 books and edited almost as many. Subrahmanyam's work, steeped as it is in Western and non-Western historiography, conveys a fuller, more-rounded history than most other scholars have been able to provide.

"I greatly appreciate the international recognition afforded to my scholarship, which is a great encouragement," Subrahmanyam said. "When I came to UCLA in 2004, I was proud to join a history department with some great and world-famous figures in it, and I have tried to live up to their example. The Dan David Prize gives me a fresh wind in my sails, to push on with the next set of projects I have in mind: whether on global historiography, Islamic history or the enigmatic figure of Michel de Montaigne." The total purse of \$3 million makes the Dan David Prize one of the highest-value prizes internationally.

Indian-American Dies after being Run over by Truck in New Jersey

NEWARK (TIP): An Indian American man from Princeton, New Jersey died after getting run over by a trailer truck when he allegedly tried to take a short cut by crawling under the vehicle. According to the Edison Township Police Department, the incident happened on Feb 5, when Neal Patel, 30, was critically injured when the driver from Michigan started the vehicle and drove away. Patel was dragged 10 feet before being run over by the trailer's rear tires. He was being treated at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital's intensive care unit in New Brunswick but succumbed to death Feb 9.

According to media reports, the incident occurred at the Raceway service station on Route 1 South near Wooding Avenue at 9:25 p.m. Patel and his friend were leaving Wick Plaza on their way to the Global Inn located across Route 1 when he decided to go under the truck that was stopped to refuel at a gas station. The driver from Farmington Hills suddenly started the vehicle and drove away unaware that Patel was being dragged. Patel's friend walked around the truck and wasn't struck.

Indian American Philanthropist Kiran Patel Launches sustainability Center in India



Dr. Patel is a renowned cardiologist, entrepreneur and philanthropist based in Tampa, Florida

TAMPA, FL (TIP): Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar last month launched Dr. Kiran C. Patel Centre for Sustainable Development, with a generous endowment from the Tampa Bay area. Dr. Patel is a cardiologist, entrepreneur and philanthropist. The Centre will develop a national and global network of leading experts and researchers on sustainability and

undertake research on water, pollution, waste management, energy, natural resources and climate change.

Dr. Kiran moved to Tampa, Florida in 1982 and began his practice in cardiology. He was very successful and became a distinguished cardiologist in that area. He developed a physician practice management company and expanded throughout the Tampa Bay area, diverging into 14 practices including Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Pediatrics and Cardiology.

Kiran was also in partnership with many point-of-service locations to form a multi-specialty network. This network helped patients access most medical services conveniently. He has actively engaged himself in managed care contracts and it has expanded considerably, providing care now for more than 80,000 patients. Apart from this, he has developed good associations with several HMOs and hospitals.

His success in managed care contracts led a group of doctors to seek his services to help them with an HMO in New Port Richey, Florida. Dr. Patel took up the project after discussing a pre-determined purchase option of the company. It was called the Well Care HMO, Inc. (Well Care). In 1992, Dr. Kiran Patel, along with Rupesh Shaw, CEO, and Pradip Patel, President, started a Medicaid managed care company. This company became the largest Medicaid provider in the state of Florida. He also helped to bring around the struggling HMO, WellCare of New York and Connecticut. Dr. Patel and his wife Dr. Pallavi Patel have contributed nearly \$300 million to various philanthropic causes.

A resolution has also been adopted last month to rename Clearwater road, after the well-known Tampa Bay area Indian American.

Indian Named CEO of Development Victoria in Australia

SYDNEY (TIP): The Andrews Labor Government on Feb 5 announced the appointment of Angela Skandarajah as the new Chief Executive Officer of Development Victoria.

Development Victoria is an important partner in the Labor Government's infrastructure program, delivering projects that create cultural and recreational facilities, and bring key urban and regional precincts to life.

Ms Skandarajah brings a wealth of leadership and governance experience to the role, most recently as Development Victoria's acting Chief Executive and General Counsel.

In a career spanning more than two decades in the legal profession and property development industry, Ms Skandarajah has been a partner and the national head of Minter Ellison's real estate, environment and planning practice.

Ms Skandarajah has specialised in major infrastructure projects and Crown land development and is a regular contributor to industry bodies on development and real estate issues.

Indian American Businessman Arrested for Super Bowl Ticket Scam

ATLANTA (TIP): Police arrested a prominent Indian American businessman in Atlanta-area, accused of exploiting Super Bowl fans out of tens of thousands of dollars as part of a ticket scam.

Gwinnett County Police arrested 48-year-old Lawrenceville resident Ketan Shah at a California casino and charged him with one count of felony theft by conversion.

According to Gwinnett County Police, in late January 2019 they became aware of a possible scam in reference to the upcoming Super Bowl being held in Atlanta. Ketan Shah seemed to be at the center of the incidents. At least six people had reported to Gwinnett Police that Ketan had offered to sell them Super Bowl tickets. One of the victims also reported he paid \$500,000 for his entertainment company to host a large Super Bowl event at "an arena." *(Read full story on www.theindianpanorama.news)*



Angela Skandarajah brings a wealth of leadership and governance experience to the role



Gwinnett County Police arrested 48-year-old Lawrenceville resident Ketan Shah at a California casino

contd from page 1

67 US lawmakers attend Capitol Hill reception for new Indian Ambassador Shringla

several business associations and members of the media.

The Congressional reception was hosted by the Co-Chairs of the Senate India Caucus and Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans, Senator John Cornyn (R-TX), Senator Mark Warner (D-VA),

Congressman Brad Sherman (D-CA) and Congressman George Holding (R-NC).

The event was attended by lawmakers from both the Senate and the House. In addition, prominent members of the Indian American community from across the US.

In their welcome remarks, Senator Warner, Senator Cornyn, Congressman Sherman and Congressman Holding, underlined the importance of the India-US strategic partnership and the critical role played by Congress, in particular, the India Caucus in strengthening relations.

They extended a warm welcome to Ambassador Shringla and committed to working together in building closer ties between the two countries.

The lawmakers also appreciated the significant role played by the Indian American community in building bridges of understanding across the two cultures and nations. They called upon the new members of Congress to join the India Caucus. Conspicuous by attendance were: Congressmen Frank Pallone (D-NJ), one of the co-founders of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans; Congresswomen Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) and Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI) as well as Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL) and Ro Khanna (D-CA).

Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), in her remarks mentioned she will be introducing a bill in the 116th Congress to award a Congressional Gold Medal to Mahatma Gandhi in this 150th Birth Anniversary year.

Congressman Gregory Meeks (D-NY) said in his remarks that Mahatma Gandhi had been an inspiration for him. Congresswoman Grace Meng (D-NY) mentioned her support for India's permanent membership of the UN Security Council. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) also attended and spoke about the great contributions of the Indian American community across all fields in the US.

Ambassador Shringla thanked the Caucus Co-Chairs for their warm welcome. The Ambassador noted that the bipartisan support for the India-US strategic partnership was reflected in the turnout of the Members of Congress across the aisle for the event. Further, the overwhelming support for the relationship with India is attested by the fact that the India Caucus is the largest country-specific Caucus on the Hill. He thanked the Indian American Diaspora for serving as cultural Ambassadors of India and contributing to a strong foundation for the strategic partnership between the world's oldest and largest democracies.

The Ambassador also spoke briefly about the progress made in bilateral ties over the past year across all domains - defense, economic and trade, energy cooperation, culture and people-to-people exchanges. Following the Congressional reception, Ambassador Shringla hosted a meet and greet and dinner event at his residence.

US Unveils Two Women Economic Empowerment Projects in India

WASHINGTON (TIP): The US has announced that it is going to launch two projects in India in partnership with the private sector as part of its Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Initiative.

Trump Administration launched the W-GDP Initiative Feb 7, the first-ever whole-of-government approach focused on advancing women's full and free participation in the global economy. Through the Administration's 2X Women's Initiative, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) is mobilizing \$1 billion to support women in the developing world.

The two projects in India are:

Induced Bank Limited-Women Microentrepreneurs Facility: The OPIC \$100 million loan will expand IndusInd's microfinance lending to women in India.

The PepsiCo Partnership: A USAID and PepsiCo partnership in West Bengal, India, to scale women's economic empowerment throughout PepsiCo's agriculture supply chains.

Through the W-GDP Initiative to empower



President Trump has signed a National Security Presidential Memorandum

50 million women globally to tap their economic potential, the Administration will seize on the significant opportunity that promoting women in the economy represents for boosting global gross domestic product.

The aim is to reach 50 million women across the developing world from the start of

the Trump Administration in 2017 to 2025, says The White House.

The President signed a National Security Presidential Memorandum and directed the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to allocate an initial \$50 million for the new W-GDP Fund.

Experts from India and US Exchange Views on 'Delivering Democracy in India'

WASHINGTON (TIP): The Embassy of India in collaboration with Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) New Delhi and Hudson Institute organized a day-long seminar on "Delivering Democracy in India" on Wednesday, 13 February 2019 at the Hudson Institute, Washington D.C. More than 150 prominent representatives from the media, academic institutions, US Agencies and think tanks attended the seminar.

Chargé d'Affaires Ambassador Santosh Jha delivered the keynote address. The panel discussions were held on the various topics such as Democracy and the Economy; Democracy and Public Participation; and Governance and Democracy in India.

Speakers from India included Shri Surjit Bhalla, Economist & Chairman, Oxus Research & Investments, Shri Sanjay Paswan, Professor, Department of PM&IR, Patna University and Member, Bihar Legislative Council and Shri Ramaswami Balasubramaniam, Development Activist and Author.

The experts from the US side included: Mr. Rick Rossow, Senior Adviser and Wadhvani Chair in U.S.-India Policy Studies, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Mr. Thomas Duesterberg, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute, Mr. Richard Fontaine, Acting CEO, Center for New American Security, Mr.



The panelists underscored India's exceptional record as the world's largest democracy

Daniel Twining, President, International Republican Institute, Mr. Tod Lindberg, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute and Ms. Aparna Pande, Research Fellow & Director of Hudson Institute's Initiative on the Future of India and South Asia.

The panelists underscored India's exceptional record as the world's largest

democracy and its emergence as a shining example for the rest of the world. They also spoke on India's impressive record of economic growth and fast pace of ongoing transformation in India. Several India-specific features that had emerged over seven decades of functioning democracy were also highlighted.

Trump's ex-aide Manafort lied to investigators in Russia probe: Judge

WASHINGTON (TIP): Former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort intentionally lied to investigators and a federal grand jury in the special counsel's Russia probe, a judge ruled Wednesday.

US District Judge Amy Berman Jackson's decision was another loss for Manafort, a

once-wealthy political consultant who rose to lead Donald Trump's 2016 campaign and now faces years in prison in two criminal cases brought in special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation.

The four-page ruling hurts Manafort's chance of receiving a reduced sentence, though Jackson said she would decide the exact impact during his sentencing next month.

It also resolves a dispute that had provided new insight into how Mueller views Manafort's actions as part of the broader probe of Russian election interference and any possible coordination with Trump

associates. Prosecutors have made clear that they remain deeply interested in Manafort's interactions with a man the FBI says has ties to Russian intelligence.

But it's unclear exactly what has drawn their attention and whether it relates to election interference because much of the dispute has played out in secret court hearings and blacked out court filings.

In her ruling Wednesday, Jackson provided few new details as she found there was sufficient evidence to say Manafort broke the terms of his plea agreement by lying about three of five matters that prosecutors had singled out. (AP)

Senators Kamala Harris and Mike Lee introduce Bill to Remove Per-Country Green Card Caps



Sens. Mike Lee (R-UT) and Kamala Harris (D-CA) introduced the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act on February 6

WASHINGTON (TIP): Sens. Mike Lee (R-UT) and Kamala Harris (D-CA) introduced the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act on February 6, a bill that would remove per-country caps for employment-based green cards.

Current law caps the annual percentage of green card recipients from any one country at 7 percent. That restriction hits Indian citizens most, because of the high numbers of Indians in the U.S. who are eligible for green

cards. Indian citizens on the H-1B visa and other visas can wait years or even decades for a green card.

"Immigrants should not be penalized due to their country of origin," Sen. Lee said. "Treating people fairly and equally is part of our founding creed and the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act reflects that belief. Immigration is often a contentious issue, but we should not delay progress in areas where there is bipartisan consensus just because we

have differences in other areas."

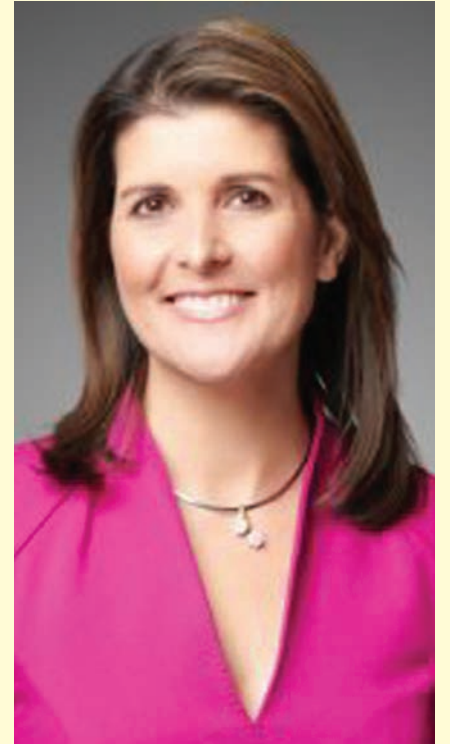
"Ours is a nation of immigrants, and our strength has always come from our diversity and our unity," said Indian American Senator Harris. "We must do more to eliminate discriminatory backlogs and facilitate family unity so that high-skilled immigrants are not vulnerable to exploitation and can stay in the U.S. and continue to contribute to the economy. I'm proud to join with Senator Lee on this bipartisan legislation to ensure that our country remains vibrant and dynamic."

The Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act also increases the per-country caps for family-sponsored green cards from 7 percent to 15 percent. Without adding any new green cards, S. 386 creates a "first-come, first-served" system that alleviates the backlogs and allows green cards to be awarded more efficiently.

The bill has broad bipartisan support and is additionally cosponsored by Sens. Roy Blunt (R-MO), Susan Collins (R-ME), Jim Moran (R-KS), Tom Carper (D-DE), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Cory Gardner (R-CO), Tom Cotton (R-AR), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Kevin Cramer (R-ND), and Krysten Sinema (D-AZ).

The bill has also been endorsed by Immigration Voice, Compete America Coalition, the Information Technology Industry Council, Google, Microsoft, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, The Heritage Foundation, La Raza, and many others.

Former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley Rejoins her South Carolina Charity's Board



Haley left the UN position at the end of 2018

WASHINGTON (TIP): Indian American Nikki Haley, former South Carolina governor and UN ambassador who left the UN at the end of 2018, would be rejoining The Original Six Foundation - the charity founded by her as the chair of its board, the organization announced Feb 12.

In addition to Haley, The O6 Foundation also elected a new Board of Trustees including civic, business, and industry leaders from across South Carolina.

"South Carolina's children are our state's future leaders. That's why it's so important that every single child feels they have the support system and resources they need to succeed. Regardless of where they are born, we want these kids to know all of us are here to lift them up and help them achieve greatness," said Haley in a statement.

Currently, The O6 Foundation provides afterschool homework assistance to 4th through 8th grade students in Bamberg County at Richard Carroll Elementary School, in Clarendon County at Manning Junior High School, and in Union County at Jonesville Elementary and Middle School. Each program operates with two certified teachers and serves students Monday through Thursday.

In addition to after school homework support, The O6 Foundation is piloting a kindergarten through 3rd grade literacy initiative in Barnwell County at Barnwell Primary School. The program provides tools and resources to over 700 students encouraging strong reading skills in early grades as the foundation for success in later years. Founded in 2011 by then-Governor Haley, The O6 Foundation serves as a catalyst of change in South Carolina by uniting public, private, and civic partners and resources with rural communities to improve education for every child, regardless of where they are born and raised.

Indian H1B Visa Holders Rally Outside White House for Merit-Based Immigration Policy

WASHINGTON, DC (TIP): A large number of Indian H1B visa holders held a rally on February 10 outside the White House, demanding immigration law reforms to benefit those in the country legally.

President Trump recently addressed the issue of Green card backlogs and has made Merit based Immigration as a requirement of any DACA (Deferred Action on Childhood arrivals) fix. DACA is an immigration policy introduced by Barrack Obama that allows some individuals with unlawful presence in the United States after being brought to the country as children to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and become eligible for a work permit

At the rally, organized by the Republican Hindu Coalition (RHC), they said that "merit-based" immigration system would benefit thousands of high-skilled visa holders who've waited years to become legal permanent residents.

Their demands include clearance of Green Card backlog with a period of 1-5 years, removal of country caps for Green Card allotments, grant of Green Cards to H4 children so that they can remain in the U.S. after they turn 21 without having to switch to another visa category.



PULWAMA ATTACK: HOW IT HAPPENED

3.30AM: Around 2,500 CRPF personnel in 78 vehicles left Channi Rama transit for Bakshi Stadium transit camp in Srinagar to travel further for their respective camps. The number of security personnel travelling was high as there was no traffic on Jammu-Srinagar high for the last one week due to heavy snow.

3.30-3.35PM: The convoy was moving towards Latoomode in Awantipora in south Kashmir when the vehicle driven by Adil Ahmad Dar (as claimed by Pakistan based-Jaish militant group) started following the convoy. He apparently came on the highway from a road linking nearby villages to the highway

3.37 PM: He travelled for a few minutes with the convoy and then crashed his vehicle laden with about 350kg of explosives into un-armoured bus, belonging to the 76th Battalion of the force. Thirty-nine personnel were on board. Such was the impact that the bus turned into a mangled heap of iron

3.40PM: The quick reaction team of the army took CPPF personnel to army base hospital at Badami Bagh. The entire highway was cordoned off

MAJOR MILITANT ATTACKS ON FORCES IN J&K SINCE 2013

DEC 31, 2017: Five CRPF personnel and three Jaish militants, including two locals, were killed when militants stormed a CRPF camp in a pre-dawn strike in south Kashmir's Lethpora in Pulwama

AUG 26, 2017: Heavily armed Jaish-e-Mohammad militants stormed the district police lines complex Pulwama killing eight security personnel, including four policemen and four CRPF men. Three Pakistani fidayees were also killed

NOV 29, 2016: Militants entered an army unit at Nagrota-based 16 Corps headquarters on the outskirts of Jammu city, killing seven soldiers, including two officers

SEP 19, 2016: Heavily armed militants attacked an army base in north Kashmir killing 17 soldiers and injuring dozens of which two more died later. The raid surprised soldiers in their sleep as attackers lobbed grenades and set the building on fire. The attack had then triggered a surgical strike from the Indian Army on militant launching pads in Pakistan occupied Kashmir

JUNE 25, 2016: Eight CRPF men were killed and 20 others injured in a militant ambush on a convoy in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district

JUNE 3, 2016: Three BSF personnel were killed and five more wounded after militants ambushed their convoy on the Srinagar-Jammu highway at Bijbehara in south Kashmir's Anantnag district, around 45km from Srinagar

FEBRUARY 20, 2016: Militants attacked a convoy of CRPF on the Srinagar-Jammu highway in Pampore and entered a government building. The gunfight continued for more than 48 hours and ended with the death of three army men, two CRPF personnel, a civilian and three militants

AUGUST 5, 2015: Two LeT militants attacked a convoy in Udhampur district killing two BSF personnel. A militant was killed while another Pakistani terrorist Mohammad Naved was captured alive by villagers

DECEMBER 5, 2014: Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's election rally in Kashmir, six militants stormed an army camp in north Kashmir's Uri. In the ensuing gunbattle, eight soldiers, including a Lieutenant Colonel, three Jammu and Kashmir policemen and all six militants were killed

JUNE 24, 2013: Militants carried out a brazen attack on an army convoy killing eight jawans and injuring 11 others near Hyderpora area on the outskirts of Srinagar

Terror outfits committed a grave mistake, will pay a heavy price: Modi

NEW DELHI (TIP): Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday delivered a sharp warning to Pakistan and terror groups operating from across the border after CRPF jawans were killed in a deadly terror attack in Kashmir's Pulwama.

PM Modi, who was speaking to an event to flag off the country's fastest train, said the country will give a "strong response" to this attack. The ruling BJP and the opposition Congress have cancelled all political meetings of its top leaders in light of Thursday's suicide attack carried out by Pakistan-based terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed.

Masood Azhar's Jaish had rushed to take responsibility for the car bomb that ripped into a CRPF convoy that was feared to have killed 44 jawans and reduced their bus to a mangled heap of metal. Pakistan says it isn't to be blamed for the attack.

But as many countries came together to condemn the deadly attack and Pakistan shrugged off blame, New Delhi underscored that Masood Azhar had been given full freedom by Pakistan to operate and expand his terror infrastructure "and to carry out attacks in India and elsewhere with impunity".



Without naming the western neighbour in his speech, PM Modi said "if our neighbour, which is totally isolated in the world and thinks it can destabilise India through its tactics and conspiracies, then it is making a huge mistake."

Turning to the Pak-based terror groups, PM Modi said, "I want to tell the terror groups that you have committed a grave crime. The perpetrators of terror will pay a heavy price. I assure the nation that we will punish the perpetrators of terror."

Prime Minister Modi, who had minutes earlier chaired a meeting of the cabinet committee on security, also thanked all nations that "have supported us and condemned this incident in the strongest of terms."

"A strong reply will be given to this attack," said PM Modi.

"When all the nations will fight together against terror, it will be eliminated. The jawans have sacrificed their lives for the country. I assure everyone that we will take every step to bring the perpetrators of the crime to book," said PM Modi.

After the CCS meeting, the government has already announced that it will take all possible diplomatic steps to ensure the "complete isolation" of Pakistan. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley told reporters that as the first step, this would include India removing most favoured nation (MFN) trade privileges given to Pakistan.

"The ministry of external affairs will initiate all possible steps, and I am here referring to all possible diplomatic steps which have to be taken to ensure the complete isolation from the international community of Pakistan," he said.

21-year-old Pulwama suicide bomber had joined JeM in 2018

NEW DELHI (TIP): The man who carried out the worst terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir in at least three decades is a 21-year-old school dropout from Gundibagh village in south Kashmir's insurgency hotbed of Pulwama district, police records and government officials said.

Adil Ahmad Dar, who was given the name of Waqas commandoby militant group Jaish-e-Mohammad, dropped out of class 12 in a local school in Gundibagh in March 2017. The village is barely 10 kilometres from the spot where his car, laden with explosives, rammed into a bus carrying Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel.

In police records, Dar was recorded as a category C militant and after joining militancy in 2018, officials said he was seen with members of terror group Jaish-e-Mohammad, Hizbul Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Taiba. "He was not any top gun; he was just like any other militant of Pulwama, and went missing in 2018," said a police officer posted in south Kashmir on the condition of anonymity.

Before he went missing, Dar occasionally worked at a local joinery mill. His father, Riyaz Ahmad Dar, runs a small shop in the locality. Local villagers said he dropped out of school after his cousin, who was also a militant, was killed in an encounter.

As news of the suicide attack spread, people gathered in Gundibagh and organised a funeral for Dar.

They prevented government officials from reaching the spot.

Dar is the third local "fidayeen" (suicidal) militant recruited by the Jaish-e-Mohammad for a big suicide attack. A militant named Fardeen Ahmad Khan, 16, of Tral was killed on December 31, 2017, when he, along with three foreign militants, sneaked into the CRPF training centre at Lethpora and killed



Adil Ahmad Dar

five personnel.

Afaq Ahmad Shah, 17, was the first local fidayeen who blew up an explosive-laden vehicle outside the 15 Corps headquarters at Badami Bagh on the outskirts of Srinagar, in early 2000, that killed eight troopers. He too was affiliated with Jaish-e-Mohammad.

Shortly after the attack, a video clip of Dar started circulating on social media in Kashmir, in which the young militant, carrying a weapon, is heard reciting a poem in Urdu — "Get ready and step forward fast, the destiny is not far and the men of Jaish are waiting for you. It is not the time to talk only, get up as it is not the time to be in dreams, the moment demands practitioners on ground, please forgive me but it is not the time for beautiful speeches."

US condemns attack, tells Pakistan to end 'safe haven' to terrorists

WASHINGTON (TIP): The US on Thursday called on Pakistan to "end immediately" its support of terrorist groups operating from its soil in the aftermath of the suicide attack carried out by Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama that killed at least 44 CRPF personnel.

Holding Pakistan responsible for the attack, the White House press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, said in a statement that the US "condemns in the strongest terms the heinous terrorist attack by a Pakistan-based terrorist group".

"The United States calls on Pakistan to end immediately the support and safe haven provided to all terrorist groups operating on its soil, whose only goal is to sow chaos, violence, and terror in the region," Sanders said. "This attack only strengthens our resolve to bolster counterterrorism cooperation and coordination between the United States and India."

The White House did not specify the consequences but the Trump administration has suspended nearly \$2 billion in security aid to Pakistan already on account of its dubious counter-terrorism efforts already and could follow up with more. In a similar message earlier, the US state department called on United Nations' member countries to deny safe haven and support for terrorists as it condemned in the "strongest terms" the killing of the Central Police Reserve Force's personnel in Pulwama.

India, Pakistan differ on crossing points for Kartarpur corridor

NEW DELHI (TIP): India and Pakistan have proposed different border crossing points for the planned corridor to allow Indian pilgrims to visit Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara in Pakistan's Punjab and the matter is expected to be resolved when officials of the two sides meet next month, the external affairs ministry spokesperson said on Thursday.

New Delhi had recently provided the coordinates for a crossing point to Islamabad. "From the Pakistan side, we have received a response where they have suggested an alternate border crossing point," spokesperson Raveesh Kumar told a news briefing.

Officials of the two sides, who are expected to meet in New Delhi on March 14, will take up the issue of the different coordinates for the crossing point and the Indian side is hopeful there will be an agreement on the matter, he said.

"We had also proposed that we will hold technical-level discussions (among) engineers and this shouldn't be held hostage to the main meeting which will take place on March 14. We still await a response from the Pakistani side on this," Kumar said.

India believes the technical discussions will facilitate the early establishment of



requisite infrastructure and finalisation of the alignment of the corridor, he added.

India and Pakistan were earlier scheduled to hold the first meeting of officials to finalise modalities for the Kartarpur corridor on March 13. A follow-up meeting is expected to be held in Pakistan when required, Indian officials had said earlier.

The two sides unveiled plans last November to build the corridor to facilitate visits without visas by Indian pilgrims to the gurdwara at the site where Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, died in 1539.

They have also said they plan to open the corridor on the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak in November 2019.

India, Sweden sign security pact to share classified information

NEW DELHI (TIP): India and Sweden have concluded a security protection agreement that will enable both countries to share classified information with each other, the Swedish embassy in New Delhi said on Thursday.

Defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman and her Swedish counterpart Peter Hultqvist signed the pact in Stockholm on Wednesday, at a time when the Scandinavian country is eyeing projects worth billions of dollars under the "Make in India" initiative.

Swedish defence firm Saab is pursuing opportunities to build fighter jets and next-generation submarines in the country under the government's strategic partnership (SP) model that seeks to provide impetus to the 'Make in India' programme.

Saab India Technologies chairman Ola Rignell on Thursday said the company was eyeing several projects in India, including plans to build 114 fighter planes and six next-generation submarines locally. Both the projects fall under the SP model.

The strategic partnership (SP) model envisages local manufacturing of major defence platforms by an Indian strategic partner who will collaborate with a foreign original equipment manufacturer (OEM) to set up production facilities in the country.

On January 31, the defence ministry approved Project 75I worth Rs 40,000 crore for building six advanced submarines in the country. The SP model covers submarines, fighter planes, helicopters and armoured vehicles.

Arun Jaitley back as finance minister

NEW DELHI (TIP): Union Minister Arun Jaitley, who returned from the US last week after a medical treatment, resumed office as the Finance Minister on Friday.

Official sources said Jaitley resumed function as the Finance Minister. Jaitley is attending the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), which is underway AT7, LKM in New Delhi.

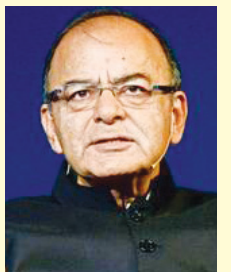
The CCS meeting has been called to access the situation and discuss India's response to the terrorist attack on a convoy of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel on Thursday in which at least 45 soldiers were killed and 38 injured.

The 66-year-old Jaitley had in January flown to New York for the treatment after reportedly being diagnosed with soft tissue cancer which required surgery.

In wake of his absence just ahead of budget presentation, Railway Minister Piyush Goyal was given additional charge of Finance.

He had served as the Finance Minister briefly even in 2018 during Jaitley's absence for kidney transplant surgery.

Sources said that Jaitley is recovering well and will be able to assume the responsibilities of the Finance Ministry.



CAG on Rafale deal: Jets are 2.86% cheaper compared with UPA price

NEW DELHI (TIP): After generating massive political controversy, the Comptroller and Auditor General report on Rafale deal was tabled in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday. After being scheduled for Tuesday's meeting, it was postponed to Wednesday.

According to the report, the overall price of fighter jets is 2.86 per cent cheaper as compared to the UPA-era deal. It also says that when compared to the 126 aircraft deal, the 36 Rafale contract signed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi managed to save 17.08 per cent for the India Specific Enhancements. The report says that the delivery schedule for the first 18 aircraft is better by five months than the one proposed in the 126 aircraft deal negotiated by the UPA government.

Audit noted that the IAF did not define the ASQRs (Air Staff Qualitative Requirements) properly. As a result, none of the vendors could fully meet the ASQRs and these were changed repeatedly during the procurement process. This created difficulties during the technical and price evaluation and affected the integrity of competitive tendering, which is one of the main reasons for delay in the acquisition process. Objectivity, equity and consistency of technical evaluation process was not evident in the technical evaluation report, said ANI, quoting the CAG report.

The report also says that the defence ministry team, in March 2015, had recommended the scrapping of the 126 Rafale deal. The ministry had said that Dassault Aviation was not the lowest bidder and that the EADS (European Aeronautic Defence & Space Company) was not fully compliant with the tender requirements. Finding issues in the



UPA-era 126 aircraft deal, CAG observed that the defence ministry had suggested in 2015 that the proposal of Dassault Aviation should have been rejected during the technical evaluation stage itself, as it was non-compliant with RFP requirements.

But it is to be noted that the most controversial point of pricing has been redacted under the claim that the details cannot be revealed.

The government's decision to buy 36 Rafale fighter jets from French company Dassault has become a controversial political issue, with the main opposition party Congress levelling allegations of corruption and impropriety, and the ruling dispensation defending the move.

Former minister and senior Congress leader Kapil Sibal on Sunday alleged conflict of interest and had asked the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) Rajiv Mehrishi to recuse himself from auditing the deal as he was the finance secretary when the deal was negotiated.



Process to appoint CIC should be same as that of chief election commissioner: SC

NEW DELHI (TIP): The Supreme Court on Friday passed a slew of directions on filling up vacancies in the Central Information Commission (CIC) and state information commissions (SICs) saying the process of appointments must start one to two months before a post falls vacant.

A bench comprising Justices AK Sikri and SA Nazeer said the post of a chief information commissioner is on a higher pedestal and the appointment process for a CIC should be on the "same terms" as in the process of a chief election commissioner.

The apex court also took note of the existing vacancies in CIC and SICs and directed authorities to fill them up within six months.

Taking note of the provisions in the RTI Act, it said besides bureaucrats, eminent citizens from other walks of life should also be considered for the post of information commissioners in the CIC.

Source: PTI

AS I SEE IT

Why Modi's BJP May Fail to Regain Power?



By Ven Parameswaran

Failed foreign policy, Mounting Unemployment, Economic Woes for many Sections, and Hindutva pose a challenge to Modi

Prime Minister Modi has failed to capitalize on US-India closest ally relationship. Modi must display and reciprocate friendship to the USA thru developing systematic communications through diplomatic channels and also thru regular Press Conferences. New Delhi has failed to make international headlines because Prime Minister does not speak to the international media.

President Trump is the first President to make India its "closest ally" on a par with the U.K. By this policy decision, the U.S. has agreed to the 100% transfer of US sophisticated technology to India. The "closest ally" status also enabled India to access U.S. strategic and defense intelligence, especially on China. Any military moves by China will be closely monitored by the US Intelligence and shared with India. President Trump is also the first President critical of Pakistan and he has been applying pressure on Pakistan to get rid of all terrorist organizations including Lashkar-e-Taiba responsible for attacks on Mumbai, that killed 165 people. He has also allowed Lockheed Martin to manufacture in India sophisticated defense aircrafts.

Prime Minister Modi has not embraced "closest ally" status with enthusiastic support. He was more concerned with concluding defense deals with Russia and buying aircrafts from France. He also wanted to be able to import oil from Iran, sanctioned by the US. President Trump cooperated with Modi and allowed him to finalize the deal with Russia and France. He also agreed to exempt sanction so that Iran could export to India.

President Trump has visited all major countries in the world except India. Prime Minister Modi should have invited President Trump and given him an enthusiastic reception. He invited Trump for the Republic Day event knowing fully well January is the busiest month for any U.S. President. He could have used the U.S. support to negotiate with Pakistan to mete out justice to the leaders of Lashkar-e-Taiba, responsible for attacks on Mumbai. Modi failed to apply diplomatic pressure on Pakistan. He has no roadmap.

Prime Minister Modi has failed to liberalize India's economy and create favorable environment for foreign investment. He has failed to privatize several public sector corporations, most of them are inefficient and running at a loss such as Air India and others. With 100% transfer of U.S. technology, India does not still have a blueprint of industrial and military products it intends to manufacture.

U.S. WARNS MODI AGAINST PANDERING TO HINDU NATIONALISTS

Dan Coats, Director of National Intelligence in his written testimony of the intelligent community's assessment of worldwide threats in 2019 to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on January 29, said:

"Parliamentary elections in India increase the possibility of communal violence if Indian Prime Minister Modi's BJP stresses Hindu nationalist themes. BJP policies during Modi's first term have deepened communal tensions in some BJP governed states, and Hindu nationalist state leaders might view a Hindu-nationalist campaign as a signal to incite lowlevel violence to animate their supporters," he said.

Coats predicted, "increasing communal clashes could alienate Indian Muslims and allow Islamist terrorists groups in India to expand their influence," ahead of general election.



Modi physically embraced Trump but failed to embrace US policies most beneficial to India

In his written statement, Coats also said it was unlikely that there would be any modus vivendi between India and Pakistan before India's election in May and the strained relations between India and Pakistan would persist.

"We judge that cross-border terrorism, firing across the Line of Control (LoC), divisive national elections in India, and

Islamabad's perception of its position with the U.S. relative to India will contribute to strained India-Pakistan relations at least through May 2019, the deadline for the Indian election, and probably beyond," Coats said.

Coats also said militant groups supported by Pakistan would continue to conduct terrorist attacks in both India and Afghanistan and contended that Islamabad's "narrow approach to counterterrorism cooperation-using some groups as policy tools and confronting only the militant groups that directly threaten Pakistan-almost will frustrate US counterterrorism efforts against Taliban.

Prime Minister Modi has thus failed to capitalize on US-India closest ally relationship. Modi must display and reciprocate friendship to the USA thru developing systematic communications through diplomatic channels and also thru regular Press Conferences. New Delhi has failed to make international headlines because Prime Minister does not speak to the international media.

CORRUPTION IN INDIA

N. Ram, Chairman of The Hindu wrote a column that was published in The Washington Post recently. He wrote, "Corruption in India is pervasive, omnipresent and multifarious, especially in the nexus between politics and business. As India heads toward its general elections, expected to be held in April and May, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi finds himself embroiled in controversy around one of the country's largest arms purchase contracts: a murky 7.8 billion Euro weapons deal to purchase 36 Rafale fighter planes from France."

Modi's arbitrary decision to reduce the number of Rafale planes purchased to 36 from 126 raised the price by 41%. Rafale planes are manufactured by Dassault Aviation. Dassault Aviation agreed to invest 50% of the 7.8 billion euro Rafale contract in India to manufacture airplane components with offset partners, chief among whom would be the Indian billionaire Anil Ambani's Reliance Defence. The deal is expected to help generate up to 1.9 billion euros in new revenues for Ambani - the younger and much less successful brother of Mukesh Ambani, India's richest man - who has no experience in manufacturing fighter jets.

Ram concludes: "The devastating effects of Modi's demonetization on the working poor and small and medium businesses and widespread distress in rural India could do more damage to his electoral prospects, but a credible corruption narrative, backed even with incomplete evidence, can bring focus and emotional power to the electoral campaign. It can be a catalyst for change. The election is coming."

(Ven Parameswaran, MBA, Columbia University Business School, was President and CEO, First Asian Securities Corporation, New York; Senior Advisor to Imagindia Institute, a think tank in New Delhi. He can be reached at vpwaren@gmail.com)



GUEST COMMENT

CAG on IAF purchases: Rafale reflects the need for major corrections

The Rafale tender stole the political thunder in the Comptroller and Auditor General of India's (CAG) assessment of 11 capital acquisitions by the Indian Air Force over a time period that spanned both the UPA and Modi governments. Considering that previous CAG reports on coal and 2G had irrevocably damaged the credibility of the UPA government, the Modi government can consider itself fortunate to have escaped unscathed because of the inventiveness of the auditors. The CAG used a never-used formula (called alignment pricing) to declare the Modi tender cheaper than the UPA era's now-cancelled 126 aircraft bid. An audit basically evaluates four criteria in a defense platform: quality, cost-effectiveness, delivery and objectivity. The CAG report gives

conditional thumbs up on only two: cost-effectiveness and the delivery schedule. Even these are up for debate.

But the benchmark of objectivity, which includes intangibles such as transparency, fair play and integrity, stands in a grey zone. For instance, the comparison of UPA and NDA-era prices on the basis of a French index is debatable when payments are made in dollars. A dissent note alleging parallel negotiations (dismissed by then Defence Minister Parrikar as an overreaction) went unchallenged, while there was just a mild rap for not signing an integrity pact and succumbing to French refusal on opening an Escrow account. The Modi government was also easily let off the hook for failing to respond to a 20 per cent price cut by a Rafale competitor. Who knows whether Rafale would

have still played tough if it had not been the single vendor?

Rafale was one of the 11 purchases studied by CAG and the common tale that emerges is of overambitious services whose requirements are frequently changed, leading to several vendors dropping out; the contract negotiations committee that rarely establishes the benchmark price, which, in turn, makes it difficult to establish the reasonability of the price. Complex and multi-level approval processes further add to the delays. Overall, the existing capital acquisition system is unlikely to effectively support the IAF in its war preparedness and modernization.

(Tribune, India)

CRISIS AT GLEN COVE GURDUARA



I.J. Singh

Just days ago, Gurduara Glencove held not one but two meetings of the general body on the same day, Sunday; the second meeting immediately followed the first.

Believe me, this incredible matter is not a typographical oversight or slip. It is absolutely true. It is important to note that despite Constitutional requirements for periodic meetings no general meeting had been held for many years.

It is not that people did not want any meetings but their earlier requests - and there were several - were summarily ignored or rebuffed. And now there were two, on the same day, one directly on the heels of the other.

Clearly, the state of the Gurduara at Glencove is not as it ought to be, and that's the most charitable way that I can put it. The divisions are sharp and hard edged.

Of the two meetings, the first was run and controlled by the existing management of the gurduara and reluctantly held in response to the continuous wish of a sizeable segment of the community. The second meeting held by members of the sangat followed minutes after the first concluded was by members of sangat. It is important to note that no member of the management attended the second meeting.

This short note today is not to castigate or

scold either side but to focus a lens on fundamental premises and logic that were pushed and highlighted by the existing management to justify their atrocious reasoning and decision making.

Now for my two cents worth on the mess:

Via a letter the current management dismissed the sangat's right to a meeting as both irrelevant and contrary to any legal requirements. Their rationale almost took my breath away. They attached a letter framed by their lawyers. It appeared to assert that since no general body meeting had been held for several years, the sangat had obviously abrogated its rights, if any, to a meeting. Hence none was necessary, and none may be held.

With me others, too, will find such reasoning absolutely untenable, if not atrocious. Why?

Think a moment: The British ruled India for about 200 years (and Punjab for about one century). Could one argue that since, for much of the time, Indians did not unceasingly and single mindedly ask for independence, they had lost their right to demand it any further? Or look at our new home - The United States: For centuries racial discrimination was legal and widely practiced. Women's rights were severely curtailed. For instance, women did not have the right to vote until 1920, 150 years after the country was founded. Should they have been told that since they accepted the reality for so long, they no longer had the option to protest or demand a change? Every day now, discriminatory practices that existed for centuries are giving way to changing realities and new attitudes and much still



needs attention. For example, until about 40 years ago women were accepted into medical schools in the United States with great difficulty, if at all. Now that's no reason to continue to curtail their rights.

I also offer you a potent example of what I would term atrocious reasoning that surfaced at the meeting by the current management that I am alluding to. The Chairman, Maninder Singh Sethi, offered that he would embrace the idea of retiring from his position at the gurduara's helm but was determined to stay in command until he could identify a suitable person to whom he would hand the reins and control.

I confess that I am absolutely shocked and flabbergasted. Words almost fail me. The gurduara is an institution, not private property for which any one individual, no

matter, how brave, honest, wise, dedicated, capable or respected can appoint or anoint a successor. Good institutions are governed by procedures, principles, priorities, practices and the shareholders that live and die for them.

The sangat and the membership constitute the shareholders of a gurduara. A respected leader deserves reverence, and respect, but never absolute dictatorial control.

Mr. Chairman: This is absolutely not your prerogative, nor that of any one person. The least you can do is to assure the people that this was never your intent and that you misspoke. The decision rests with the sangat.

A gurduara is not to be used to divide the world into friends and foes but to see if we can transform them into allies and collaborators.

Arrant Religious Bigotry and Disguised Racism now seem alive and well in the US Supreme Court (Scotus)

Executed Muslim denied last rites by Mullah



By Nagendra Rao

Looks like the halcyon days of Supreme Court justices like William J. Brennan Jr., Thurgood Marshall, Earl Warren, Potter Stewart, William O Douglas, Felix Frankfurter are permanently over, or at least for a very long time.

This is what happens when economic prosperity heads full speed towards a brick wall as is increasingly happening to the US as it begins its irreversible long slide down.

This is the court of Brett Kavanaugh, John Roberts, of late Antonin Scalia disguised but intensely opinionated, conservative, fundamentalist, (bigoted?) Catholic / Christian judges.

It's why as NYT wrote in a long and thoughtful piece about 10 years ago that the world has now stopped reading or giving credence to the opinions of SCOTUS. It is too right wing, too biased, (Christian parochialism?) to be worthy of universal respect as in past eras. It is the Supreme Courts of Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and India (alas, now increasingly of slavishly westernized and deracinated from Indic cultural ethos and pandering to western sensibilities) which are respected and regarded.

SCOTUS on narrow technical grounds just

denied an American Muslim the right to last rites by a Mullah / Maulvi in the judgment on *Dunn v. Ray*. Domineque Ray, was executed Thursday evening by the State of Alabama. Mr. Ray did not contest the state's power to kill him, he simply asked that Alabama permit his spiritual adviser to be in the execution chamber to comfort him as the state extinguished his life. Ray is a Muslim, and the prison's policy allowed him to be attended by a Christian chaplain but not by a Muslim imam.

"Religious liberty for me, but not for thee".

The word "empathy," it should be noted, does not mean "sympathy." Sympathy implies a kind of partisanship - to be sympathetic to a party is to be favorable to their claims. Empathy means something else. It is the ability to place yourself in someone else's shoes and to understand their perspective even if you have not shared their experiences. It is a white Christian man's ability to see that the world sometimes operates differently for an African-American Muslim.

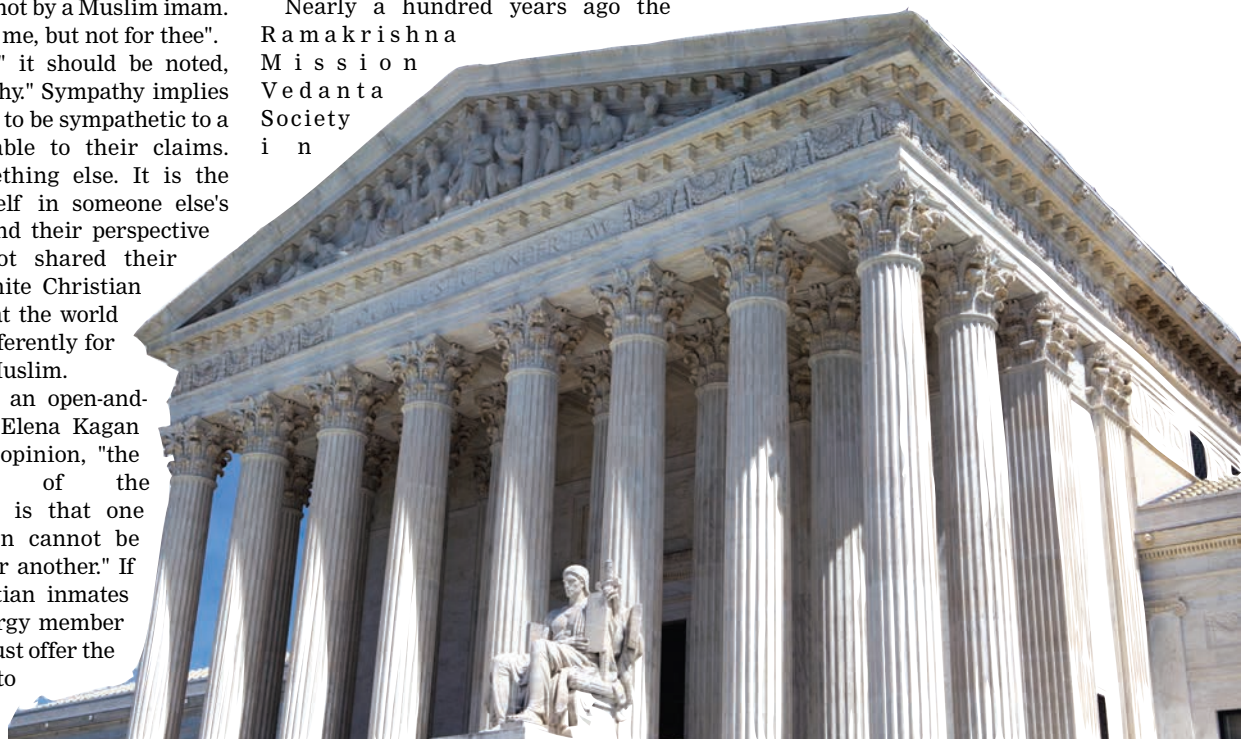
It should have been an open-and-shut case. As Justice Elena Kagan noted in a dissenting opinion, "the clearest command of the Establishment Clause is that one religious denomination cannot be officially preferred over another." If Alabama allows Christian inmates to be attended by a clergy member of their faith, then it must offer the same accommodation to people of other faiths.

Neal Katyal, a former acting Solicitor General of the United States who, by virtue of the fact that he practices before the Supreme Court, must be careful about criticizing its judges too harshly, compared the Ray decision to notorious decisions such as "*Dred Scott*," *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Korematsu*, and the Chinese Exclusion Act cases." The National Review's David French labeled Ray "a grave violation of the First Amendment."

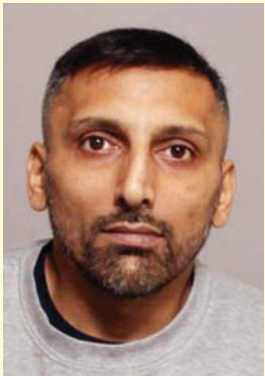
Nearly a hundred years ago the

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California was gifted a huge property by a wealthy devotee in her will. Her family filed suit. The openly and blatantly racist and religiously bigoted judge (there are scads of them even in federal courts of the Confederate South) set aside the bequest on totally specious grounds and awarded the property to the family. It looks like SCOTUS under Trump is rapidly returning to the *Dred Scott* days of viewing slaves as property.



Indian Origin Man in UK Sentenced to Four Years Imprisonment for Robbery



Imtiaz Patel, 42, had threatened a shop worker with a knife at the store in Haymarket, Leicester

LONDON (TIP): An Indian jewellery shop robber in the city of Leicester, who was caught minutes after the offence by two police officers on patrol has been jailed for four years.

Imtiaz Patel, 42, had threatened a shop worker with a knife at the store in Haymarket, on the morning of Saturday 5 January this year, before running off with a Rolex watch. Patel was wearing a dress, a Burkha and had a scarf across his face when he had entered the store. He was looking at a Rolex watch valued at around £7,000, when staff became concerned about the way he was acting.

Patel asked to see another watch leading to the member of staff saying she would have to put the first watch back. Patel then produced a knife and made threats to another staff member who was stood near the shop door before running off with the watch just before 9.40am.

But he was stopped minutes later by the officers who were concerned about his behaviour. While searching Patel, they were informed about the robbery leading to the connection being made and the defendant being arrested.

On Feb 11, at Leicester Crown Court, Patel, of no fixed address, pleaded guilty to the robbery and to possession of a bladed article. He was sentenced to four years imprisonment for the robbery and nine months imprisonment for possession of the bladed article. Both sentences will run concurrently.

Patel was also sentenced to an additional two months imprisonment for breaching a community order. The total sentence handed down was four years and two months imprisonment.

19-year-old pregnant British woman who joined ISIS in Syria wants to come home

LONDON (TIP): The woman, Shamima Begum, faces an uncertain future, with no clear answers about how she would get home to east London, or about whether Britain would try to prosecute her for terrorist offenses if she did.

A 19-year-old woman who left Britain in 2015 to join the Islamic State and who says she is nine months pregnant has told a reporter that she fled the last remaining village held by the terrorist group in Syria and wanted to return home.

But the woman, Shamima Begum, faces an uncertain future, with no clear answers about how she would get home to east London, or about whether Britain would try to prosecute her for terrorist offenses if she did. (New York Times)

UK PM Theresa May loses symbolic Brexit vote in parliament

LONDON (TIP): British lawmakers defeated Prime Minister Theresa May in a symbolic vote over her Brexit strategy on February 14, undermining her pledge to European Union leaders that she can get the unpopular divorce deal approved if they grant her concessions.

Lawmakers defeated the government 303-258 on the main motion asking them to reaffirm support for her plan to seek changes.

While the vote does not force the government to change tack, the numbers will undermine EU leaders' confidence that May can win parliament's support for a revised agreement.

The latest twist in the two-year negotiation to leave the EU underlines the deep divisions in parliament over how, or even whether, Britain should leave the bloc in its biggest political and trade policy shift in more than 40 years.

It also increases the possibility of Britain leaving without a deal, a nightmare scenario for many businesses, but also of Brexit being delayed or potentially never happening at all.

Up until the last minute before the votes, ministers and May's chief whip, her enforcer in the House of Commons, tried to convince a group of Brexit supporters favouring a radical break with the EU that leaving



Prime Minister Theresa May was defeated in a symbolic vote over her Brexit strategy in Parliament on Thursday. (Source: Reuters/File)

without an agreement was still the legal default position.

The group, several dozen strong, had said they would abstain in Thursday's vote.

Some Conservative and many opposition lawmakers accuse May of "running down the clock", edging Britain closer to the exit date to try to force parliament into a choice between backing her deal or leaving without

an agreement.

To try to prevent a no-deal exit, several lawmakers put down alternative proposals.

The real crunch date for the government looks set to come on Feb. 27, when May has promised the next round of votes. Lawmakers seeking to force the government to delay Brexit say that will be moment they make their move. (Reuters)

Maria Ressa, Philippine journalist critical of President Rodrigo Duterte, is arrested

MANILA (TIP): Rodrigo Duterte has not tried to hide his disdain for journalists, calling reporters "sons of bitches" and "spies" and even warning that they are "not exempted from assassination."

It is a scene that Maria Ressa, the co-founder of an online news startup critical of President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines, has grown accustomed to.

Late Wednesday afternoon, several plainclothes agents from the National Bureau of Investigations arrived in Ressa's newsroom in Manila, Philippines, with a warrant for her arrest in a digital libel case involving her online news site, Rappler. An hour later, they took her and her lawyer away.

Ressa's arrest is the most dramatic sign yet of Duterte's crackdown on the news media in the Philippines. Duterte has not tried to hide his disdain for journalists, calling reporters "sons of bitches" and "spies" and even warning that they are "not exempted from assassination."

As she left the building flanked by police officers, Ressa addressed reporters, telling them, "I will do the right thing."

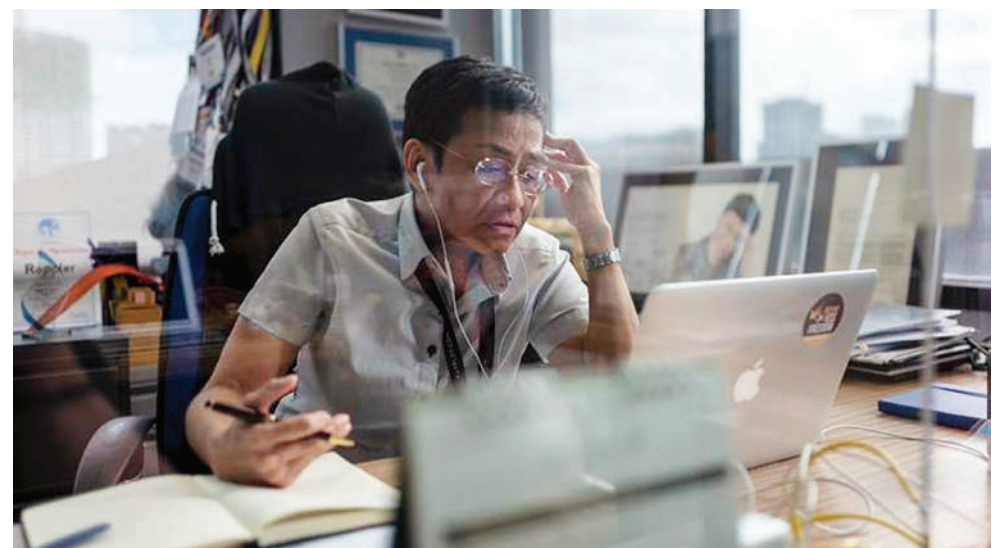
"These legal acrobatics show how far the government will go to silence journalists, including the pettiness of forcing me to spend the night in jail," she later added in an emailed statement.

Gemma Mendoza, an editor at Rappler, said a judge had denied bail to Ressa.

Chay Hofileña, a Rappler executive, said the arrest was "about media intimidation and media harassment."

"This is proof," she added, "because Rappler has been critical of the government and they are very intent on silencing us."

Ressa had already been served an arrest warrant and turned herself in to authorities in December to face tax evasion charges. This time, the arrest warrant was related to an



FILE — Maria Ressa, one of the founders of Rappler, an online news start-up critical of the Philippine government, at her desk in Manila (Jes Aznar/The New York Times)

article that Rappler published in May 2012. In both cases, Ressa has called the charges "unfounded" and part of a larger attack on news outlets in the Philippines.

The arrest on Feb 13 stems from an indictment filed by the Department of Justice against Ressa and Reynaldo Santos Jr., a former researcher and writer for Rappler, and involves a 2012 Rappler article saying that Renato Corona, then the chief justice, had used a car that was registered to a businessman named Wilfredo Keng.

The Cybercrime Prevention Act, under which Ressa was charged, was approved four months after the article's publication and came into effect in October 2012.

In a court filing last year, Ressa denied the charges and called them "baffling and unfounded," adding that the government was applying a law retroactively.

For several years, Rappler and other news

outlets have closely followed a brutal anti-drug war waged by Duterte that has resulted in the deaths of thousands of people. Their coverage helped to draw international attention to the campaign, resulting in widespread international rebuke.

Duterte has also threatened reporters from other publications and warned that he would not allow the renewal of the license for ABS-CBN, the biggest broadcast news network in the Philippines.

But Ressa has been on the receiving end of an onslaught of legal attacks by the government. Her star political reporter has been stripped of her press pass, equivalent to a White House pass, and Rappler has been banned from covering presidential appearances. She faces a slew of charges related to a handful of different laws including ones governing financial securities and cybercrimes. (NYT)

Cuba charges US moving special forces, preparing Venezuelan intervention

HAVANA (TIP): Cuba charged on Feb 14 that the United States was secretly moving special forces closer to Venezuela as part of a plan to intervene in the South American country using the pretext of a humanitarian crisis. A “Declaration of the Revolutionary Government” charged recent events in the country amounted to an attempted coup that had so far failed.

US President Donald Trump’s administration has been trying to pressure Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro to step down and hand over power to Juan Guaido, the head of Venezuela’s National Assembly.

Guaido invoked a constitutional provision to assume the presidency three weeks ago, arguing that Maduro’s re-election last year was a sham.

These events, the declaration said, had led the United States to impose drastic sanctions causing damage “1000 times greater” than the aid it is trying to force on the country.

“Between February 6 and 10 military transport aircraft have flown to the Rafael Miranda Airport of Puerto Rico, the San Isidro Air Base, in the Dominican Republic and to other strategically located Caribbean islands, probably without knowledge of the governments of those nations,” the declaration said.

“These flights originated in American military installations from which units of Special Operations and Marine Corps operate, which are used for covert actions,” it said.

Venezuela, a major oil producer, is in the throes of a severe economic crisis with a



President Donald Trump promised to use the “full weight” of U.S. economic and diplomatic power to push for the restoration of Venezuela’s democracy. (Files/Agencies)

dramatic drop in output and six-digit inflation wreaking havoc on the livelihoods of residents and sending an estimated three million of them searching for sustenance in neighboring countries.

Cuba has been a key backer of the Venezuelan government since what is called the Bolivarian Revolution began under former leader Hugo Chavez in 1998.

Most Western and Latin American countries, including the United States, quickly recognized Guaido as Venezuela’s legitimate head of state and pledged millions of dollars in humanitarian aid in support. The aid has begun arriving along the border

with Colombia and Brazil.

Maduro’s socialist government retains the backing of Russia, China and many other nations, as well as control of state institutions including the military. Guaido said on Feb 12 the aid would roll across the border on February 23 despite the Maduro government’s objections, setting up a possible confrontation.

Cuba said on Thursday it was clear the United States wanted to “forcibly establish a humanitarian corridor under international protection, invoking the obligation to protect civilians and applying all necessary measures.” (Reuters)

Africa’s black panthers emerge from a century in the shadows

ADDIS ABABA (TIP): There have been a few reported observations of this species in Africa, but, until now, only one had been confirmed, in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, in 1909.

It’s a scientific coup to warm the heart of any superhero fan: the first documented sightings of a black panther in Africa in nearly 100 years, not far from where Marvel places the fictional setting of its Oscar-nominated “Black Panther.”

A team from the Institute for Conservation Research of the San Diego Zoo Global and the Loisaba Conservancy in Kenya confirmed the existence of black leopards — as the animals are also known — in Laikipia County, an area north of Nairobi, Kenya’s capital.

“It is certain black panthers have been there all along, but good footage that could confirm it has always been absent until now,” Nicholas Pilfold, a biologist at the San Diego institute, said in an Instagram post Tuesday.

“Black panthers are uncommon; only about 11 percent of leopards globally are black,” he added. “But black panthers in Africa are extremely rare.”

The researchers’ findings were published in the African Journal of Ecology in January.

The leopard, scientific name *Panthera pardus*, is more commonly found with a black coat in tropical and humid Southeast Asia. But, apparently, melanism — the cause of the dark coloring — can also be displayed in semiarid climates, like that of Laikipia, according to the paper.

There have been a few reported observations of this species in Africa, but, until now, only one had been confirmed, in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, in 1909.

After unconfirmed reports of a black leopard in Laikipia County, the research team installed eight cameras around the Laikipia Wilderness Camp — focusing on available water sources, such as swimming pools and natural springs, and on animal trails.

From February to April 2018, five of the cameras recorded footage of a young female black leopard. She appeared alone in four nighttime videos — drinking water from artificial water sources or carrying remains of her prey — but in the only daytime video, she was following an adult female leopard with normal markings.

“Unconfirmed observations from September 2017 from the two leopards together suggest that this nonmelanistic female might be the mother of the black leopard,” according to the paper, which added that in previous sightings, the black leopard was “smaller in size, and in closer proximity to her mother.”

Word of the camera observations brought forth another high-quality image of a black leopard from the Ol Ari Nyiro Conservancy, also in Laikipia, which was taken in May 2007.

“Collectively, these images are the first reported in nearly 100 years that confirm the existence of black leopard in Africa, and the first in Kenya,” the paper said.

The dark coloration of the melanistic leopards’ coat is attributed to a recessive gene that causes the loss of the normal function. Despite being called black, they are usually very dark brown and have the same pattern of spots as other leopards, according to the Out of Africa Park in Arizona, which hosts two black leopards, named Enoch and Silhouette. (New York Times)

The \$89,000 verdict tearing Japan and South Korea apart

SEOUL (TIP): Though the two nations have bickered for decades over their painful shared history, the current falling-out may be one of the most serious yet. And it comes as the Trump administration is seen in the region as inattentive and unwilling to act as mediator.

Until recently, few had heard of PNR, a company in South Korea that turns sludge from steel mills into iron. Then a 94-year-old man named Lee Chun-shik tried to settle an old debt. Lee grew up during the Japanese occupation of Korea and as a teenager he was taken to Japan and forced to work for a steel-maker, essentially as slave labor. Today, that steel-maker is Japan’s largest, Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal, with assets around the world, including \$9.6 million worth of shares in PNR. Lee asked a court in South Korea to seize some of those shares as compensation for what he endured so long ago — and the court did so last month.

The ruling is now at the center of a bitter dispute that has called into question the foundation of diplomatic ties between the United States’ top allies in Asia, driving them apart even as Washington is trying to build a united front against China’s rise and a nuclear-armed North Korea.

At issue is a question that has strained relations since the end of World War II: Has Japan accepted full responsibility for occupying Korea and mobilizing Koreans for its war effort?

Though the two nations have bickered for decades over their painful shared history, the



Lee Hee-ja, a South Korean activist whose father died while forced to work for the Japanese military, displays photos of other victims of forced labor who joined lawsuits at her urging and have since died in Seoul. (Jean Chung/The New York Times)

current falling-out may be one of the most serious yet. And it comes as the Trump administration is seen in the region as inattentive and unwilling to act as mediator.

“Unless both sides pull their wisdom together to find a solution, this will get worse and could become a full-blown diplomatic war over history,” said Lee Won-deog, a scholar at Kookmin University in Seoul. The countries have also traded heated accusations over

encounters between their armed forces. In December, Japan said a South Korean warship had locked targeting radar on a Japanese military plane. Seoul denied the charge and accused Japan of sending low-flying planes over its naval ships.

The spike in tensions has unsettled many who see cooperation between Japan and South Korea — which both host U.S. bases — as vital to stability in the region. (NYT)



NEHA KAKKAR OPENS UP ABOUT BREAKUP WITH HIMANSH KOHLI

Bollywood singer and Indian Idol judge Neha Kakkar has opened up about her breakup with actor Himansh Kohli. In a new interview, Neha has said that she is happy to have moved on from the 'bad relationship' and is thankful that she is able to spend more time with family now.

Speaking to Dainik Bhaskar, Neha said, "Right now, all I can say is that being single is the best feeling of my life. You know what, when I was in a relationship, I was not being able to give time to my family and my friends. At that time, I dedicated all my time and energy to that person who does not deserve it. And guess what; in spite of giving him so much time; he always complained of not being together."

Neha and Himansh, who had announced their relationship on national television, broke up at the end of last year. She wrote in an emotional Instagram post that the negative comments she'd received immediately after the breakup had sent her into depression. "Yes I am in Depression. Thanks to All the Negative people in the world. You're successful in giving me the worst days of my life. Congratulations you're successful!" she'd written. There were also reports of her having broken down on the sets of Indian Idol, after a contestant sang an emotional song.

SHRADDHA KAPOOR ROPED IN FOR BAAGHI 3

Bollywood star Shraddha Kapoor, who was last seen in *Stree* alongside Rajkummar Rao, has been officially signed up for the third instalment of hit franchise *Baaghi*. Shraddha, who featured in the first part, returns to the franchise and joins Tiger Shroff, who has headlined the previous two instalments.

Tiger's rumoured girlfriend Disha Patani was the female lead in *Baaghi 2*. Disha and Sara Ali Khan were two names rumoured to be roped in as the female lead but Shraddha has now been finalised for the role. The film's producers, Nadiadwala Grandsons, said in a statement, "The entire team of *Baaghi* is very happy to have Shraddha Kapoor back. Tiger and Shraddha's pair was extremely loved in *Baaghi* and I am sure that fans of the franchise will be as excited as we are to have them together."

Director Ahmad Khan, who directed *Baaghi 2*, will direct *Baaghi 3* as well. It will be produced by Sajid Nadiadwala. *Baaghi 2* was one of the biggest hits of 2018 and also marked Tiger's career best at the box office, collecting Rs 250 crore worldwide. Starring Disha Patani and Tiger, it was a remake of Telugu film *Kshanam*. *Baaghi 2* worked wonders at the box office, despite being panned by critics.

"There is pressure because I didn't expect *Baaghi 2* would do the numbers which it did so there is lot of expectations among audience for *Baaghi* as a franchise and not only that, I am also doing *Student of The Year 2* which is a very big franchise," Tiger had said at photographer Dabboo Ratnani's 2019 calendar launch in January.

Tiger had announced the third instalment in 2018 and tweeted, "And round 3 is on! #SajidNadiadwala's #Baaghi3 will be out on 6th March 2020. This one's for you Baaghians. @khan_ahmedasas @foxstarhindi @NGEMovies @WardaNadiadwala"

Tiger Shroff will next be seen in *Student of The Year 2*. He is also working with Hrithik Roshan on an untitled project, which is being made under the banner of Yash Raj Productions. *Baaghi 3* is slated to hit theatres on March 6, 2020.



Katrina Kaif has a witty reply to a question on her contemporaries getting married

What began with Anushka Sharma's 2017 dreamy wedding in Tuscany found momentum in 2018. If Sonam Kapoor tied the knot with longtime boyfriend Anand Ahuja in presence of close friends and family, Deepika Padukone and Ranveer Singh chose the picturesque Lake Como as the ideal location for their intimate wedding. Following their footsteps was Bollywood's *Desi Girl*, Priyanka Chopra who tied the knot with Nick Jonas in Jodhpur in one of the grandest weddings of that year.

And with the onset of 2019, murmurs of Varun Dhawan tying the knot with Natasha Dalal have already spread like wildfire.

With almost all her Bollywood friends getting hitched, Katrina has a hilarious reaction to this. Recently, Katrina Kaif, who is single after her break-up with Ranbir Kapoor, opened up on everyone

getting married in Bollywood. The 35-year-old actress on a chat show said, "I am like everyone's getting married, wait... don't leave me behind."

It was in 2016 that Katrina Kaif broke up with Ranbir Kapoor. While Ranbir has found love in Alia Bhatt, Katrina is still single and busy concentrating on her work.

On the work front, Katrina was last seen with Shah Rukh Khan and Anushka Sharma in *Zero*. The film bombed at the box office, but the actress was lauded for her role. Katrina played the role of an actress battling alcoholism.

Currently, she is busy shooting for Ali Abbas Zafar's *Bharat* with Salman Khan. After Priyanka Chopra made an impromptu exit from the film owing to her wedding with Nick, Katrina stepped into her shoes. The film is an official remake of a Korean film, *An Ode To My Father*. The film is set to hit the screens this Eid.





GILLIAN ANDERSON CELEBRATES AGEING

Actress Gillian Anderson said ageing is something one needs to find a way to embrace.

Anderson told: "If you watch yourself on film, there is a certain point where you see yourself change. It's arresting. It can either be completely traumatic or something that instigates a shift of consciousness towards thinking about what's important.

"But you have to go through that trauma first, to mourn." The 50-year-old star has grown to accept that she cannot do anything to halt getting older so is celebrating the changes instead, reported.

She added: "The thing to remember is, how one looks in the mirror is the youngest one will ever look again. So you can't do anything but celebrate it! Ageing is something we all need to find a way to embrace - the inevitability of age, of decline, of... rot."

Anderson - who has children Piper, Oscar and Felix from previous relationships and has been dating screenwriter Peter Morgan since 2016 can currently be seen in comedy drama.

JENNIFER CONNELLY PRAISES TOM CRUISE AFTER HE RECREATES 'TOP GUN' MOTORCYCLE SCENE

Actor Jennifer Connelly has praised Hollywood star Tom Cruise for his driving skills after they recreated the iconic motorcycle scene from 'Top Gun' for the sequel. The 48-year-old actor was photographed holding on to Cruise, 56, from the back on a black motorcycle as he drove. The scene is similar to the one featured in the 1986 classic in which Maverick and his love interest Charlotte 'Charlie' Blackwood, portrayed by Kelly McGillis, go for a ride.

"That was a fast motorcycle. He is an excellent driver. I was marvelling at it actually because we had this scene. We were doing that and we raced down the street and we pull up at the house that's supposed to be my house (in the film) and, like, not once was it even half of an inch off.

"Every time it (would) zoom down the street and then stop perfectly exactly on the mark. He's got skills! For sure," Connelly told Entertainment Tonight.

The two are set to star in "Top Gun: Maverick" with Cruise reprising his role as Pete 'Maverick' Mitchell. Val Kilmer is also returning to the role of Iceman, while Jon Hamm and Miles Teller have joined the cast.

Directed by Joseph Kosinski, the film is scheduled for release in June 2020.



Brad Pitt gate crashes ex-wife Jennifer Aniston's 50th birthday party

Brad Pitt attended his ex-wife Jennifer Aniston's birthday party at the weekend. The 55-year-old actor - who split from the former 'Friends' star in 2005 after five years of marriage - was spotted making a casual entrance at the Sunset Tower Hotel in Los Angeles, arriving alone in a black Escalade and quickly making his way inside, wearing a cap, in a bid to dodge photographers who were waiting outside.

Other guests at the party were said to include another of Brad's former flames, actress Gwyneth Paltrow, as well as Jennifer's former boyfriend John Mayer, and the singer's ex-girlfriend Katy Perry, who arrived by motorcycle with her partner Orlando Bloom.

Meanwhile, Dolly Parton had hoped to join the festivities for her 'Dumplin'' co-star - who turns 50 on Monday (11.02.19), but claimed she'd been too busy to buy her a gift.

She told 'Entertainment Tonight': "She's having a party. I've been invited. I'm going to try to go!

"I'm just going to go... eat her food and drink her wine and say 'Happy Birthday!'

"I don't have time to get her a present. I'm busy! No, I'll think of something."

It was previously claimed Jennifer and Brad had got back in contact following his 2016 split from Angelina Jolie.

However, a source said: "They aren't in regular contact, beyond an occasional text back and forth to wish each other the best when there's been a new project or big event."

The 'Cake' actress - who split from Justin Theroux last February after two years of marriage - recently insisted she still regards her relationships with both Brad and the 'Leftovers' actor as "successful".

She said: "I don't feel a void. I really don't.

"My marriages, they've been very successful, in personal opinion. And when they came to an end, it was a choice that was made because we chose to be happy, and sometimes happiness doesn't exist within that arrangement anymore.

"Sure, there were bumps, and not every moment felt fantastic, obviously, but at the end of it, this is our one life and I would not stay in a situation out of fear. Fear of being alone. Fear of not being able to survive. To stay in a marriage based on fear feels like you're doing your one life a disservice.

"When the work has been put in and it doesn't seem that there's an option of it working, that's OK. That's not a failure. We have these cliché's



Jennifer Lawrence is officially engaged to Cooke Maroney

Jennifer Lawrence and Cooke Maroney have got engaged after dating for over nine months. According to source, the 28-year-old Oscar winner was recently seen wearing a massive engagement ring while she was hanging out with the 34-year-old art gallerist in New York City.

"It was a giant rock. They seemed like they were celebrating and people were talking about it," a source told.

"The ring was very noticeable. They were sitting back in a corner. She was wearing a cute black dress with white polka dots," it added.

A representative of the actor confirmed to the outlet that the couple will be getting married soon.

She was first romantically linked to Maroney in June 2018. They are reported to have been introduced by Lawrence's best friend Laura Simpson.

Before Maroney, Lawrence was in relationship with director Darren Aronofsky, who directed her in 2017's 'mother!'.

Gunman kills 5 of family in northwest Pakistan

PESHAWAR (TIP): A gunman on February 14 barged into a house in northwest Pakistan and shot dead five members of a family.

The incident occurred in Nowshera district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

District Police Office Mansoor Aman said the residents belonged to Peshawar's Badaber area.

The slain included a couple, their daughter and two sons.

The motive behind the murders was yet to be known.

Sri Lankan Government is Advertising Job Positions for Hangmen



COLOMBO (TIP): The return of capital punishment to Sri Lanka means new job opportunities, with the government posting a job ad for an "executioner" in a local newspaper. The listing, issued by Sri Lanka's commissioner general of prisons this week, calls for male applicants aged between 18 and 45 who possess "excellent moral character" and a "very good mind and mental strength," Reuters reports. It comes as the country's president pushes ahead with plans to reinstate the death penalty as part of a hardline, Philippines-style crack down on drug traffickers.

"We never know if the government will resume the death penalty, but we want to hire two hangmen to fill vacancies and be ready if the government wants to execute drug traffickers," said Thushara Upuldeniya, a spokesman for the prison service. In return for executing people convicted of drug-related offences, the successful candidate will be paid 36,310 Sri Lankan rupees (about \$285 Australian dollars) per month, which is an above average salary for a government employee, according to Reuters. Job interviews will be carried out next month.

There hasn't been an execution in Sri Lanka since 1976, with all death penalties for capital crimes such as murder, rape, and drug trafficking were commuted to life in prison instead. The country's last hangman quit in 2014—claiming stress after seeing the gallows for the first time—and another employee who the government hired last year never showed up for the job.

President Maithripala Sirisena is hoping to end the 43-year moratorium on capital punishment, however, and roll out the punitive measure again over the next two months in a bid to curb crime and maintain order, local paper Colombo Page reported. During a state visit to the Philippines last month, Sirisena praised President Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs—a bloody, violent campaign that's claimed the lives of more than 12,000 people since 2016—amid concerns that Sri Lanka could become a new transit hub for drugs in Asia. (VICE AU)

Imran Khan, Top US Officials To Hold Talks With Taliban In Pakistan

On the "formal invitation of the government of Pakistan, another meeting is scheduled to take place between the negotiation teams of the Islamic Emirate and the US on 18th of February in Islamabad," Taliban spokesman said

ISLAMABAD (TIP): The Taliban on February 13 said its negotiators would next week meet the top US and Pakistani officials including Prime Minister Imran Khan during a key round of talks in Islamabad as part of the ongoing Afghan peace talks.

Neither Washington nor Islamabad immediately confirmed the announcement by the Taliban.

On the "formal invitation of the government of Pakistan, another meeting is scheduled to take place between the negotiation teams of the Islamic Emirate and the US on 18th of February, 2019 in Islamabad," Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said in a statement.

The Taliban's delegation would also meet Prime Minister Khan, the statement said.

Mujahid said the regular round of talks was already scheduled to be held on February 25 in Qatar.

He said that in the meeting with Khan, Taliban would have "comprehensive discussions about Pak-Afghan relations and issues pertaining to Afghan refugees and Afghan businessmen".

Though there was no official confirmation, diplomatic sources in Pakistan said that the Taliban delegation would visit Pakistan and hold talks with both American and Pakistani officials.

The Taliban and the US are in a discussion to end more than a 17-year long bloody war in Afghanistan.



Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan will be part of the key round of talks in Islamabad.

The Taliban control nearly half of Afghanistan, and are more powerful than at any time since the 2001 US-led invasion after the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001.

Special US Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad recently said after six days of talks with the Taliban representatives in Doha last month that the US has made "significant progress" in its peace talks with the Taliban.

Since being appointed in September, Khalilzad has met with all sides in an attempt to end America's longest war in which the US has lost over 2,400 soldiers in more than 17 years.

US President Donald Trump reportedly wants to cut in half the 14,000 American troops in Afghanistan, and the Taliban leaders have made a US withdrawal a key condition in peace negotiations. (NDTV)

Former Maldives Prez charged with money laundering

COLOMBO (TIP): Maldives' former President Abdulla Yameen, who is accused of using money stolen from state coffers, was charged with money laundering on Wednesday, according to a local media report.

The case stems from an allegedly shady deal to lease islands for tourist resort development and the discovery of \$1 million in his bank account.

The case has been filed at the criminal court, the Prosecutor General's office tweeted on Wednesday. Yameen, who lost the presidential poll to Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in September 2018 after a five-year rule, is accused of using money stolen from state coffers, police said last week, after wrapping up probe, The Maldives Independent reported.

Under the 2014 anti-money laundering law, the offence carries a prison sentence between five and 15 years or a fine of up to \$64,850. Separate charges were sought over alleged false testimony to the anti-graft body during its probe into the theft of \$90 million from Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation. Yameen was questioned over \$1 million deposited to his account by SOF, a firm that was used to funnel resort acquisition fees paid to the MMPRC. He denies any wrongdoing. — PTI

Indian national on Lanka assassination plot further remanded in custody

COLOMBO (TIP): An Indian national arrested for possible links to an alleged plot to assassinate Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena was on Wednesday further remanded in custody until February 27.

Marceli Thomas was arrested in October following a complaint by Namal Kumara, a police informant, who had alleged a plot to assassinate Sirisena and Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, the former top defence ministry bureaucrat and brother of ex-president Mahinda Rajapaksa. Kumara also claimed that the senior police officer in charge of the police's counter-terrorism division Nalaka Silva had masterminded the plot. Silva has since been interdicted and questioned extensively by the police CID.

The police maintained although no details had emerged on the alleged plot to kill Sirisena, Silva had been arrested for plotting the murder of a police officer.

Thomas, said to be from Kerala, appeared before a court on Wednesday.

Sirisena in late October sacked Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe triggering an unprecedented constitutional crisis which lasted nearly two months.

The alleged assassination plot and Wickremesinghe government's go slow on the investigation was cited by Sirisena as one of the reasons for his sacking of Wickremesinghe. (PTI)

Crocodile mauls Indonesian to death in Malaysia: police

KUALA LUMPUR, (TIP): An Indonesian man has been mauled to death by a crocodile in Malaysia, with his horrified nephew spotting the victim disappearing into a river during the attack, police said Thursday.

Muh Tahir Majid Syam, 40, went missing while hunting for crabs with his nephew on Tuesday by a river in Sarawak state on jungle-clad Borneo island.

While looking for him, the younger man suddenly saw his uncle's head pop up above the water's surface before sinking again, deputy local police chief Mohamad Sabri Zainol told AFP.

"(The nephew) was looking around, and then he saw his uncle's head in the water before being pulled back into the river," the police officer said.

Muh Tahir's body was found Wednesday covered in bite marks, leading police to conclude he was likely killed by a saltwater crocodile. The victim was a migrant worker on a palm oil plantation, the official news agency Bernama reported. Many Indonesians work in the agricultural sector in relatively affluent Malaysia.

Saltwater crocodiles are often sighted along rivers and by beaches in Malaysia's two states on Borneo, Sabah and Sarawak. Borneo is shared between Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei.

The reptiles, which can grow up to seven metres (22 feet) long, have been blamed for a series of attacks in recent years in the area.

Authorities in Sarawak began granting licences to hunt crocodiles in 2017 in a bid to reduce the number of attacks, according to local media. — AFP

SIKKIM: A FAIRYTALE DESTINATION

Under the starry sky exists a paradise that is full of warm-hearted people and fairytale destinations. Ornamenting the right shoulder of India, Sikkim is a hideout from the hullabaloo of chaotic urban life. Last to be added as a part of Northeastern Region, Sikkim vouches for an incredible holiday experience that is an assortment of adventure, opulent history, nature's beauty, and heart melting culture. Music to the ears of holidaymakers, this Northeastern piece of melody is where rejuvenation awaits you amidst scintillating high altitude lakes, green sprawls, gorgeous waterfalls and meandering rivers; and where spirituality and peace of mind find you at serene monasteries; and celebration of a plethora of fairs & festivals makes you fall in love.

A fairytale land indeed, Sikkim is adorned with glistening high altitude lakes, rolling green mountains, pretty rhododendron groves, azure rivers, milky waterfalls and vivid monasteries. The west-most Northeastern state of Sikkim is evidently an abode of beauty, however, it does have a window of opportunity for adventure. Not to forget, the state is famous for its incredible view of the third highest mountain in the world, Mount Kanchenjunga/Khangchendzonga.

The first glance of Sikkim tourism impresses tourists with a scenic view of chains of mountains and lush greenery. In fact, the state boasts dramatic contours that range from dense forests to barren lands and patches of meadows. The northern part of Sikkim is primarily known for its high altitude lakes like Gurudongmar, and that of a meadow called Valley of Flowers. The scenery of this part of the state is quite distinctive, and that is why it is mostly preferred by adventurers who relish trekking, camping and mountaineering here. Also, the wildlife lovers enjoy their visit to North Sikkim which houses a larger portion of famous Khangchendzonga National Park. Apart from the lofty mountains, lakes and alpine meadows, the nature lovers can get mesmerized by the awe-inspiring beauty of the meandering and scintillating rivers like Teesta and Rangit that cut and run through several popular destinations in Sikkim. The mighty cascades/waterfalls such as Seven Sisters also add the dash of surrealness to the state, whereas the alpine mountain passes like Nathu La and Gocha La assist in adding more to the character of the heavenly place.

Standing second to the nature's bountifulness in Sikkim are the vivid sacred sites. Sikkim, home to a copious quantities of Buddhist monasteries and a decent sum of Hindu Temples, Churches and Gurudwaras, opens its door wide for pilgrimage tours. The state that has been said to have been blessed by Guru Padmasambhav himself is dotted with 200 monasteries, each being unique in its own way. Amongst the prominent Buddhist places in Sikkim include Samdrupte, where the world's highest Guru Padmasambhav statue is erected. Then there are monasteries like Pemayangste, Tashiding, Rumtek, Enchey, Phensang, Ralong, Phodang, Tolung, and Labrang Palden Phuntsok that draws the attention of the Buddhist pilgrims and tourists alike. The Dubdi Monastery in Yuksom is also a heritage tour destination. The Kiretshwar Mahadev Temple on the bank of River Rangit in Legship and the Sai Mandir are two important religious sites in Sikkim for Hindu pilgrims. In Sikkim, the religious feel is not confined to monasteries and temples, the state also is dotted with hot springs like Borong and Ralong that have therapeutic properties, there are also 4 caves - Sharchog Beyphug in the East, Lho Kando Sangphug in the South, Nub Dechenphug in the West and Jhang Lhari Nyingphug in the North, and lakes like Gurudongmar and Khecheopalri that are considered as holy destinations in Sikkim.

Adventure is an essential part of Sikkim



tourism that reflects the uniqueness of this unsurpassed destinations that never fails to thrill. The state offers excellent trekking experience to both amateur as well as veteran adventurers with its unspoiled trekking trails that passes through groves of rhododendron; silver fir, hemlock, and magnolia forests, high altitude mountain passes, and lesser explored lakes. Amongst the popular treks in Sikkim include Gocha La Trek, the Green Lake Trek and Barsey Rhododendron Trek. For wildlife adventurers, Sikkim offers a number of wildlife reserves that are replete with rare animal and bird species. Apart from the famous Khangchendzonga National Park, the state has Fambong Lho Wildlife Sanctuary, a home to Himalayan Black Bear, Red Panda, and Civet cat; Maenam Wildlife Sanctuary, which shelters Red Panda and a variety of birds like blood pheasant and black eagle; Singba Rhododendron Sanctuary, where blooms a variety of rhododendron; and Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary that as aforementioned is ideal destination for trekking as well. River Rafting is yet another opportunity for adventure in Sikkim, as the state renders its Teesta and Rangit Rivers for an exhilarating watersport activity.

What catches the eyes in Sikkim the most is the rich culture this Northeast state is endowed with. Peacefully inhabited by the Bhutias, Nepali and Lepcha people, Sikkim offers an exciting diversity to witness whose influence can be seen in the food, culture as well as festivals. It wouldn't be incorrect to say that each month of the year in the state is a celebration, with fairs & festivals occupying a few days of the locals. In fact, the state now observes a number of tourism festivals like World Tourism Day along with religious and agriculture festivals, increasing the count of celebrations that one can be part of while touring Sikkim. Amongst the popular festivals in Sikkim include Loosong, Losar, Bhumchu, Saga Dawa, and Phang Lhabso. The harmonic diversity of Sikkim can also be witnessed in its food habit, contributed by the three different sects of people, the state offers an interesting blend of dishes that can make any mouth drool. An ideal way to plunge into the lives of Sikkimese people and their culture is by taking a village tour. It is true, many villages in Sikkim like Dzongu and Kewzing have thrown their doors open to tourism, and even offer homestay facilities.



SPRING CLEANING: HOW TO PAMPER YOUR SKIN

Spring cleaning doesn't only refer to combing through the junk in your closet or garage. Your beauty stash also requires a good purge.

EXFOLIATE MORE OFTEN

As we come out of winter, our skin is still a little on the dry and dehydrated side, making our pores look enlarged and our tone a little dull and red from the chilly temperatures and lack of humidity. As the weather warms up and activity increases, our metabolism, circulation and oil production all get back into gear which will instantly brighten the complexion, but this is also a great time of year to exfoliate.

Exfoliation expedites the process of sloughing off old skin cells so that new ones can emerge, explained Patinkin. For your body, a gentle physical exfoliator made with sugar, salt or finely-ground plant material can be used.

SWITCH TO A LIGHT MOISTURIZER

Look at dialing back on the thickness and richness of the moisturizing products you were using in winter," notes Patinkin. "You can do the same with makeup, stepping down from medium or full coverage to a lighter BB Cream, tinted moisturizer or even just a tinted SPF.

So instead of reaching for facial creams made with nut butters or heavy oils, opt for water gel moisturizers or dry oils like camellia or rosehip. For the rest of your body, switch from a heavy cream to a lotion or gel, as well.

ADD EYE CREAM TO YOUR REGIMEN

Allergies can worsen in the spring, resulting in dark circles, swelling, inflammation and redness under the eye.



When this happens, under eye bags look worse and wrinkles become more noticeable.

You should look for an eye cream that focuses on hydration and skin brightening.

HAIRCARE ROUTINE

The primary hair changes people experience from winter to spring include a more oily scalp, a decrease in volume due to higher temperatures, and lackluster color due to sun exposure.

After the dry winter season transitions into spring, restoring your hair's natural luster and moisture is key.

If you don't already, use a clarifying shampoo once a month to cleanse your scalp and to remove build up.

GET RELIGIOUS ABOUT SPF

The importance of sunscreen can't be reiterated enough. It's one of the easiest ways you can prevent damage and keep your skin healthy throughout the year. With an increased exposure to sun in the summer, though, it becomes even more important to be diligent about applying sunscreen. Daily application of SPF to your face and body should be your top priority when it comes to skincare concerns as we enter sunnier days.

Plants that bring luck, wealth, prosperity and health to home

Palms

Palms are ideal to create a room divider, especially when placed in a colorful planter to activate any missing Feng Shui Elements in a room.

Palms remove xylene and formaldehyde from carpeting.

Money tree

Pachira money tree is a plant commonly used in Feng Shui and also believed to bring the grower good luck.

Interestingly, money trees are often braided together, but in order for the "luck" to work, you'll need to have three to five braided plants, steering clear of the unlucky number four.

Rubber Plant

Rubber plants are especially auspicious when placed in the "Wealth Area" of your home because the round leaves symbolize good fortune, abundance, and wealth.

Peace Lily

This plant grows well under artificial



light and produces white flowers, making it ideal for office settings as well as your home.

Jade plant

According to Feng Shui lore, plants with rounded leaves are sure to bring good fortune and the jade plant is no exception.

Jade is a traditional gift given to new business owners and, when placed near the entrance, is thought to bring prosperity and success. No reason this shouldn't work for the home too.



Orchids

They represent love: they attract love, soothe the soul, and deepen friendships. The ancient Greeks associated orchids with fertility and virility, which makes them a great gift for new parents!

English Ivy

Trailing vines of ivy help soften any "poison arrows" that point at you where you sleep or work. Ivy removes benzene found in plastics, and helps control formaldehyde from carpets and paint.

FOOD CORNER



Chicken Tandoori Wrap

Ingredients

- Chicken Fillets - 4, chopped, boneless, skinless, Onion - 1/4 cup, sliced, Tomatoes - 2, sliced/chopped, Green Chilli - 1, chopped, Garlic - 2 cloves, chopped, Ginger - 1 tblsp, peeled, chopped, Plain Yogurt - 125 gms, Coriander Leaves - handful, chopped, Curry Powder - 1/2 tsp, Plain Rotis as required (leftovers or fresh), Salt as per taste

Method

- Coarsely grind the garlic, ginger and green chillies.
- Combine this with the yogurt and small handful of coriander leaves.
- Grind again until well mixed.
- Sprinkle some salt and mix well.
- Add the curry powder and mix well. Reserve some of this mixture.
- Add the chopped chicken pieces and mix well until evenly coated.
- Keep aside for 15 to 20 minutes.
- Heat a nonstick pan over medium flame.
- Cook the chicken until slightly browned and cooked through, turning from time to time.
- Alternatively you can place it in a baking tray lined with foil and bake for 15 to 20 minutes in a preheated oven at 170C.
- To the reserved yogurt mixture add the onions, tomatoes and some coriander leaves.
- Mix well.
- Warm the chapatis and place them on a flat surface.
- Divide the chicken and the salad between the chapatis.
- Roll them up tightly and serve at once.
- Cut them in halves if desired.

SAG ALOO

Ingredients

- 2 tbsp sunflower oil, 1 onion, finely chopped, 2 garlic cloves, sliced, 1 tbsp chopped ginger, 500g potato, cut into 2cm, 3/4in chunks, 1 large red chilli, halved, deseeded and finely sliced

Method

- Heat 2 tbsp sunflower oil in a large pan, add 1 finely chopped onion, 2 sliced garlic cloves and 1 tbsp chopped ginger, and fry for about 3 mins.
- Stir in 500g potatoes, cut into 2cm chunks, 1 halved, deseeded and finely sliced red chilli, 1/2 tsp black mustard seeds, 1/2 tsp cumin seeds, 1/2 tsp turmeric and 1/2 tsp salt and continue cooking and stirring for 5 mins more.
- Add a splash of water, cover, and cook for 8-10 mins.
- Check the potatoes are ready by spearing with the point of a knife, and if they are, add 250g spinach leaves and let it wilt into the pan. Take off the heat and serve.

NOVEL INSULIN PILL FOR DIABETICS MAY REPLACE PAINFUL JABS

Scientists have developed a drug capsule that could be used to deliver oral doses of insulin, paving the way for replacing the painful injections that diabetics have to give themselves every day.

About the size of a blueberry, the capsule contains a small needle made of compressed insulin, which is injected after the capsule reaches the stomach.

In tests in animals, the researchers showed that they could deliver enough insulin to lower blood sugar to levels comparable to those produced by injections given through skin.

The study, published in the journal *Science*, also demonstrated that the device can be adapted to deliver other protein drugs.

"We are really hopeful that this new type of capsule could someday help diabetic patients and perhaps anyone who requires therapies that can now only be given by injection or infusion," said Robert Langer, from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the US.

The tip of the needle is made of nearly 100 per cent compressed, freeze-dried insulin, using the same process used to form tablets of medicine.

The shaft of the needle, which does not enter the stomach wall, is made from another biodegradable material.

Within the capsule, the needle is attached to a compressed spring that is held in place by a disk made of sugar. When the capsule is swallowed, water in the stomach dissolves the sugar disk, releasing the spring and injecting the needle into the stomach wall.

The stomach wall has no pain receptors, so the researchers believe that



patients would not be able to feel the injection.

To ensure that the drug is injected into the stomach wall, the researchers designed their system so that no matter how the capsule lands in the stomach, it can orient itself so the needle is in contact with the lining of the stomach.

"As soon as you take it, you want the system to self-right so that you can ensure contact with the tissue," said Giovanni Traverso, an assistant professor at Brigham and Women's Hospital at Harvard Medical School in the US.

Once the tip of the needle is injected into the stomach wall, the insulin dissolves at a rate that can be controlled

by the researchers as the capsule is prepared.

In this study, it took about an hour for all of the insulin to be fully released into the bloodstream.

In tests in pigs, the researchers showed that they could successfully deliver up to 300 micrograms of insulin. More recently, they have been able to increase the dose to 5 milligrams, which is comparable to the amount that a patient with type 2 diabetes would need to inject.

"Our motivation is to make it easier for patients to take medication, particularly medications that require an injection," Traverso said.

Source: PTI



BIRTH CONTROL PILLS COULD IMPAIR WOMEN'S ABILITY TO RECOGNISE EMOTION

Despite the widespread use of oral contraceptives (OCPs) by women, many are not aware that it may impair their ability to recognise others' emotional expressions, which may have serious consequences in interpersonal contexts, suggests a new study.

The study showed that healthy women who use birth control pills are poorer judges of subtle facial expressions than non-users.

"More than 100 million women worldwide use oral contraceptives, but remarkably little is known about their effects on emotion, cognition and behaviour," said senior author Alexander Lischke from the University of Greifswald in Germany.

"However, coincidental findings suggest that oral contraceptives impair the ability to recognise emotional expressions of others which could affect the way users initiate and maintain intimate relationships," said Lischke.

To investigate the effects of OCPs on women's emotion recognition, the researchers administered a special emotion recognition task to two similar groups of healthy women: 42 OCP users and 53 non-users.

The findings, published in *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, showed that OCP users were nearly 10 per cent less accurate on average than non-users in deciphering the most enigmatic emotional expressions.

Though the groups were equally good at recognising easy expressions, the OCP users were less likely to correctly identify difficult expressions, results showed.

The effect held for both positive and negative expressions, and regardless of the type of OCP or the menstrual cycle phase of non-users.

"Cyclic variations of estrogen and progesterone levels are known to affect women's emotion recognition and influence activity and connections in associated brain regions. Since oral contraceptives work by suppressing estrogen and progesterone levels, it makes sense that oral contraceptives also affect women's emotion recognition," said Lischke.

There is a need for further studies that replicate and extend the findings of the present study before thinking about changing current guidelines regarding the prescription of OCPs, the study noted.

Source: IANS

How fungus cripples immune system

Scientists have found how a common fungus—found virtually everywhere on Earth—can knock out our body's defence system, enabling a potentially fatal infection to develop.

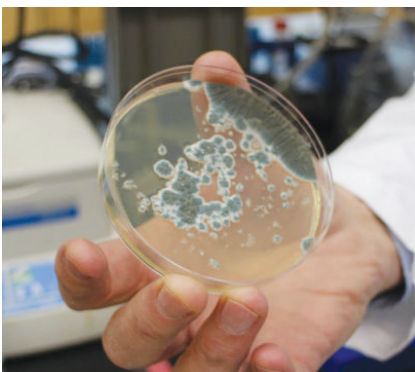
The fungus *Aspergillus fumigatus* can be found as a dark grey, wrinkled cushion on damp walls or in microscopically small spores that blow through the air and cling to wallpaper, mattresses and floors, researchers said.

Healthy people usually have no problem if spores find their way into their body, as their immune defence system will put the spores out of action.

However, the fungus can threaten the lives of people with a compromised immune system, such as AIDS patients or people who are immunosuppressed following an organ transplantation.

A team led by Oliver Werz of Friedrich Schiller University in Germany, has now discovered how the fungus knocks out the immune defences.

Among other factors, it is gliotoxin—a potent mycotoxin—that is responsible for the pathogenicity of *Aspergillus fumigatus*, according to a study



published in the journal *Cell Chemical Biology*.

"It was known that this substance has an immunosuppressive effect, which means that it weakens the activity of cells of the immune defence system," said Werz.

However, it had not been clear previously how exactly this happens.

Researchers brought immune cells into contact with synthetically produced gliotoxin. These cells, called neutrophilic granulocytes, represent the first line of the immune defence system.

As soon as such a cell comes into contact with a pathogen, for example a fungus, it releases specific messenger substances into the blood, which attract other immune cells.

Once a sufficiently large number of immune cells has gathered, they can render the intruder harmless, researchers said.

This does not happen if the pathogen *Aspergillus fumigatus* is involved, researchers said.

The team found that gliotoxin ensures that production of the messenger substance leukotrieneB4 in the neutrophilic granulocytes is inhibited, so that they are unable to send a signal to other immune cells.

This is caused by a specific enzyme (LTA4 hydrolase) being switched off by the mycotoxin.

"This interrupts communication between the immune cells and destroys the defence mechanism. As a result, it is easy for spores—in this case the fungus—that enter the organism to infiltrate tissues or organs," said Werz.

Source: PTI

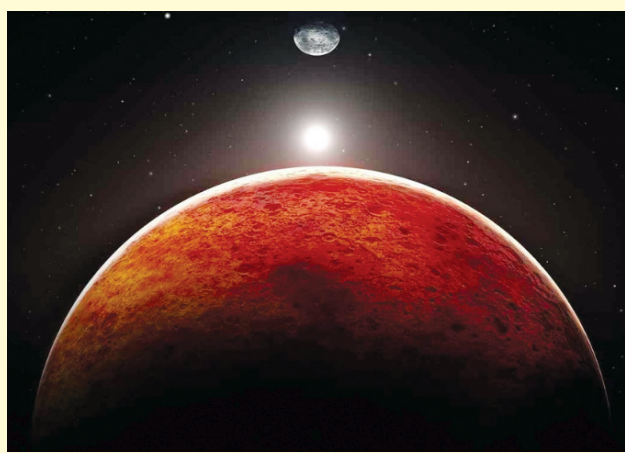
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DR. SATISH AND GITANJLI ANAND



DR. SATISH ANAND
Former Chairman, Board of Trustees, AAPI National
E-Mail: sanandmd@gmail.com

GITANJLI ANAND
Former President, India Association of Long Island (IALI)
E-mail: gitanjlianand@gmail.com



MARS HAS 'UNDERGROUND VOLCANIC ACTIVITY'

Mars may have volcanic activity below its surface, according to scientists who argue that without an underground source of heat it would not be possible for the Red Planet to host liquid water.

Previous research has suggested that liquid water is present beneath the south polar ice cap of Mars.

According to the study published in the AGU journal *Geophysical Research Letters*, there needs to be an underground source of heat for liquid water to exist underneath the polar ice cap.

Researchers from University of Arizona in the US suggest recent magmatic activity—the formation of a magma chamber within the past few hundred thousand years—must have occurred underneath the surface of Mars for there to be enough heat to produce liquid water underneath the kilometer-and-a-half thick ice cap.

On the flip side, the team said that if there was not recent magmatic activity underneath the surface of Mars, then there is not likely liquid water underneath the ice cap.

The presence of liquid water on the Red Planet has implications for potentially finding life outside of Earth and could also serve as a resource for future human exploration of our neighbouring planet.

Twitter to fix bug fluctuating 'Like', 'Retweet' counts

Micro-blogging site Twitter on Wednesday said it is working to resolve the problem that has been causing the 'Like' and 'Retweet' counts on its platform to fluctuate continuously.

"Some people around the world are experiencing an issue with notifications, Likes, and Retweets. We're working on resolving this and will follow up soon. We apologise for the inconvenience," Twitter Support tweeted.

However, the company did not say what caused the problem and has not specified by when the bug would be fixed.

The bug seems to have been affecting Indian users as well.

"Everything OK with @Twitter? It keeps deleting RTs & likes. Observed huge fluctuation in retweets," Xiaomi India Managing Director and Global Vice President Manu Jain tweeted on Tuesday.

The bug made users wonder if accounts were being suspended in mass or if Twitter was deleting them, TechCrunch reported.

Twitter has a global user-base of nearly 236 million active monthly users and it is not clear how many users actually did get affected by the problem.

Earlier in February, a Twitter bug confused Android users into believing they were viewing posts from random strangers when actually it was Twitter that was mislabelling usernames on retweets.



SELF-DRIVING CARS 'LEARN' TO PREDICT PEDESTRIAN MOVEMENT

Scientists are using humans' gait, body symmetry and foot placement to teach self-driving cars to recognise and predict pedestrian movements with greater precision than current technologies.

Data collected by vehicles through cameras, LiDAR and global positioning system (GPS) allowed the researchers at the University of Michigan in the US to capture video snippets of humans in motion and then recreate them in three-dimensional (3D) computer simulation.

With that, they have created a "biomechanically inspired recurrent neural network" that catalogs human movements.

The network can help predict poses and future locations for one or several pedestrians up to about 50 yards from the vehicle, at about the scale of a city intersection.

LiDAR is a surveying method that measures distance to a target by illuminating the target with pulsed laser light and measuring the reflected pulses with a sensor.

"Prior work in this area has typically only looked at still images. It wasn't really concerned with how people move



in three dimensions," said Ram Vasudevan, an assistant professor at the University of Michigan.

"But if these vehicles are going to operate and interact in the real world, we need to make sure our predictions of where a pedestrian is going does not coincide with where the vehicle is going next," said Vasudevan.

Equipping vehicles with the necessary predictive power requires the

network to dive into the minutiae of human movement: the pace of a human's gait (periodicity), the mirror symmetry of limbs, and the way in which foot placement affects stability during walking.

Much of the machine learning used to bring autonomous technology to its current level has dealt with two dimensional images—still photos.

Source: PTI

Instagram users can soon send DMs from web



Instagram is reportedly testing internally a web version of Direct Messages (DMs) that would allow personal chat and sharing of posts between users on the app.

If and when the feature rolls out for public, it would enable Instagram users to chat via DMs on a desktop, laptop PC, Mac and non-Android or iPhone.

"Mobile reverse-engineering specialist and tipster Jane Manchun Wong alerted us about the Instagram's test. It's still being internally 'dogfooded' -- used heavily by employees to identify bugs or necessary product changes. But she was able to dig past security and access the feature from both a desktop computer and mobile web browser," TechCrunch reported.

In the current design, Direct on the web is reportedly available from a Direct arrow icon in the top right of the screen.

Instagram added notifications feature

in 2016, and later in 2017 added Explore and some other features for web users. With a 1-billion user-base worldwide, the app still does not allow web users to post Stories from the desktop.

Rolling out a web version of Direct could prove to be a full-fledged SMS alternative rather than just a tacked-on feature for discussing the photo and video app's content, the report said.

Facebook launched its chat feature on web before releasing it on mobile phones. Similarly, Facebook-owned messaging app WhatsApp launched a web portal in 2015 followed by desktop clients in 2016.

It could also pave the way for Facebook's upcoming unification of the back-end infrastructure for Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram Direct that should expand encryption and allow cross-app chat, the report added.

Instagram has not officially responded or commented on the subject.

LinkedIn launches live video broadcast for select groups

Microsoft-owned professional networking platform LinkedIn is launching a live video feature on its app to enable users to broadcast real-time videos.

The beta version of "LinkedIn Live" is first launching as an invite-only feature in the US, and it remains unclear if and by when would the feature be available for everyone to create LinkedIn Live videos.

"Video is the fastest growing format on our platform right now and Live has been the most requested feature," TechCrunch quoted Pete Davies, Director of Product Management at LinkedIn as saying on Tuesday.

LinkedIn's live video effort is supported by a part of Microsoft's cloud division -- Azure Media Services -- that is providing encoding for LinkedIn Live.

"The feature is intended to allow users to ask questions or make suggestions in the comments in real time where hosts could moderate those comments in real time too," Davies said.



Airbus pulls the plug on the A-380, world's biggest jet



Europe's Airbus announced plans to scrap production of the A380 superjumbo on Thursday, abandoning its dream of dominating the skies with a cruisesliner for the 21st century after years of lacklustre sales.

The world's largest airliner, with two decks of spacious cabins and room for 544 people in standard layout, was designed to challenge Boeing's legendary 747 but failed to take hold as airlines backed a new generation of smaller, more nimble jets.

Airbus said in a statement that the last A380 would be delivered in 2021.

Confirming a shake-up first reported by Reuters, it said Emirates - the largest A380 customer - had decided to reduce its orders for the iconic superjumbo and order a total of 70 of the smaller A350 and A330neo models.

The European company said it would enter talks with unions in coming weeks over the 3,000-3,500 jobs potentially affected.

Airbus will produce 17 more of the planes including 14 for Emirates and 3

for Japanese airline ANA.

As part of the restructuring, Emirates placed a new order for 40 A330-900neo jets and 30 A350-900 aircraft, partially restoring a purchase of A350 aircraft which it cancelled in 2014.

Leading buyer 'disappointed'

Emirates, which had built its global brand around the A380 and Boeing 777 and which also has 100 of the Airbus superjumbos in its fleet, said it was disappointed by the closure.

"Emirates has been a staunch supporter of the A380 since its very inception," said Emirates Chairman Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed al-Maktoum.

"While we are disappointed to have to give up our order, and sad that the programme could not be sustained, we accept that this is the reality of the situation," he added.

The A380 will remain a pillar of the Emirates fleet well into the 2030s, stated the airline.

Emirates' local rival Etihad of Abu

Dhabi also disclosed it was cutting some Airbus and Boeing jet orders, highlighting growing questions over the growth of Gulf airlines.

Making its maiden flight in 2005, the A380 was a major step in Airbus's efforts to compete on equal terms with Boeing and challenge what had been a cash cow for its arch-rival.

But sales of the industry's largest four-engined jets have fallen due to improvements in lighter twin-engined alternatives, such as the Boeing 787 and 777 or Airbus's own A350.

The prospect of a premature halt to A380 production emerged last month as part of a restructuring of orders first reported by Reuters.

On Wednesday, Reuters reported that Airbus was poised to axe the superjumbo and would likely give an update coinciding with results due on Thursday morning.

The decision to scrap production is the last major step by outgoing Airbus Chief Executive Tom Enders.

Source: Reuters

CHINA'S PRESIDENT Xi TO MEET TOP US TRADE OFFICIALS: REPORT

BEIJING (TIP): Chinese President Xi Jinping plans to meet with top US officials in Beijing this week, a report said Wednesday, as the world's two biggest economies rush to patch up their trade differences before a looming deadline.

Xi will meet on Friday with officials including US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, who are in the capital for crunch talks towards a trade deal, the South China Morning Post reported.

"Xi is scheduled to meet both Lighthizer and Mnuchin on Friday," it said, quoting a source briefed on the arrangements. The US officials and their Chinese counterparts meet for talks on Thursday and Friday.

They are under the gun to seal an accord ahead of the March 1 deadline set by Donald Trump, though the US president said Tuesday that he was open to extending that, depending on progress in Beijing.

"If we're close to a deal, where we think we can make a real deal ... I could see myself letting that slide for a little while," Trump told reporters at the White House.

In December, Washington suspended for three months Trump's plan to increase tariffs on USD 200 billion worth of Chinese imports - to 25 per cent from the current 10 per cent - to allow time for negotiations.

Venezuela turns to India for oil exports as US sanctions bite

HOUSTON/MEXICO CITY/ MOSCOW (TIP): Venezuela's oil exports have tapered off and shifted toward India since new U.S. sanctions began Jan. 28 as state-run oil company PDVSA seeks to replace deliveries to the United States and Europe that were disrupted by payment restrictions.

The South American nation is turning its focus to cash-paying buyers, especially in India, its second-largest customer after the United States, amid US sanctions designed to undercut financial support for Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. Sanctions are designed to bar Maduro's access to oil revenue that has helped his government remain in power. In the two weeks since the sanctions were announced, PDVSA has been able to load and export 1.15 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude and refined products, according to Refinitiv Eikon data. Venezuela was exporting about 1.4 million bpd in the months before sanctions, according to the Eikon data. Two supertankers, Baghdad and Folegandros I, launched late on Monday from Venezuela's Jose terminal carrying cargoes to Indian ports. Ship tracking data in Refinitiv showed several other tankers carrying Venezuelan crude or fuel towards Asia, although the final destinations of these vessels were not yet clear.

More India rate cuts could be in store as core inflation eases

India's headline and core inflation rates are set to converge in the coming months as the economy slows, increasing the chance of more interest rate cuts.

The core measure -- which strips out volatile fuel and food costs -- has remained sticky at around 6 percent and is a key reason economists cautioned against more rate cuts after last week's surprise easing. It softened to 5.4 percent in January, according to economists at Yes Bank Ltd. and Axis Bank Ltd. Pranjul Bhandari, chief India economist at HSBC Holdings Plc, sees it slowing to as low as 4 percent this year.

For now, headline inflation eased further as food prices extended their fall, albeit at a slower pace. Consumer-price growth reached 2.05 percent in January, well below the Reserve Bank of



India's medium term target of 4 percent.

"It looks like headline inflation will begin to move towards core," HSBC's Bhandari said. "With rupee and fuel costs stabilizing, the core could also start coming down."

The convergence of the two measures, along with recent surveys from the central bank suggesting slowing inflationary expectations among households and industry, will be key for a clearer assessment of policy actions by the Monetary Policy Committee. The six-member panel last week voted 4-2 to lower the key interest rate. Shaktikanta Das, the RBI's new governor, voted for a cut despite only weeks earlier acknowledging the challenges posed by the divergent paths taken by core and food inflation.



Amazon to acquire mesh Wi-Fi router startup 'Eero'

Amazon.com Inc. has agreed to acquire Eero, a builder of Wi-Fi-networking tools, in another deal aimed at bolstering the retail and technology giant's home devices business. Eero, based in San Francisco, makes gadgets that extend Wi-Fi coverage throughout a home using local networking, known as mesh technology, that removes hiccups in broadcasting internet signals. The companies didn't disclose the purchase price Monday when they announced the acquisition. Eero has raised \$148 million in equity and debt, according to PitchBook Data Inc.

Amazon, builder of the hit Echo smart speaker line, is behind a growing range of home electronics, from Fire TV streaming sticks to a voice-controlled microwave. Last year, the company bought Ring, a builder of video doorbells and home security gear.

Woman charged with tossing chairs from Canada high-rise

TORONTO (TIP): A 19-year-old woman turned herself in to police on Wednesday to face charges for allegedly throwing two chairs off a 45th story balcony along a busy downtown Toronto street. The incident shown in an online video has sparked widespread outrage.

Det. Todd Higo said Marcella Zoia turned herself in. A widely viewed video shot from the apartment balcony shows a woman throwing one of the chairs, which plummets to the street below.

The chairs landed near the front entrance of the towering condo, but there were no reports of injuries.

After receiving tips from the public, police identified her and asked her to turn herself in.

Zoia is charged with mischief endangering life, mischief endangering property and common nuisance.

Zoia made a brief court appearance Wednesday afternoon and was released on \$2,000 Canadian bail (US\$1,508) and ordered to live with her mother. She must also not have any contact with the four individuals that were with her at the time.

"She is embarrassed by what happened. She wished it never happened. Of course, she would never wish anyone would be hurt," said

Greg Leslie, her lawyer.

Leslie said she understands the public outrage. He said he'll have discussions with the prosecution and said it might not go to trial but said he'll see how it develops.

Leslie said she was under peer pressure and they are looking for the others involved.

Zoia left the courthouse smiling with a Starbucks Frappuccino in hand as she entered an Uber.

Constable David Hopkinson said the apartment was being used as a short-term rental. Airbnb spokesman Ben Breit said the company reached out to Toronto police to offer their full support in their investigation "of any individuals involved with this abhorrent act."

"We remain outraged by the blatant disregard for community safety on display in the video," Breit said.

"We have no evidence at this time to suggest that the accused has ever been an Airbnb user, but we have suspended the account of a guest with a reservation at the building pending further review."

Tyler Walton said she believes she rented the same Airbnb unit, suite 4508, on the same day the chairs were thrown. She said she was told by the host to arrive later because the previous renter left a "big mess." (AP)

Hackers steal over 600 mn account details from 16 websites

LONDON (TIP): Hackers have made available on the dark web details of some 617 million accounts stolen from 16 websites including ShareThis, Dubsplash and MyFitnessPal among others, The Register reported.

It has been claimed that databases, which are aimed at making "life easier" for hackers, can be purchased from the Dream Market cyber-souk, located in the Tor network, for less than \$20,000 in bitcoin.

The stolen information mainly includes account holders names, email addresses and passwords, according to the report that appeared this week.

The price appears to be relatively cheap because the information is targeted at spammers and credential stuffers who could use the information to also get access to other sites for which the users use the same usernames and passwords.

The hacked websites are Dubsplash (162 million), MyFitnessPal (151 million), MyHeritage (92 million), ShareThis (41 million), HauteLook (28 million), Animoto (25 million), EyeEm (22 million), 8fit (20 million), Whitepages (18 million), Fotolog (16 million), 500px (15 million), Armor Games (11 million), BookMate (8 million), CoffeeMeetsBagel (6 million), Artsy (1 million), and DataCamp



(700,000), according to the report in The Register.

The seller, who is believed to be located outside of the US, told The Register that the Dubsplash data has been purchased by at least one person.

While some of these websites—particularly MyHeritage, MyFitnessPal and Animoto—warned their customers last year that they had been compromised, several others have started notifying users about the hacks. — IANS

contd from page 1

Terrorist Attack in J&K kills more than 40 Security Personnel

vehicles when they were ambushed on the Srinagar-Jammu highway at Latoomode in Awantipora.

Police said the terrorist driving the suicide vehicle was Adil Ahmad from Kakapora in Pulwama who joined the JeM in 2018.

The terror group has claimed responsibility for the attack that took place about 30 km from Srinagar, they said.

Over 20 people were injured in the terror attack, which reduced the bus to a mangled heap of iron. Body parts could be seen strewn around the area.

"It was a large convoy and about 2,500 personnel were travelling in multiple vehicles. Some shots were also fired at the convoy," CRPF DG R R Bhatnagar told PTI.

National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval is monitoring the situation in Kashmir, said sources. Senior CRPF officials are also briefing him about the developments.

The convoy started from Jammu around 3.30 am and was supposed to reach Srinagar before sunset, officials said.

The number of personnel travelling back to the Valley was high as there was no movement on the highway for the last two to three days because of bad weather and other administrative reasons, they said.

Usually, about 1,000 personnel are part of a convoy. A road opening party was deployed, and the convoy had armored counter-terror vehicles, officials said. Forensic and bomb analysis teams are on the spot.

The bus that was the focus of the attack belongs to the 54th battalion of the force and had 44 personnel on board, officials said.

CRPF Inspector General (Operations) in the Kashmir Valley Zulfiqar Hasan described it as a "vehicle-bound attack" and said Jammu and Kashmir Police has taken up the investigation.

"Governor Satyapal Malik observed forces responsible for the insurgency in J&K are desperate & frustrated and just want to prove presence. Visibly it seems to be guided from

across the border as Jaish-e-Mohammad has claimed responsibility," said J&K Raj Bhawan PRO on the terror attack.

Rajnath, who will visit Srinagar on Friday, has also spoken to Satyapal Malik. Home Minister Rajnath Singh has already spoken to DG CRPF RR Bhatnagar over the terror attack.

"Senior officers at the spot, the investigation is underway. Injured being taken care of. There were 2500 personnel in the convoy," said Bhatnagar.

Condemning the attack, Union Minister Arun Jaitley said, "attack on CRPF in Pulwama is cowardice & a condemnable act of terrorists. Nation salutes martyrs&we stand united with families of martyrs. We pray for the speedy recovery of the injured. Terrorists will be given an unforgettable lesson for their heinous act."

In the attack on the Uri military base in September 2016, JeM militants killed 18 Army jawans and injured dozens of others. Experts of the anti-terror commando force National Security Guard (NSG) and investigators of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) are being sent to Jammu and Kashmir to join the probe into the terror attack in Pulwama in which at least 39 CRPF personnel were killed, officials said Thursday, Feb 14. (Source: PTI)

Trump to declare national emergency to build border wall: Democrats say "will challenge the move in the Supreme Court"

President Trump will sign the government funding bill, and as he has stated before, he will also take other executive action - including a national emergency - to ensure we stop the national security and humanitarian crisis at the border, White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders said in a statement.

The President is once again delivering on his promise to build the wall, protect the border, and secure our great country, she said.

The White House statement came soon after Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell made the move public.

"I had an opportunity to speak with President Trump and he, I would say to all my colleagues, has indicated he's prepared to sign the bill. He also (will) be issuing a national emergency declaration at the same time. I indicated I'm going to support the national emergency declaration," Mr. McConnell said.

On the Democrats saying they will challenge the move in the Supreme Court, Sanders said, "We're very prepared, but there shouldn't be [legal challenges]. The president's doing his job. The Congress should do theirs."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said that declaring a national emergency would be a lawless act, a gross abuse of the power of the presidency and a desperate attempt to distract from the fact that Trump broke his core promise to have Mexico pay for his wall".

It is yet another demonstration of President Trump's naked contempt for the rule of law. This is not an emergency, and the president's fearmongering doesn't make it one, they said in a joint statement.

He couldn't convince Mexico, the American people or their elected representatives to pay for his ineffective and expensive wall, so now he's trying an end-run around Congress in a desperate attempt to put taxpayers on the hook for it. The Congress will defend our constitutional authorities, they said.

Opposing the proposed move, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) said that Mr. Trump's hankering for a wall at the southern border cannot be justified by calling a national emergency.

This would be a clear abuse of presidential power - one that sidesteps the role of Congress in the appropriation of funds. Shame on any member of Congress who doesn't clearly and vigorously speak out on this illegitimate invocation of emergency authorities, ACLU said.

Senator James Inhofe said Mr. Trump had no choice but to declare a national emergency.

I want to make sure this declaration has minimal, if any, impact on our military and reimburse all the necessary accounts affected by the decision. As I heard in a hearing yesterday, military housing and all military installations are facing disrepair and poor conditions. We cannot afford to allow them to be further impacted, he said.

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PRESIDENT/PUBLISHER: Prof. Indrajit S. Saluja
VICE PRESIDENT: Chitagam Saluja
CHIEF EDITOR: Prof Indrajit S. Saluja
ASSISTANT EDITOR: Bidisha Roy
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The Indian Panorama
P.O. Box No. 190067, South Richmond Hill, NY 11419,
Tel: 646-247-9458
Email: editor@theindianpanorama.com
DALLAS EDITION
P.O. BOX 121695, ARLINGTON, TX 76012
Lovllien Kaurr, VP & Bureau Chief

Bureau Chief Phone: 972-330-3139
E-mail tipdallas01@gmail.com; Phone: 646-247-9458
www.theindianpanorama.news
Published by Prof. Indrajit Saluja

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MAGHI PURNIMA

Magha Purnima is an important day for Hindus that falls on the 'purnima' (full moon day) in the month of 'Magha' in the traditional Hindu calendar. This date roughly corresponds to the months of January-February in the Gregorian calendar. Magha Purnima is also popularly known as 'Maghi Purnima' or 'Maha Maghi' and is the last and most important day of the Magha Maas. In the Hindu legends Purnima is known to be an important day for performing religious and spiritual rituals, and of these the Magha Purnima is one of the most auspicious.

On this day Hindu devotees in thousands perform the ritualistic bath at the Triveni Sangam in Prayag. During this time the famous 'Kumbha Mela' and 'Magha Mela' is also held in which devotees flock from each and every corner of the country. Even in southern states of India like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, it is celebrated with utmost enthusiasm and gaiety. In Tamil Nadu on this day the spectacular 'float' festival is held wherein beautifully decorated idols of Meenakshi and Lord Sundeshwara are mounted on floats. Magha Purnima also holds special significance for followers of Buddhism as it is believed that Gautama Buddha pronounced his impending death on the same day.

Rituals during Magha Purnima

- On the day of Magha Purnima, devotees must get up early and take a holy dip in any water body, before sunrise. For those who cannot take a dip in the river, can take bath at home by mixing Gangajal in water.
- After the ritualistic bath, devotees begin to make preparations for the puja. On this day, they worship Lord Vishnu and Hanuman Ji. Also along with the 'Ishta Devatas', the day of Magha Purnima is also dedicated to worshipping Goddess Parvati and Lord Brihaspati' (as Brihaspati is the God of Magha Nakshatram).
- Devotees perform the Satyanarayana Puja with full devotion and also recite the Satyanarayana Katha. The idol of the lord is worshipped with banana leaves, sandalwood paste, til, supari, moli and fruits. In the most of Lord Vishnu's temples across India, special arrangements for this puja are made. Hence people also visit the temples in the evening.
- Fasting on the day of Magha Purnima is also considered to be rewarding. The observer of this vrat, fasts during the day and eats only after offering 'ardhya' to the moon in the evening. Only Single meal is allowed in a day.
- Making donations in the form of clothes, food, cereals, ghee, jaggery and fruits is highly beneficial. Donations can be any form and should be made to Brahmins and those in need. In the Hindu scriptures, it is believed to be very auspicious to donate 'til' (sesame seeds) in the entire month of Magha.
- In some regions ancestor rituals are also held on Magha Purnima. Devotees offer tarpan for the peace of the deceased souls.

Significance

The importance of Magha Purnima is mentioned in Brahma Vaivarta Purana. According to the Hindu mythology, on this sacred day, Lord Vishnu resides in the River Ganga and therefore it is strongly believed that by mere touching the holy water of River Ganga, devotees can attain salvation. Taking a holistic bath in the sacred rivers like Ganga, Saraswati and Yamuna on Magha Purnima is very beneficial. By piously observing the Magha Purnima vrat devotees can gain freedom from their sins and also acquire purity and peace of mind. Doing charity on Magha Purnima gives same benefits as observing Maha Yagyas.

Besides, religious significance, the day of



Magha Purnima is also holds importance in the science of astrology. It is held that on this day Sun enters into the Capricorn Sign and Moon moves in the Cancer constellation. Hence it is believed that taking a holy dip on Magha Purnima can put an end to all the problems correlated with Sun and Moon. The month of Magha is also beneficial from scientific point of view. It is believed that this month helps the human body to adjust with the changing seasons. Therefore taking a bath on Magha Purnima will provide strength and power to the body.

A Bathing Festival

Magh Purnima is adored as a 'bathing festival' across the country and a dip in the Ganga on this day holds high religious merit. Hindu devotees take a holy bath in the Ganga or Yamuna rivers every day of the month which begins from Paush Purnima and ends on Magha Purnima. Those who cannot make it to the sacred river can take a bath in any other stream, river, tank or pond which is regarded as holy and auspicious. On this day, a number of bathing festivals are held on the banks of holy rivers like the Ganga, Jamuna, Kaveri, Krishna, Tapti, etc. People walk for miles and

miles to be able to take a single holy dip in the river. A dip in the sea at Kanyakumari and Rameshwaram also has high religious value. Similarly, a bath in the Pushkar Lake in Rajasthan is also regarded as equally auspicious. In Madras at Kumbhakamaon, there are shrines of Nageshwara and Sarangpani near which there is a large tank in which devotees can take a dip on this holy day. It is believed that the water of the sacred Ganga flows into this tank on this auspicious day.

Blessings of Lord Vishnu

Get up early in the morning before sun rise and take holy bath in any river, holy pond. If it is not possible then do remember the sacred rivers Ganga, Yamuna, Narmada in your bathing water and pray to bless you. After taking bath, worship Lord Vishnu, do panchopchar puja and also chant the mantra "Om Namo Bhagwate Vasudevay" as much as possible. If possible, fast for the whole day. Most important, donate items like food, clothes, etc as per your capacity to Brahmins, and needy persons. Pray for success and keep on chanting mantra mentally. Stay energized and motivated for the whole day.

Kalpavas

A person who undergoes the Kalpavasa Vrata is honoured with the title of kalpawasi. The kalpawasi spend their time in Magha Mela in Prayag living an austere life for the whole Magha month. Urban life is very demanding and has become highly mechanical, many of us may neither have the time nor the inclination to fulfill the extreme form of austerities performed by the traditional kalpawasis. The idea is to get away from the everyday worldly existence and observe and absorb the true meaning of life by the learning from the religious gurus, interacting with other kalpawasis, experiencing the cultures, traditions and heritage from every part of India at one single place and maintaining a single minded devotion to the understanding of the Absolute-Truth. The whole Magha month has spiritual significance Indian lifestyle. Magha purnima or Maghi Purnima is given special significance for taking bath in river Ganga or elsewhere. During this month it is prescribed to take bath early in the morning before Sunrise or the Arunodaya kala. So, we should take bath early in the morning throughout this month wherever we are.

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"If Hindus don't maintain Hinduism, who shall save it?"

"If India's own children don't cling to their faith, who shall guard it?"

"Indians alone can save India, and India and Hinduism are one."

INDIA VS AUSTRALIA

3 World Cup certainties who could be rested for ODI series

NEW DELHI (TIP): After the historic triumph in Australia and New Zealand, the Indian selectors would now want to try out a few new faces in a bid to test the bench-strength leading up to the World Cup. Hence, in the upcoming ODI series against Australia, they could rest few frontline players and give opportunities to other players.

Here's a look at three players who could be rested after the rather tight schedule in Australia and New Zealand. With the IPL coming up, the selectors will also be keen to monitor the workload of different players.

Rohit Sharma

The Indian opener has been a constant fixture at the top of the order for India and has even stepped in as the stand-in skipper in the absence of Virat Kohli. He has featured in almost all the limited overs series in the recent past and could be rested for the upcoming series.

KL Rahul, who has found form in the A series against England, and could be given another opportunity at the top of the order.

Bhuvneshwar Kumar

After being rested for the limited overs leg in Australia and New Zealand, Jasprit Bumrah could be back and this would make the selectors rest Bhuvneshwar Kumar. Also, with the IPL coming up, his workload will be a cause of concern for the management.

This might give a chance to the other seamers who have been with the team in Mohammed Siraj and Siddarth Kaul to stake their claim for the World Cup berth.

Yuzvendra Chahal

The diminutive leg-spinner has been a vital cog in the Indian ODI machinery



for quite some time now and was the preferred option in the T20Is, ahead of Kuldeep Yadav. The selectors would want to give him a break and try out few other spinning options.

This could provide a longer rope to Ravindra Jadeja for the all-rounder's spot.

Why Rishabh Pant should be in World Cup squad?

Former India pacer Ashish Nehra lists five reasons

X-factor

In a team, there will always be contributors but at a big event like the World Cup, you need players with X-factor. Rishabh Pant is not a mere contributor but a pure match-winner

Left-hander

If you look at India's batting line up, save Shikhar Dhawan, there aren't any left-handers in the top seven. You need

variety with a left-right combination, where Rishabh fits perfectly

A floater

Rishabh can bat at any position between No. 1 to 7, so Virat Kohli and the team management can use him as a floater

Six-hitter

When it comes to hitting sixes, Rishabh comes second only to Rohit Sharma. India will need that in abundance during the World Cup

Match-winner

No disrespect, but this team has three clear match-winners and they are Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and Jasprit Bumrah. For me, the fourth one is going to be Rishabh Pant. Ambati Rayudu, Kedar Jadhav and Dinesh Karthik are all fantastic players but they are all in the same mould. You need X-factor which this boy possesses



DRAMATIC DAY: SAINA REFUSES TO PLAY ON UNEVEN SURFACE

GUWAHATI (TIP): Olympics silver medallist PV Sindhu expectedly sailed into the semifinals with two straight-game wins, while defending champion Saina Nehwal entered the quarters after winning a late pre-quarterfinal match on a day of intense drama at the 83rd Senior National Badminton Championship here today. Sindhu went about her business as usual, beating Riya Mookerjee 21-16 21-7 in 28 minutes to progress to the semifinals on a day when three pre-quarterfinals were postponed due to "uneven" surface at the Assam Badminton Academy.

The top seed from Hyderabad, a former champion, had opened her campaign with a 21-11 21-13 win over Nagpur's Malvika Bansod in the morning. Saina, who had refused to play her pre-quarterfinals match against Pune's Shruti Mundada due to "uneven" surface earlier in the morning, walked out to play her match late in the evening after the organisers managed to refurbish the court. "The wooden planks came out at a couple of places after Sindhu played her match. So they are now going to fix it. We will come back in the evening to play our pre-quarterfinal matches," Kashyap had said after Saina refused to play in the morning.

The Olympics bronze medallist beat Shruti 21-11 21-10 to set up a clash with Neha Pandit on Friday, while her husband Parupalli Kashyap, seeded third, beat Rahul Yadav 20-22 21-17 21-17.

Nagpur's Vaishnavi Bhale and Assam's Ashmita Chaliha, meanwhile, dished out superb fightback to enter their maiden singles' semifinals, while Lakshya Sen and Kaushal Dharmamer, too, progressed to the last-four with straight game wins in the men's singles.

Earlier in the day, top seed Sameer Verma conceded his men's singles encounter against Aryamann midway at 21-16 1-8 after straining his Achilles tendon.

Europa League: Chelsea edge out Malmo, Arsenal suffer setback

PARIS (TIP): Chelsea claimed a 2-1 victory at Malmo in the Europa League last-32 first leg on Thursday to ease some of the pressure on beleaguered coach Maurizio Sarri, while Arsenal suffered a shock loss to BATE Borisov.

Visitors Chelsea desperately needed a response after back-to-back humiliating away losses, with last Sunday's 6-0 thrashing by Manchester City following a 4-0 reverse at Bournemouth.

Ross Barkley took advantage of a defensive lapse by the home team to put Chelsea ahead on the half-hour mark, with Olivier Giroud adding a 58th-minute second before Malmo's late goal gave them a glimmer of hope ahead of next week's return match at Stamford Bridge.

Chelsea face Manchester United in the FA Cup on Monday, before facing City again in the League Cup final on February 24.

"I am happy because we played with confidence and it wasn't really very easy after the last match (the defeat by City)," Sarri told BT Sport.

"I think I am always confident but sometimes we had the wrong approach with matches so we need to be careful in every match." Sarri named a strong team, although he did leave Gonzalo Higuain and Eden Hazard on the bench.

Chelsea found themselves up against a spirited Malmo outfit in the first half, roared on by a vociferous home crowd, but kept the Swedes at arm's length before Barkley grabbed their first away goal of 2019.

Toss-up between Khaleel and Unadkat for Oz series

MUMBAI (TIP): Zeroing in on players for a couple of available World Cup spots, including a toss-up between left-arm pacers Jaydev Unadkat and Khaleel Ahmed, will be the selection committee's primary focus on Friday when it picks the India squad for the limited-overs series against Australia. India will play two T20Is and five ODIs, starting on February 24, in what will be their last international assignment before the World Cup, which begins in England on May 30.

The series against Australia will also be an indicator as to who among Rishabh Pant and Dinesh Karthik will board the Heathrow-bound flight as a specialist batsman and reserve wicketkeeper. KL Rahul is back in the mix as the third opener after a couple of good innings for India A against England Lions in the two unofficial Tests.

While the two T20I matches will be a precursor to the ODI series, vice-captain Rohit Sharma is likely to be given a short break to rejuvenate and come back fresh for the ODIs.

The selectors have reportedly already finalised 13 names for the World Cup — they are Virat Kohli, Shikhar Dhawan, Rohit Sharma, Ambati Rayudu, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Kedar Jadhav, Hardik Pandya, Vijay Shankar, Yuzvendra Chahal, Kuldeep Yadav, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami.

Skipper Kohli and pace spearhead Bumrah will be back in



action for the final dress rehearsal and the selectors are unlikely to look beyond 16 to 17 players who are now in the scheme of things for the World Cup. There are at least four contenders for the last two slots depending on the combination the team management would want.

Source: 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@bejandaruwala.com and on phone **011-91-8141234275 www.bejandaruwala.com**

WEEKLY HOROSCOPE FEBRUARY 18 - FEBRUARY 24, 2019

Aries:

You are thrusting ahead forcefully in all directions. There is a lot of movement as well as a lot of stability. You are flying high but with purpose. Very deep and perseverant energies lend themselves to you. There is tremendous potential for inner growth. You gain deep insights into the functioning of your psyche; in the process you understand yourself more. You get interested in the deep questions about change and metamorphosis, death, birth and regeneration. But you are also practical and know that money in the bank is the best bet.

Taurus:

This is a great time to be. You are in an extremely positive frame of mind. You are emotionally secure and in touch with your feelings. You come across as frank and honest and are much appreciated for this. You are also very generous and are able to help out with others' problems easily. You are more giving than usual at this juncture. You want to nurture others and take them under your wing. You feel like protecting, caring and supporting others. You will also spend a lot of time at home making it a comfortable and happy place.

Gemini:

You are firing in all cylinders. Everything you touch seems to work out. You are scoring a double century at Lord's and still smashing your way ahead on the front foot. You have the guile of Maradona, when he slaughtered, teased and taunted England in the famous World Cup match, and the concentration of Tiger Woods. You also have the elegance of Nureyev and the perseverance of Zubin Mehta. You are all this combined and more as you take on the opposition and emerge trumps.

Cancer:

You may also be in emotional turmoil about your relationships. A relationship, in particular, could trouble you as you don't know what to look for in it. You get mixed signals all the time. There could also be misunderstandings with colleagues and the boss. If self-employed, there could be trouble with the authorities. There could be problems with the local municipality or with the police. You have to figure out the best way to cease out of the situation. Do not take a confrontational attitude. Allow the other person his or her view point.

Leo:

There could be health issues. You need to solve them right away. If there is a chronic problem, attend to it. If you have been careless about your diet and have gained weight, it is time to address the issue head on. Go on a strict diet and exercise regimen. While you have several virtues and are one of the most successful of all sun signs, they can also be their own worst enemy. You have an independent streak and often back the wrong horse. Kindness, compassion, sympathy are all synonyms but they do have slight differences in meaning.

Virgo:

There is consolidation of your affairs. You make headway at work. There are new projects on the verge of taking off and you are unusually busy. There are also many expenses but you manage finances well. Love could be thrown into the ring now. Or it could just be lust as you let your hormones get the better of you. There could be a home away from home and new investments in stock and land. Ganesha is with you, wishing you well all the way. You spend time with the taxman in a frenetic, action-packed time.

Libra:

There is a settling down of sorts but you are still on the move. You are happy to see that life is taking you where you want to go. You meet new people and sign up new and profitable associations. There could be a marriage in the family or an addition to it. There will be many fun times with old friends and a lot of socializing. Ganesha is happy and so are you. You look for a home away from home and could travel. There is good news from overseas. There are no surprises and life is working out the way you had worked.

Scorpio:

Scorpio is a powerful sign and can move mountains but it also depends on what type of Scorpio you are - the scorpion, lizard or the eagle. The horoscope depends on several factors. You also have the use of free will to change your life. I want to remind you that an accurate analysis will need personal astrological details. These are mere indicators although I must confess, in all modesty, that I have been fairly accurate in the last many decades. You have to be particularly careful in your dealings with people. Learn to respect others.

Sagittarius:

There is a lot of movement in your life. You want to do new things and break free from the rut. You carry a devil-may-care attitude on your back like Atlas carrying the world on his hand. You can expect rebellious and explosive energies to enter your life. You look for freedom and fight whatever restrictions you perceive are closing in on you. You could get argumentative and judgmental. You will be impulsive and will fly off the handle at the slightest provocation.

Capricorn:

There are many emotions to contend with which could take the form of a forest fire raging within. There will be a new fondness for taking risks. You take chances and embark on projects that may never work. The subsequent failures make you even more frustrated and your behavior towards others, especially towards those at home and in the office, becomes unbearable. Then, you blame others for things not working out in your life. This is inappropriate behavior. Ganesha feels you had better take a break from routine and sort yourself out in some hermitage or health center away from the city.

Aquarius:

The situation changes for the better. There is much needed relief. There is optimism and positive thinking in your life. You are able to look back at life and get a better perspective. This is a good time to make long-range plans and, possibly, to travel or educate yourself in something entirely new and different. There is much-needed psychological and physical equilibrium. If you have recently been ill, you will be on the road to recovery. Ganesha asks you to continue on the road as there will be new projects and ventures.

Pisces:

This can be a very important time for youngsters. You will be in the spotlight for your achievements. They can ring glory to the family. There will be many happy events at home. The last period helps fuel your ambition to greater heights. You will also be busy with loans, funds, joint-finances, leasing and buying/selling. There is money to be made and you sniff out new opportunities like a bound. Try not to live in the past or get into any type of morbidity. Ask Ganesha for help.

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