

President Trump wants wall, with or without Congress



"I'll continue to build the wall, and we'll get the wall finished," President said in his interview to the New York Times Thursday, January 31. Photo / Courtesy White House

NEW YORK (TIP): President Donald Trump, in an interview to the New York Times on Thursday, January 31, called the ongoing talks with congressional lawmakers to avoid another shutdown "a waste of time" and suggested he may go in for funding the wall without the lawmakers.

"I think Nancy Pelosi is hurting our country very badly by doing what she's doing and, ultimately, I think I've set the table very nicely," Trump told the Times. Declining to confirm whether

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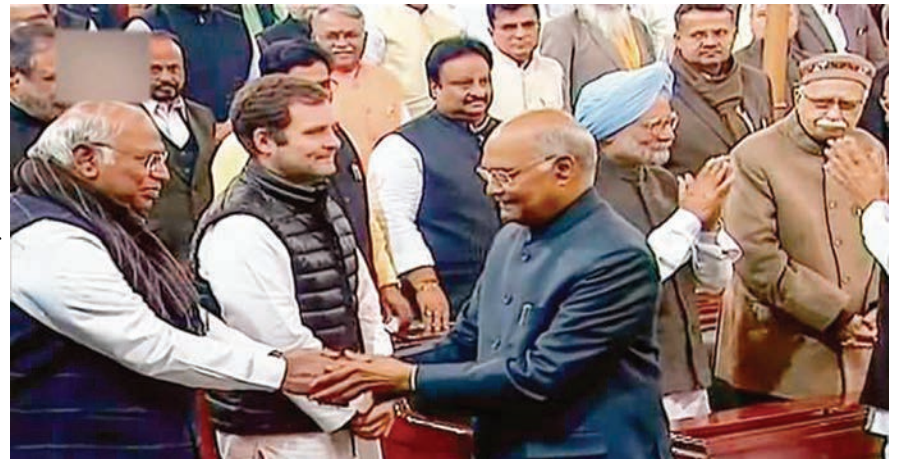
President Kovind defends Demonetization, Rafale deal

Addressing House, heaps praise on govt on triple talaq, surgical strikes

NEW DELHI (TIP): Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, President Ram Nath Kovind, on January 31, defended the BJP government's controversial decisions, from Rafale jet purchase and demonetization to GST implementation, saying the government had commenced its journey towards building a "New India".

His hour-long Address to the joint sitting of Parliament marked the start of Budget Session with PM Narendra Modi, former PM Manmohan Singh, BJP chief Amit Shah and Congress president Rahul Gandhi in attendance. Gandhi debuted in the front rows.

The President used the occasion to hail demonetization as "a defining moment in the government's war on corruption and black money"; term the GST contd on Page 20



President Ram Nath Kovind greets Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge during the joint session of both Houses on the first day of the Budget Session at Central Hall of Parliament, in New Delhi on January 31. Photo / Courtesy PTI

DHS Announces Final Rule for H-1B Visa Program

Final Rule Effective Beginning April 1, 2019

WASHINGTON (TIP): The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) posted January 30 for public inspection, a final rule amending regulations governing H-1B cap-subject petitions, including those that may be eligible for the advanced degree exemption.

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Indian Embassy in Washington Celebrates 70th Republic Day of India

WASHINGTON DC (TIP): The 70th Republic Day of India was celebrated at the Embassy of India with an enthusiastic and unprecedented participation of about 800 prominent members of the Indian community in USA.

Ambassador Harsh Vardhan Shringla paid floral tribute to Mahatma Gandhi at the public park in front of the Embassy. Thereafter, the Ambassador unfurled the National Flag followed by singing of the National Anthem. Ambassador addressed the guests and read out the Address of the President of India on the occasion of the Republic Day of India.

contd on Page 5

Ambassador Harsh Vardhan Shringla paying floral tribute to Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi



Republic Day of India celebrated at Gandhi Memorial in Dallas

DALLAS (TIP): Mahatma Gandhi Memorial of North Texas (MGMNT) organized the 70th India Republic Day Celebrations in Dallas (Irving) at Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Plaza with more than 150 jubilant community members, invitees and guests attending the event. Rao Kalvala, Secretary, MGMNT welcomed the gathering, introduced MGMNT Board while Dr Prasad Thotakura, Chairman MGMNT, conducted the flag hoisting ceremony

The Chief Guest at the event Ms. Oscar Ward, Deputy Mayor Pro Tem, City of Irving, greeted the Indian American community on this special occasion and appreciated their



efforts in building better communities with their education, intellect and knowledge. Irving City Councilmember Allan Meagher, Special Guest of the occasion, addressed the gathering, conveyed his best wishes to the Indian Americans for celebrating India's 70th Republic Day. He stated that it is essential for all to work together to uphold the democratic values both in the largest democracy, India and the oldest democracy, USA.

Dr. Prasad Thotakura observed, "After getting Independence from Great Britain, under the leadership of Father of the Constitution Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, many leaders like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Babu Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee etc., who worked very hard for about three years to bring out the best Constitution for the nation."

He said that "since 1950's, as a Nation we have achieved a lot, but much remains to be done. As Indian Americans, our responsibility is double now. We all need to strive for the betterment of both countries where we come from and where we live in." B.N.Rao, MGMNT Co-Chair, conveyed his Republic Day greetings to the community and remembered the sacrifices of Mahatma Gandhi who got Independence for India with peaceful methods. Abhijit Railkar, Treasurer, MGMNT, in his closing remarks thanked 'Music Masti Magic' for providing Audio Visual, Bombay Photography, TV5, TV9 and TVAsia for media coverage, volunteers from Haryana Association, City of Irving officials, leaders from IAFC, IANT, and the community at large for joining and making the event a grand success.

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Indian Penn Undergraduates in Y-Prize Winning Team of Four

NEW YORK (TIP): A team of four Penn Undergraduate students including two Indians is the winner of this year's \$10,000 Y-Prize, awarded Jan. 28 for planning a new, improved catheter designed to stop costly-and deadly-infections at the source.

The two Indians - Tanvi Kapur, a senior at the Wharton School who's from Frankfurt, Germany and junior Ishir Seth from Rochester, New York won the prize along with two other students - Beatriz Go and WenTao Zhang.

Along with the prize money, their company, Nosoco Technologies, is also entered into the semi-final round of the Penn Startup Challenge later this year if the project meets that competition's guidelines.

Since forming the team in October 2018, the group worked with researchers at the Perelman School of Medicine and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia to figure out whether the idea will work. Now, with the Y-Prize money, Nosoco can move toward testing the viability of the product by the end of the year. In vivo testing and clinical trials



The winners. From left: Ishir Seth, Tanvi Kapur, Beatriz Go and WenTao Zhang

would come next.

The Y-Prize is a collaboration between Penn Engineering, Wharton's William and Phyllis Mack Institute for Innovation Management,

Penn Wharton Entrepreneurship, and the Penn Center for Innovation.

(Source: Penn Office of University Communications)

Indian American Announces Bid for Ohio State Senate in 2020



Niraj Antani is the second Indian-American state elected official in Ohio history, and the first Indian-American Republican

COLUMBUS, OH (TIP): State Representative Niraj Antani, the second Indian-American state elected official in Ohio history and the first Indian-American Republican, announced on Jan 30 that he is running for the state Senate to replace Sen. Peggy Lehner.

"I am excited to announce that I am running for State Senator in 2020! If I am elected your State Senator, I will work tirelessly to use our principles and values to solve the challenges our community and state faces", Antani tweeted.

Antani is serving his third term in the Ohio House. He represents the 42nd District, which covers most of southern Montgomery County. Having been elected at age 23, now 27, he is one of the youngest currently serving members of the House.

Antani has served as Vice-Chairman of the Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development, also having served on the Committee on Health, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care, and the Committee on Community and Family Advancement.

During the Romney for President campaign in 2012, Antani worked for the Ohio State Director & Senior Adviser to the campaign. He has also worked for U.S. Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen in Washington, DC. In Ohio, Antani has worked for then State Representative - now State Senator - Peggy Lehner, as well as U.S. Congressman Mike Turner in his Dayton office.

Antani was named to Forbes Magazine's list of the top "30 Under 30" people in the United States for Law & Politics in 2015. As well, the conservative media organization Newsmax named him the 2nd most influential Republican in the nation under age 30. In addition, in 2013 he was named to the "Top 30 Conservatives Under Age 30 in the United States" list by Red Alert Politics. Antani has received the Legislator of the Year Award by the AMVETS Department of Ohio for his work helping veterans, as well as the Friend of Community Colleges Award by the Ohio Association of Community College and the Distinguished Government Service Award by the Ohio Association of Career Colleges and Schools for his work for the betterment of higher education for the middle class.

Indian American Writer Gita Mehta Turns Down Padma Award



Mehta is Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's elder sister

NEW YORK (TIP): Indian American writer Gita Mehta, who was awarded Padma Shri in "Literature and Education," this year, turned down her award.

In a statement from here Mehta, who is Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's elder sister, said, "I am deeply honored

that the Government of India should think me worthy of a Padma Shri but with great regret I feel I must decline as there is a general election looming and the timing of the award might be misconstrued, causing embarrassment both to the Government and myself, which I would much regret."

Odisha will face both general and Assembly elections in April-May this year. The BJP and Patnaik's BJD are trying hard to edge out each other in the state. Padma Shri for Mehta was aimed at wooing her brother in the event of the BJP needing post-poll allies, reports The Telegraph quoting government sources.

According to media reports, months before the conferment of the award, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached out to her and had a 90-minute meeting with Gita and her husband, famous publisher Sonny Mehta, head of the Alfred A. Knopf publishing house.

Gita Mehta has produced and/or directed 14 television documentaries for UK, European and US networks. During the years 1970-1971 she was a television war correspondent for the US television network NBC. Her film compilation of the Bangladesh revolution, Dateline Bangladesh, was shown in cinema theatres both in India and abroad.

Gita's books have been translated into 21 languages and been on the bestseller lists in Europe, the US and India. She has written books like 'Karma Cola' (1979), 'Raj' (1989), 'A River Sutra' (1993), 'Snakes and Ladders: Glimpses of Modern India' (1997) and 'Eternal Ganesha: From Birth to Rebirth' (2006). The subject of both her fiction and non-fiction is exclusively focused on India: its culture and history, and the Western perception of it. Her works reflect the insight gained through her journalistic and political background.

Kiwi-Indian Businessman Honored with Top Diaspora Award



Bhav Dhillon is also the Honorary Consul of India in Auckland

NEW DELHI (TIP): New Zealand's famous Indian businessman Bhav Dhillon, who is also the Honorary Consul of India, overseeing New Zealand-India diaspora issues in Auckland, was honored with Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award last week under the "excellence in business and services to the Indian diaspora" category.

Indian government has conferred the highest Indian diaspora award-Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards (PBSA) on 30 NRIs this year. President Ram Nath Kovind gave the award to Dhillon on January 23, final day of the three-day biennial diaspora conclave of India (Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas) organized at Varanasi in the State of Uttar Pradesh.

Mr. Dhillon is the managing director of construction company CEMIX, the chair of There's a Better Way Foundation, is on the board and treasurer of the India NZ Business Council. He is also the publisher of the Indian community's only English language weekly newspaper The Indian Weekender.

Indian American School Students Now Get a Chance to Connect to Homeland

NEW YORK (TIP): Aiming to connect high school American students of Indian descent to their ancestral homeland, a top Indian-American organization has announced a three-week fully funded scholarship program for youngsters to travel to India.

Titled "Heritage India" by Indiaspora, powered by 360+, the program is designed for students to experience India's rich cultural history, participate in hands-on projects, engage in stimulating discussions, and create lifelong bonds with a cohort that will share in this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

(Read full story on www.theindianpanorama.news)

DHS Announces Final Rule for H-1B Visa Program

Final Rule Effective Beginning April 1, 2019

WASHINGTON (TIP): The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) posted January 30 for public inspection, a final rule amending regulations governing H-1B cap-subject petitions, including those that may be eligible for the advanced degree exemption.

The final rule reverses the order by which U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) selects H-1B petitions under the H-1B regular cap and the advanced degree exemption, and it introduces an electronic registration requirement for petitioners seeking to file H-1B cap-subject petitions.

The rule published in the Federal Register on Jan. 31, will go into effect on April 1, though the electronic registration requirement will be suspended for the fiscal year (FY) 2020 cap season.

"These simple and smart changes are a positive benefit for employers, the foreign workers they seek to employ, and the agency's adjudicators, helping the H-1B visa program work better," said USCIS Director L. Francis Cissna. "The new registration system, once implemented, will lower overall costs for employers and increase government efficiency. We are also furthering President Trump's goal of improving our immigration system by making a simple adjustment to the H-1B cap selection process. As a result, U.S. employers seeking to employ foreign workers with a U.S. master's or higher degree will have a greater chance of selection in the H-1B lottery in years of excess demand for new H-1B visas."

Effective April 1, USCIS will first select H-1B petitions (or registrations, once the registration requirement is implemented) submitted on behalf of all beneficiaries, including those that may be eligible for the advanced degree exemption. USCIS will then select from the remaining eligible petitions, a number projected to reach the advanced degree exemption. Changing the order in which USCIS counts these allocations will likely increase the number of petitions for beneficiaries with a master's or higher degree from a U.S. institution of higher education to be selected under the H-1B numerical allocations. Specifically, the change will result in an estimated increase of up to 16% (or 5,340 workers) in the number of selected petitions for H-1B beneficiaries with a master's degree or higher from a U.S. institution of higher education.

USCIS will begin accepting H-1B cap petitions for FY 2020 on April 1, 2019. The reverse selection order will apply to petitions filed for the FY 2020 H-1B cap season. Petitioners may file an H-1B petition no more than six months before the employment start date requested for the beneficiary. USCIS will provide H-1B cap filing instruction on uscis.gov in advance of the filing season.

Importantly, after considering public feedback, USCIS will be suspending the electronic registration requirement for the FY 2020 cap season to complete user testing and ensure the system and process are fully functional. Once implemented, the electronic registration requirement will require petitioners seeking to file H-1B cap petitions, including those that may be eligible for the advanced degree exemption, to first electronically register with USCIS during a designated registration period. Only those whose registrations are selected will be eligible to file an H-1B cap-subject petition. USCIS expects that the electronic registration requirement, once implemented, will reduce overall costs for petitioners and create a more efficient and cost-effective H-1B cap petition process for USCIS and petitioners.

Additionally, USCIS will publish a notice in the Federal Register to announce the initial implementation of the H-1B registration process in advance of the cap season in which it will implement the requirement. Prior to implementation, USCIS will conduct outreach to ensure petitioners understand how to access and use the system. Once implemented, USCIS will announce the designated electronic registration period at least 30 days in advance for each fiscal year it is required.

On April 18, 2017, President Trump issued the Buy American and Hire American Executive Order, instructing DHS to "propose new rules and issue new guidance, to supersede or revise previous rules and guidance if appropriate, to protect the interests of U.S. workers in the administration of our immigration system." The executive order specifically mentioned the H-1B program and directed DHS and other agencies to "suggest reforms to help ensure that H-1B visas are awarded to the most-skilled or highest-paid petition beneficiaries."

Open Risk Technologies Inc. and Vouchr Join the Wells Fargo Startup Accelerator

New participants focused on solutions driven by artificial intelligence and blockchain, digital engagement

SAN FRANCISCO (TIP): Wells Fargo & Company (NYSE:WFC) announced January 29, that OpenRisk Technologies Inc. and Vouchr have joined the Wells Fargo Startup Accelerator, bringing the total number of companies in the portfolio to 21.

"Helping to advance innovative fintech startups plays an important role in our efforts to deliver the financial experiences of tomorrow that customers demand," said Lisa Frazier, head of the Innovation Group at Wells Fargo. "We welcome OpenRisk and Vouchr to the Wells Fargo Startup Accelerator program and applaud the passion, agility and focus they bring to create innovative solutions and unique customer experiences. Innovation is critical within financial services, and we're excited to invest in and collaborate with these companies, and all our accelerator companies, to reimagine financial services."

The Wells Fargo Startup Accelerator program began in 2014 to advance emerging technologies in pursuit of breakthroughs for financial services. Startups are eligible to receive up to \$1 million in funding, along with guidance from Wells Fargo business and technology leaders to help refine the launch of their ideas. The virtual, six-month, non-exclusive program has received nearly 2,400 applications from innovative companies in 91 countries since the program's inception. Applications can be submitted throughout the year at www.wellsfargo.com/accelerator.

Latest Wells Fargo Startup Accelerator companies:-

- OpenRisk Technologies Inc. (Franklin Park, N.J.) has built a derivatives collateral and liquidity management platform that leverages semantic web, artificial intelligence and blockchain technologies to analyze data, facilitate post-trade operations and manage risks.
- OpenRisk is excited to be part of the Wells Fargo Startup Accelerator and to work with business and tech leaders through the program to validate key components of our platform," said Narasimha Kodihalli, founder and CEO of OpenRisk Technologies Inc. "We see great potential to grow our solution and build on our foundation of smart people, smart approach and smart technology."
- Vouchr (Toronto, Ontario) has created an engagement platform for digital money that transforms financial institutions' existing transactions into a delightful, personalized and gamified experience that can create deeper customer loyalty.
- Differentiated and unique mobile consumer experiences that elevate basic money transfer and bring people closer together are key to attracting new and keeping current clientele," said Suresh Bhat, chief operating officer at Vouchr. "Joining the Wells Fargo Startup Accelerator is an opportunity to help us scale our technology globally."

To further support promising startups and encourage more women in the field of technology, Wells Fargo is the presenting sponsor of the Quesnay Female Founders in Fintech competition. The winner will be announced in March. In addition, the Wells Fargo Startup Accelerator sponsors MassChallenge FinTech, which pairs startups with industry leaders to work toward solving major challenges and shape the future of financial services.

About Wells Fargo

Wells Fargo & Company (NYSE: WFC) is a diversified, community-based financial services company with \$1.9 trillion in assets. Wells Fargo's vision is to satisfy our customers' financial needs and help them succeed financially. Founded in 1852 and headquartered in San Francisco, Wells Fargo provides banking, investment and mortgage products and services, as well as consumer and commercial finance, through 7,800 locations, more than 13,000 ATMs, the internet (wellsfargo.com) and mobile banking, and has offices in 37 countries and territories to support customers who conduct business in the global economy. With approximately 259,000 team members, Wells Fargo serves one in three households in the United States. Wells Fargo & Company was ranked No. 26 on Fortune's 2018 rankings of America's largest corporations. News, insights and perspectives from Wells Fargo are also available at Wells Fargo Stories.

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Ami Bera named Chairman of Foreign Affairs Subcommittee, Vice Chairman of Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

WASHINGTON (TIP): In two successive back-to-back announcements on Jan 29 and Jan 30, Indian American Congressman Ami Bera from California has been named as head of two important Committees.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee met Jan 29 to organize for the 116th Congress where Indian Bera (CA-07) was selected to serve as the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. "I am honored to chair the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. I've always believed that the United States has a duty to lead the world through our example. We have an obligation to confront pressing international issues, build partnerships, and work in a bipartisan manner to strengthen our national security" Bera said.

"Our Subcommittee will have broad jurisdiction to conduct oversight into America's foreign policy. Our goal is to hold government accountable, support the mission of our diplomats, and investigate abuses when they occur. Effective oversight is crucial in any



Bera is the longest-serving Indian American currently serving in Congress

foreign policy mission. I look forward to working with Chairman Engel and my

Republican colleagues to strengthen our global leadership and make government work more effectively and efficiently for the American people", he further added.

The Committee on Science, Space, and Technology on Jan 30 elected Bera as Vice Chairman of the full committee.

"It's an honor to be elected as the Vice Chairman of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology. The United States is the world leader in science and technology, but our global leadership is at risk without continued federal investment and support. The Committee's work will be critical for our nation's economic competitiveness and the health and safety of our families. We have a responsibility to ask tough questions about how and where taxpayer dollars are best used, and I look forward to working alongside Chairwoman Johnson and our colleagues to address the important challenges that our country and planet face" he said in a statement.

Bera is the longest-serving Indian American currently serving in Congress.

INDIAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON CELEBRATES 70TH REPUBLIC DAY OF INDIA

CONTD FROM PAGE 1

The President's speech highlighted three important milestones, commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi; the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of India; and elections for the 17th Lok Sabha in 2019.

In his remarks on the occasion, the Ambassador lauded the pivotal role played by the Indian diaspora in the US in contributing to strengthening the bonds of friendship between the two countries. He thanked the guests for turning out in such large numbers as a reflection of their affection for India and as a source of strength and inspiration for the Embassy as "we seek to further strengthen and deepen the bonds of friendship between India and USA".

The program concluded with the singing of patriotic songs by young students from the Gandharva School of Music, Richmond, Virginia.

Printed copies of the President's Address in Hindi and English were made available to the guests.



About 800 prominent members of the Indian community took part in the celebration

Indian American Congressman Ro Khanna to Serve on Several Committees in 116th Congress



"I'm honored to have the confidence of Speaker Pelosi to serve on these committees at such a critical time in our nation's history," said Khanna

progressive foreign policy, hold the administration accountable and modernize government technologies."

The Committee on Oversight and Reform serves as the primary investigative body for the U.S. House of Representatives and will play a crucial role in holding the Trump Administration accountable for many of the outstanding questions over potential campaign, ethics, and constitutional violations. One of the first of such investigations will focus on the ongoing issues of security clearance at the White House.

The Committee also has sweeping jurisdiction in many policy areas, allowing Khanna and his colleagues to conduct oversight over "any matter" it believes would serve the American people. Some of the first hearings will look at rising drug prices, campaign finance and lobbying reform. Rep. Khanna is a founding member of the No PAC Caucus, introduced a bill with Senator Sanders to reduce the price of drug prices, and is introducing a bill to provide "Democracy Dollars" to Americans to spend money in elections.

In November 2018, Khanna worked with the Oversight and Reform Committee to pass the 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (IDEA), a bipartisan bill that will digitize and modernize government websites and forms. This was his second bill signed into law.

WASHINGTON (TIP): Indian American Congressman Ro Khanna (CA-17) on Jan 24 announced his 116th committees: Oversight and Reform, Armed Services, and Budget. He joins the House Armed Services subcommittees on Intelligence and Emerging Threats, and Strategic Forces, as well as the Oversight subcommittees of Government Operations and Economic Policy.

"I'm honored to have the confidence of Speaker Pelosi to serve on these committees at such a critical time in our nation's history," said Rep. Khanna. "I look forward to using these assignments to spark discussions around how we are going to grow the digital economy, forge a

The Sikh Community of Phoenix, Arizona Donates \$11,000 Worth of Gift Cards to Thank TSA Employees

REPORT BY DR. JASWANT SINGH SACHDEV, M.D., PHOENIX ARIZONA



PHOENIX, AZ (TIP): It was a unique day in Arizona Sikh history. About 50 Sikhs ranging from a child of five years to all the way up to 80 plus years old were at hand as a group at Sky Harbor International Airport, Phoenix, Arizona to Donate gift cards worth 11,000 dollars to the TSA employees who continued on their job taking care of our safety during government shut down. We wanted to thank them in keeping us safe even when some of them might have had difficulty in putting food on the table for their families due to interruption in getting paychecks.

For about a week, several Sikh members worked hard to raise money. No body forced anyone but rather in a spirit of Seva every Sikh who heard about it came forward and donated for this cause, many donors requesting not to be identified.

11000 dollars were donated in the form of 20 dollar denomination gift cards bought from Costco so that needy members could divide among themselves.

A large 5 feet by 2 and half feet check was specially prepared that showed a turban with a statement borrowed and graciously authorized by National Sikh Campaign "we are Sikhs." Underneath was added "Serving Humanity is Our Religion. Donors were identified as "Sikh community of Arizona".

Kate Gallegos from City of Phoenix was at hand and joined the recipients that included chief TSA union and other leaders and officials.

Sikh representatives spoke and mentioned that serving needy is their religion and wearing turbans is part of their faith. TSA leaders were also told that American values were Sikh values and equality among genders is the hallmark of their faith.

Many passengers stopped by to know as to what the event was!

Finally the representatives from the TSA spoke and thanked the Sikh community for this great gesture of help.

We strongly believe by taking this step, we not only helped those in need, but also took a step forward in enhancing the Sikh identity besides creating camaraderie among our community.

Kamala Harris Kicks Off 2020 Presidential Campaign



Kamala Harris officially kicked off her presidential campaign in Oakland

OAKLAND, CA (TIP): Indian American Senator Kamala Harris officially kicked off her presidential campaign in Oakland, California on January 27, after announcing her decision to run for the White House in 2020 on Martin Luther King Day.

According to media reports, Harris drew a bigger crowd at her presidential campaign launch in Oakland than Barack Obama did when he launched his run for president in Illinois in 2007. At least 20,000 people turned up to hear the California senator outline her plan for winning the White House in 2020. She would be the first African American woman and first South Asian American to be chosen as a presidential nominee.

"We have a long road ahead of us, and our campaign will only succeed if we build a broad coalition of grassroots support from people across the country. If you can afford to, please pitch in now. There's too much on the line right now to sit this out" she posted on Twitter Jan 30.

Raja Krishnamoorthi becomes the First South Asian American Chairman of a Congressional Committee

WASHINGTON (TIP): Indian American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi from Illinois, on January 24, was named Chairman of the House Oversight Committee's Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy. The announcement will give Krishnamoorthi jurisdiction over important pocketbook issues



Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi Selected as Chairman of the Oversight Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy

such as education, workforce development, income inequality, health care, consumer protection and data privacy through his role as chairman of the subcommittee.

"I am honored and privileged to serve as a chair of this subcommittee in Congress," Krishnamoorthi said after the announcement. "As a child, I had the opportunity to see my parents work hard to achieve the American Dream of a middle-class life. As Chairman, I will use my role on this subcommittee to grow and strengthen the middle class so that all Americans can have the same opportunities my family did."

Earlier this month, he was appointed as a member of a Congressional committee on intelligence, becoming the first South Asian to serve in the powerful body tasked with overseeing the activities and budget of the 17 intelligence agencies of the US.

Chidambaram asks how economy is growing when unemployment is high

NEW DELHI (TIP): Former finance minister P Chidambaram on Friday raised doubts over the GDP figures, wondering how the economy is growing at 7 per cent when the unemployment rate is the highest in 45 years.

Taking a dig at the Centre, he claimed that when the government revised the GDP figures it did not realise that the unemployment figures also got revised.

Chidambaram's remark came ahead of the interim Budget on Friday.

The government on Thursday said it had not finalised the survey on labour force which reportedly showed that the unemployment rate in the country hit a 45-year high of 6.1 per cent in 2017-18.

The National Sample Survey Office's (NSSO's) periodic labour force survey (PLFS), according to the Business Standard newspaper, states that unemployment was last this high in 1972-73. The unemployment rate was 2.2 per cent in 2011-12, it said.

"NITI Aayog vice-chairman asked 'How can a country grow at an average of 7% without employment?' That is exactly our question. With unemployment at a 45-year high, how can we believe that the economy is growing at 7 per cent," Chidambaram said on Twitter.

"Modi Government revises GDP growth figures upwards. What government did not realise was that unemployment figure was also revised upwards," he tweeted.

Nirav Modi, Choksi's application to examine witnesses rejected

MUMBAI (TIP): A special court on Thursday dismissed applications filed by diamond merchant Nirav Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi for cross-examination of witnesses in the Punjab National Bank (PNB) fraud case.

With the dismissal of the plea, the court would now begin hearing the main plea filed by the enforcement directorate (ED) to declare Nirav and Choksi Fugitive Economic Offenders under the new law – Fugitive Economic Offenders (FEO) Act.

In the two similar applications filed by Nirav and Choksi's lawyers, they had sought to cross-examine 19 witnesses whose statements were recorded by the central agency on allegations of money laundering. This list of witnesses also includes officers of the agency who were part of the probe.

In their plea, the two had claimed that ED has conducted a one-sided investigation. They claimed that the agency did not consider relevant documents or examine the relevant persons before moving the court to declare both of them as fugitives under the new law.

NEW DELHI (TIP): The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) skipped a meeting of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on Thursday in protest against "interference of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in Sikhs' religious matters"

The SAD, an important constituent of the NDA, is also upset with the Centre for not announcing a debt-waiver package for the farmers. The NDA meeting was convened by the BJP to decide the strategy for the forthcoming parliamentary polls. The ally's absence is being

Budget 2019: We are moving towards New India by 2022: FM

NEW DELHI (TIP): Finance minister Piyush Goyal presented the sixth and hence, the interim budget of the Narendra Modi government on Friday. The interim budget is widely expected to focus on giving big push to investment in agriculture, small and medium industries, and health sectors.

Key announcements

- 75 pc of women beneficiaries under Mudra Yojana, 26 weeks' maternity leave and Pradhan Mantri Matritva Yojana are all empowering women
- Out of 8 cr free LPG connections under Ujjwala, 6 cr connections to poor women have already been provided
- Ujjwala Yojana providing free cooking gas connection is a remarkable success story
- More than 70 per cent of MUDRA yojana beneficiaries are women
- Gratuity limit increased from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 30 lakh
- High growth, formalisation of economy has resulted in increased EPFO membership by 2 cr in last two years
- Farmers affected by severe natural calamity will get 2 pc interest subvention on all rescheduled crop loans and additional 3 per cent on timely repayment
- High growth and formalisation of economy has led to rise in EPFO membership by 2 cr in last two years
- Farmers hit by natural calamities to get 2 per cent interest subvention; 3 per cent more on timely repayment of loans
- 2 pc interest subvention to farmers involved in animal husbandry and fishery
- Govt to provide Rs 750 crore in FY to support animal husbandry and fishing
- There is need for structured income support for poor, landless farmers to meet input cost
- Govt to implement special strategy for uplift of nomadic tribes
- Govt has fixed MSP for 22 notified crops at 50 per cent higher than cost of production
- Pension scheme for unorganised sector workers to be implemented from this fiscal
- Cheaper drugs being provided through Jan Aushadi stores: FM
- AIIMs established or operating in country, of which 14 sanctioned since 2014. Another to be set up in Haryana
- 10 lakh patients have been treated so far under Ayushman Bharat scheme, world's largest health care programme
- Use of LED bulbs saved power bill of about Rs 50,000 crore, says FM
- As many as 1.53 crore houses constructed during 2014-18 under Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana
- 143 crore LED bulbs were made available for lower and middle class families
- Farmers to be provided Rs 6,000 per year



The Union Minister for Finance (temporary charge) Railways, Coal, Finance and Corporate Affairs, Piyush Goyal departs from North Block to Rashtrapati Bhavan and Parliament House, along with the Minister of State for Finance and Shipping P. Radhakrishnan, the Minister of State for Finance, Shiv Pratap Shukla and the senior officials to present the Interim Budget 2019-20, in New Delhi on February 1, 2019.

in three instalments, to be fully funded by the central government

- We plan to provide urban facilities in rural areas while preserving 'soul of village', says FM
- Construction of rural roads tripled under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana: FM
- 2.5 cr families were without electricity in 2014; we have provided power to almost all families: FM
- Govt spent Rs 1.7 lakh crore to supply food grains at cheaper price to poor in 2018-19 as against Rs 92,000 crore in 2013-14
- Allocation to MNREGA hiked to Rs 60,000 crore for 2019-20
- Govt announces the Pradhan Mantri Samman Nidhi for small and marginal farmers; farmers to get Rs 6,000 per year
- Govt has provided 10 per cent reservation for economically weaker section; job quota to provide 2 lakh seats in educational institutes
- We have worked to bridge the urban-rural divide
- About 5.4 lakh villages made open defecation-free
- Poor have the first right over nation's resources
- I hope other banks too would soon come out of PCA framework
- Realty Law RERA has helped in bringing transparency in real estate sector
- India has achieved over 98 per cent rural sanitation coverage: FM
- We have run a corruption-free government
- Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code helping in recovery of non-performing loans. Even big businessmen are now worried about loans: FM
- BoI, OBC and Bank of Maharashtra have

been removed from the PCA framework of RBI

- 3 lakh crore recovered from big corporate loan defaulters: FM
- Our govt had the guts to ask RBI to look at bad loans and present correct picture to nation: FM
- We have stopped culture of phone banking, says FM referring to allegations of rampant loans over phone during UPA regime.
- We have liberalised FDI allowing more investment through automatic route
- We have undertaken path-breaking structural reforms by introducing GST and other reforms
- Fiscal deficit will be 3.4 per cent of GDP; Current Account Deficit to be 2.5 per cent of GDP
- Current Account Deficit likely to be 2.5 pc of GDP this year
- India attracted USD 239 bn in FDI in last five years
- If we had not controlled inflation our families would have been spending 35-40 per cent more on daily use items
- NDA govt contained double digit inflation; Govt has broken the back of high inflation
- India is fastest growing major economy in world; GDP growth in last 5 yrs higher than under any previous govt
- India has been recognised as brightest spot in the world in the past 5 years
- We have got decisive mandate to continue structured reforms. We have reversed policy paralysis
- We are moving towards realising New India by 2022: FM
- Goyal begins interim budget speech, wishes Union minister Arun Jaitley speedy recovery and good health
- Cabinet approves Interim Budget for 2019-20.

Ally SAD skips NDA meet over 'RSS interference' in Sikhs' matters

seen as a sign of more trouble in the alliance.

"The party is not happy with RSS' interference in Sikh affairs. We have also been requesting the Centre to announce a package for the farmers, but nothing has been done, said Rajya Sabha member Naresh Gujral, who coordinates with the BJP on alliance matters.

While the party's absence from the crucial meeting has become a talking point in political

circles, SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal and his wife, Union food processing industries minister Harsimrat Badal sent confusing signals by hosting a lunch at which several cabinet ministers and senior BJP leaders were present.

They included Union home minister Rajnath Singh, external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj and defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman. Lok

Sabha speaker Smitra Mahajan, Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar and his MP-daughter Supriya Sule were also there.

Asked about the presence of BJP leaders at the Badals' lunch, Gujral called it "social event". "We have not broken up with the NDA. We are registering our protest," he said. There was also a change in the SAD's position as it targeted the RSS instead of the BJP.

GOVT PLEA ON AYODHYA LAND

BJP sees it as a step towards building Ram temple

NEW DELHI (TIP): Weeks before the national elections, BJP leaders on Tuesday (Jan 29) sought to present the central government's move to return undisputed land in Ayodhya to its original owners, including Ram Janambhoomi Nyas, as a step towards starting "work" on building a Ram temple in the holy city of Uttar Pradesh.

With the RSS-led Hindutva organisations pushing for a law to build the temple at the disputed site, a BJP leader said the government's plea in the Supreme Court is an attempt to redress the "deep sense of anguish of Ram devotees and the BJP cadres".

The comments came hours after the Centre asked the Supreme Court to allow it to return the "non-disputed" surplus land acquired around the disputed structure in Ayodhya to the Nyas and other original owners.

The leader recalled that the biggest applaud the BJP president Amit Shah's speech in the party's recent convention had received from thousands of delegates was when he reiterated the party's commitment to the temple construction.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's brief mention of the emotive issue had also drawn loud cheers, he said.

Amid demands for a law, Modi had said that his government would wait for the apex court's decision on the matter but the "delay" in the matter has been causing consternation among the 'sadhus' and the party's core Hindutva supporters.

Underlining the significance of the government's petition, the senior government functionary and the party leader said, "We have to be concerned about their sentiments. People who want a Ram temple have always supported us. There has to be political massaging by the government that we care for their emotions."

Separately, BJP leader and Union minister Prakash Javadekar held a press conference at the party's headquarters here and said the



Nyas, a trust which is among the largest original owners of the undisputed land that the government had acquired and has offered to return, wants a Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

He indicated that the government's plea in the Supreme Court to return excess land around the disputed site to its original owners could pave the way for construction of the Ram temple.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, a prominent Hindutva face of the party, also hailed the government's move and hoped permission would be granted to start work on the undisputed land.

"We welcome this initiative of the Central government. We should get permission to start work on the undisputed piece of land," he said in Allahabad.

Underlining that the government is not touching the disputed land in Ayodhya, Javadekar said only 0.313 acre of land is disputed for which the title suit is yet to be decided. "Today the government has taken a very important in-principle decision to return the excess land, which was acquired in 1994, to

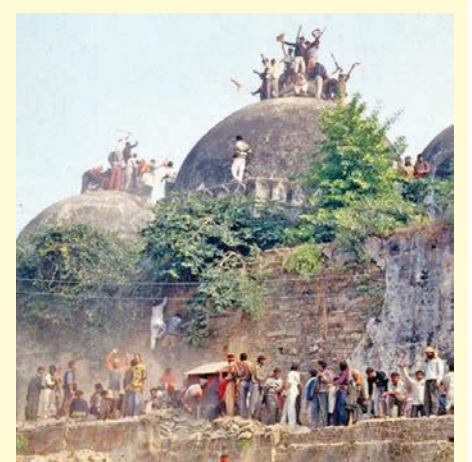
the original land owners. Out of 67 acres of undisputed land, the land owner for 42 acres is the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas. Government wants to return the land to its original owners and they want to build the Ram temple there," Javadekar said.

He maintained that the BJP has always said a temple should be built in Ayodhya through a legal route and the government's decision is a legal step.

"We are confident that the government will get permission from the court at the earliest," Javadekar said.

The BJP has in its manifesto always underscored its commitment to building the temple at the site where once stood the Babri mosque, which was razed by right-wing extremists on December 6, 1992.

With the general election round the corner, the party believes its show of intent for building the temple could consolidate its core supporters, whose indifference to the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government in 2004 was seen by many political watchers as one of the reasons for the BJP's surprise loss.



Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute: A timeline

DECEMBER 6, 1992: The disputed Babri Mosque is razed to the ground by karsevaks

APRIL 2002: Three-judge Bench of high court begins hearing to determine the ownership of land. The HC orders the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to excavate the site to determine if it was a temple earlier.

2003: ASI finds evidence of the presence of a temple under the mosque. Muslim organisations dispute the findings

SEPTEMBER 30, 2010: The HC rules the disputed land be divided into three parts — one-third to Ram Lalla Virajman, represented by the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha; one-third to the Sunni Waqf Board; and the remaining to the Nirmohi Akhara. In December, the parties move the SC

MAY 2011: The SC stays the HC order

MARCH 2017: The Supreme Court says charges against Advani and other leaders cannot be dropped in the demolition case and that the case may be revived

MARCH 21, 2017: The SC says the matter is sensitive and suggests it be settled out of court. It asks stakeholders to hold talks and find an amicable solution

MAY 30, 2017: Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Uma Bharti and Vinay Katiyar charged with criminal conspiracy in the demolition case

AUGUST 11, 2017: The SC schedules hearing of 13 appeals in the title dispute on December 5, 2017, coinciding with the eve of the 25th anniversary of the desecration of the Babri mosque

DEC 5, 2017: The SC says it will hear the civil appeals filed by various parties challenging the 2010 Allahabad High Court verdict on February 8

SEPTEMBER 2018: The Supreme Court rejects the plea for a review of the 1994 Farooqui judgment but then clarifies that it would have no bearing on pending title suits.

OCTOBER 2018: The Supreme Court decides that the land dispute case will only be listed before an "appropriate Bench" in January 2019. In what is seen as a setback to the BJP leaders pressing for a speedy disposal of the title suit, a Bench consisting Chief Justice Gogoi and Justices S K Kaul and K M Joseph says, "the appropriate Bench will fix the schedule with regard to the hearing of appeals in the case".

JANUARY 4, 2019: The Supreme Court defers hearing a bunch of petitions in the Ayodhya title dispute case till January 10. "Further orders will be passed by an appropriate bench on January 10 for fixing the date of hearing the matter," the Bench says.

JANUARY 8, 2019: The Supreme Court sets up a five-judge Constitution Bench to hear the land dispute case.

JANUARY 10, 2019: A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court hears the Ayodhya land title dispute case

Mixed reaction to govt's move over excess Ayodhya land

The government sought direction to release 67 acres of acquired land of which 0.313 acres is disputed. The move has evoked diverse reactions from different groups and political parties across the country.

Here is who said what:

Union minister Prakash Javadekar

Justifying the move, the BJP said that it has always maintained that Ram temple be built on Ram janmabhoomi. Union minister Prakash Javadekar said, "Whatever legal measure is required, the BJP will try for that. The PM had clarified that people want the temple but the matter is sub-judice and measures will be taken accordingly. Today's application is also a legal decision."

Asaduddin Owaisi

Calling the move an "insidious attempt" by the Central government, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) chief said it is another example of bringing the political fight in the court room. He said, "At this stage, filing such frivolous application for the return of 50-60 acres of land to Nyas by the Central government, after 3-4 orders rejecting the same, is completely frivolous and superfluous and full of politics." He accused the Central government of trying everything in their capacity to prevent a fair and independent adjudication of the Babri Masjid dispute.

Vishva Hindu Parishad

The VHP welcomed the Centre's writ petition in the Supreme Court, seeking to return excess or superfluous land around the disputed site in Ayodhya to its original owners, saying the step was in right direction. VHP working president Alok Kumar, in a statement, said the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas had obtained the land for the construction of the Ram temple. "This land belongs to Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas and is



not under any litigation. This is a step in the right direction and the organisation welcomes it," Kumar said.

CPM

The CPM expressed "strong disapproval" of the petition moved by the Central government, and said the status quo must be maintained. This move by the Centre is clearly aimed at appeasing the Sangh Parivar which is demanding immediate construction of the temple at all cost. Obviously, all these moves are being orchestrated keeping the impending Lok Sabha elections in mind," the Communist Party of India Marxist (CPM) said in a statement.

Yogi Adityanath

The Uttar Pradesh chief minister welcomed the move by the Centre seeking the Supreme Court's permission to return the 67 acre of acquired land around the disputed Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid site to its original owners. "We have been saying that we should get permission to use the undisputed land," he said.



GUEST COMMENT

Last-ditch move on Ayodhya: Modi plays temple card ahead of polls

Racing against the announcement of the elections, the Modi government has asked the Supreme Court to allow it to return the 'non-disputed' surplus land acquired around the disputed structure in Ayodhya to Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas and other original owners. The move, apparently the BJP's last roll of the dice ahead of the General Election, comes less than a month after PM Modi had said during an interview that his government would intervene in the matter only after the completion of the judicial process.

The Centre has pushed its plea at a time when the apex court is scheduled to hear 14 appeals against the Allahabad High Court's 2010 ruling that 2.77-acre land at the root of the dispute be divided equally between the Sunni Waqf Board, the Nirmohi Akhara and Ram Lalla. The BJP-led NDA owes an explanation for this new-found urgency at the fag-end of its term, even as the Opposition is citing relentless pressure from the Sangh Parivar.

The BJP's unexpected defeat in the 2004 Lok Sabha polls was partly attributed to the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government's failure to do enough to pacify its core supporters on the Ram temple imbroglio. In its 2003 order, the Supreme Court had directed the Centre to maintain status quo with regard to the land acquired under the Acquisition of Certain Areas of Ayodhya Act, 1993. The saffron party, which has made itself unpopular in the past couple of years, courtesy demonetization, GST and the agrarian distress, can't afford a repeat of the scenario that eventually kept it out of power for a decade. With the ordinance route, as demanded by Hindutva organizations, being a remote possibility in view of the fact that the case is sub judice, the government has come up with the next best option. Even as the ball is again in the judiciary's court, the verdict can impact the BJP's electoral fortunes particularly in the high-stakes state of Uttar Pradesh, where it is up against the formidable SP-BSP alliance and the Priyanka-bolstered Congress.

(Tribune India)

AS I SEE IT

Temple gambit evokes a sense of déjà vu

For the past over four years of the Narendra Modi government, the Ram temple issue lay dormant



By Radhika Ramaseshan

Raising a bhavya (magnificent) temple for Ram on the disputed land in Ayodhya that had housed the Babri mosque is the last arrow in the BJP's quiver that is being darted before the General Election. A sense of déjà vu descended on this pilgrim town in Uttar Pradesh, as indeed the country, when the Centre moved the Supreme Court to seek permission to return the acquired 'excess/superfluous' land measuring 67.703 acres to its 'original owners', principally the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas. The Nyas was constituted as an 'independent' trust by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) on January 25, 1993, to 'administer' the site of Ram's 'birthplace' and oversee the construction of the envisioned temple.

Two circumstances led to the creation of the Nyas: one, on January 7, 1993, a month after the mosque was razed, the Narasimha Rao government promulgated the Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Ordinance (replaced by an Act in April 1993) and took over the land surrounding the disputed 2.77 acres with the stated objective of building a Ram temple and setting up related infrastructure for Ayodhya's residents and pilgrims. The agenda was never realized, but its articulation unsettled the VHP and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), who feared that the Congress might steal a march on them. The Nyas was a signal that the VHP was very much in business as far as Ayodhya went. Second, four BJP state governments were sacked, including the one in Uttar Pradesh, that deprived the Sangh fraternity of the official patronage it had enjoyed until then. The RSS calculation was that the BJP would win the 1993 UP elections, having fulfilled a major promise of obliterating the mosque for eternity, and then a full-fledged temple could be built. That never happened, because the party lost to the Samajwadi Party-Bahujan Samaj Party coalition.

However, months before the Lok Sabha elections, the RSS and the BJP are somehow convinced that they have a winner in the temple. If, by a twist of fate, the Supreme Court expedites hearing of the title suit and adjudicates in favor of the Hindu litigants represented by the Hindu Mahasabha and the Nirmohi Akhara, the judgment would be projected as a 'triumph' of the 'majority'. Conversely, if the verdict is advantageous to the Sunni Waqf Board, it would be interpreted as an affront, even an assault, to Hindu sentiments and give the BJP an opening to play the victim.

For the past over four years of the Narendra Modi government, the temple issue lay dormant, while other subjects and controversies signifying 'nationalism' and Hindutva - notably the violent campaign against cow slaughter, re-conversion (ghar wapsi) and the surgical strikes - were placed on the radar of the cadre and the faithful. Ironically, in the 2017 UP elections, the temple did not figure in the

For the past over four years of the Narendra Modi government, the temple issue lay dormant, while other subjects and controversies signifying 'nationalism' and Hindutva - notably the violent campaign against cow slaughter, re-conversion (ghar wapsi) and the surgical strikes - were placed on the radar of the cadre and the faithful. Ironically, in the 2017 UP elections, the temple did not figure in the discourse of the BJP leaders or the minds of the voters. Even in Ayodhya, topmost on the electors' minds was the military's operation across the western border



So far not good: There are three winners and three losers, with no clear answers

discourse of the BJP leaders or the minds of the voters. Even in Ayodhya, topmost on the electors' minds was the military's operation across the western border.

The anointment of Yogi Adityanath as the UP Chief Minister stoked hopes of a breakthrough because his mentor, the late Mahant Avaidyanath, had spearheaded the 'movement' for a temple and indoctrinated his protégé so thoroughly that in February 2003, when the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government was embroiled in the Ayodhya tangle, the Yogi, then an MP from Gorakhpur and a member of the VHP's steering committee, told the media that the Hindu clergy alone owned the "right to adjudicate an issue that was a matter of faith".

Adityanath is probably committed to the same position even now, but his tenure saw little push on the temple issue, barring his celebrated touchdown on Ayodhya on Diwali that set off a controversy because the state government had allegedly spent crores on adorning the town. The CM promised a total makeover of Ayodhya from a filthy, shambolic town to a 'moksha-seeking' destination with a grand Ram statue.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, founder of the Art of Living Foundation, briefly initiated an effort to resolve the imbroglio, joining a line of godmen that included Chandraswami, the 'tantrik', and Jayendra Saraswathi, the pontiff of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham. It was unclear if the spiritual guru from Bengaluru was empowered by the Modi government to start a dialogue with the Shia Waqf Board and other stakeholders or if he acted unilaterally. However, the VHP disregarded the move, justifiably emphasizing that the Shia Board had no locus standi in the Ayodhya legal cases and it was, therefore, 'pointless' reaching out to its members.

The RSS and the VHP were determined not to let go of Ayodhya, even as the BJP was

uncertain of its electoral dividends and its potential to evoke the emotions of the late eighties and the nineties. Although a lemon that was squeezed for all it was worth, cynically of course, the BJP was hoisted by the petard on which the RSS placed it. As the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi successfully frustrated the VHP's repeated exertions to distract him from his chosen path of vikas (development) by flagging Hindutva. A distance of 903 km separates Gandhinagar from New Delhi. That's big and Modi finds that he cannot deploy the counters of the past to checkmate the VHP and its affiliated clergy.

Demoralized by the poll loss in three states, an economy that cannot be called buoyant or depressed but one that is questioned for not creating enough jobs, the downturn in manufacturing after demonetization and GST, a stagnant unorganized sector and agrarian distress, the BJP-RSS cadres are desperately seeking an issue that will raise the emotional volume on the stump. The surgical strike is over and done with. It's time to revisit Ayodhya like the late Vajpayee did in 2003, a year before he faced a parliamentary election.

Like the Modi government, the Vajpayee dispensation moved the Supreme Court to restore the land adjacent to the contentious site to the Nyas. The 2003 judgment stated that the land must not be 'disturbed' for two reasons: one, if the Muslims won the title suit case, they could not be denied access to the extended property. Second, it was imperative to maintain communal harmony and peace, pending a resolution. Ashok Singhal, the late VHP patriarch, blamed Vajpayee for nixing a settlement. How will the Parivar judge Modi, its 'poster boy'?

(The author is a senior journalist)

THE INDIAN PANORAMA

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Will the EVMs decide the Indian elections of 2019?



By George Abraham

“

We are living in an age where even sophisticated systems with high levels of security are under attack from cybercriminals. Defense Department in the US believes that 15% of the "specially build for Pentagon" chips that go into aircraft and missiles are counterfeit and they have no way of finding out. However, EC wants to convince the country that a commodity microcontroller and other electric components in an EVM are beyond any level of threats than the Systems in a technologically advanced country like the US. There may not be a machine in the world that is truly impenetrable!

”

Whether we believe in the veracity of the claims in this study or not, EC should not be taking a defensive posture with regard to the allegations of fraud or machine malfunctions. The design of India's EVMs relies entirely on the physical security of the machines and the integrity of election insiders.

One option is to use a voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT), which combines an electronic record stored in a DRE with a paper vote record that can be audited by hand. VVPAT has been tested and first used at the election in Goa. One of the remedial measures could be that all EVMs may be configured with VVPAT in the upcoming election.

An Indian Cyber expert identified as Syed Suja, recently told a press conference in London addressing via Skype that 2014 General election in India was "rigged" through Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). He also claimed that Telecom giant Reliance helped BJP to get low-frequency signals to hack the EVMs.

Whether these claims may be outlandish or not, this is not the first time that someone is raising the issue of reliability of these voting machines in determining the outcome of elections in India. As far back as in 2009, L. K. Advani, a senior BJP leader expressed serious doubts about the integrity of these machines and called for a return to the paper ballot.

Moreover, powerful new voices added to the chorus now questioning the security and verifiability of the election using these machines. Akhilesh Yadav, a former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh urged the election commission to provide an alternative to EVMs and even called them a "threat to democracy." BSP Supremo Mayawati asked for the return of paper ballots. Abhishek Singhvi, a Congress spokesperson, also expressed serious doubts over the credibility of EVMs and stated that 70 percent of the political parties had asked EC to replace EVMs with paper ballots.

Therefore, what is brewing just before the 2019 general election is a crisis of confidence in the election process primarily due to the inability of the Election Commission in convincing political leaders that the procedures and infrastructure they have put in place have transparency and fairness! Instead, EC has taken a belligerent stand dismissing concerns across the political spectrum stating that EVMs are "tamper proof" with the Chief Election Commissioner even lamenting "EVMs being tossed like a football" in the political discourse.

The Election Commission of India developed the country's EVMs in partnership with two government-owned companies, the Electronics Corporation of India (ECIL) and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL). Though the Indian government owns these companies, they are not under the administrative control of the Election Commission. EVMs were first used nationally for the general election in 2004 though they were first used in 1982 in the by-election to North Paravur Assembly constituency in Kerala for a limited number of polling stations.

One of the commonly heard arguments is that EVMs are not connected to the Internet so it cannot be hacked. However, there are so many ways one can break into an electronic device if the dishonest guys have access and are protected. Clever hackers use wireless mechanisms such as radio protocol to break into computing devices. Some would argue that this is not a computer. However, the truth is that it has ROM, RAM, Software, Keyboard and a Display! It is indeed modeled after a computer.

We are living in an age where even sophisticated systems with high levels of security are under attack from



Image Credit: pib.nic.in/newsite

cybercriminals. Defense Department in the US believes that 15% of the "specially build for Pentagon" chips that go into aircraft and missiles are counterfeit and they have no way of finding out. However, EC wants to convince the country that a commodity microcontroller and other electric components in an EVM are beyond any level of threats than the Systems in a technologically advanced country like the US. There may not be a machine in the world that is truly impenetrable!

EVM consists of a Control and Balloting Units, connected by a cable. The centerpiece in this configuration is the CPU. It is custom manufactured, and the code is embedded in a chip to prevent it from being electronically programmed. However, a Security Analysis studies done by American experts points to some of its potential vulnerabilities. For example, firmware can be compromised either at the source or the Chip manufacturer and the real chips could be swapped with dishonest ones in the supply chain by attackers with access to the assembled machines. They have also raised the possibility of using a trigger for an attack between elections and counting using malicious code at a preset interval. The same researchers also argued that a clip-on connector could execute even a vote-stealing program. It is possible that many of these assertions could be challenged and even proven wrong.

Whether we believe in the veracity of the claims in this study or not, EC should not be taking a defensive posture with regard to the allegations of fraud or machine malfunctions. The design of India's EVMs relies entirely on the physical security of the machines and the integrity of election insiders. There was a story from Madhya Pradesh that CCTV cameras were out at a storage area after electricity was cut-off raising suspicions and creating further innuendos. The tamper-resistant seals they put on the machines after the election is said to be not credible as well. It is also worth noting that in 2009, there were reports of 4000 EVMs missing in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.

Some would raise an argument of how it would be impossible to subvert such a large number of independent systems. However,

experts point out that in close races an attacker might be able to change the election outcome by tampering with only a few machines. A small number of tightly contested seats often determine which party holds a majority in the parliament, so a national-level attacker could focus on tampering with machines only in those districts.

It is time for an honest debate on this issue and country will be better off in considering how to achieve a secure and transparent voting system that is suitable to its national values and credible before the voting public. One option is to use a voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT), which combines an electronic record stored in a DRE with a paper vote record that can be audited by hand. VVPAT has been tested and first used at the election in Goa. One of the remedial measures could be that all EVMs may be configured with VVPAT in the upcoming election.

It is quite possible that even VVPAT may not satisfy all critics of the present setup. The final option is to return to paper ballots. India's EVM machines are said to be made in Japan. However, Japan still uses the paper ballot. In the US and Western Europe, many States are opting out of electronic voting systems and returning to the paper out of concerns for hacking or worries over glitches. To guarantee the secrecy, security, and verifiability of elections, elections should revert back to human-readable paper ballots, according to a new report from the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine.

Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh victories may have given a 'false sense of security' to the Opposition. Election Commission has been created as an independent entity, however, unless it truly exercises its prerogatives and responds to the valid concerns of its citizens, faith in a fair election will not be restored and stories of EVMs fixing elections may become more than mere fables!

(The author is a former Chief Technology Officer of the United Nations and Vice-Chairman of the Indian Overseas Congress, USA)

Ex-Israeli army chief launches campaign to replace Netanyahu

TEL AVIV (TIP): Retired Israeli military chief Benny Gantz is launching his long-awaited political campaign, seeking to position himself as the first serious challenger to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decade-long rule.

Gantz is flaunting a tough military pedigree and emerging in the polls as Netanyahu's top rival. This highlights how security rules supreme in the minds of most Israeli voters.

The tall, telegenic ex-general with salty hair is still untarnished by partisan politics and has been riding a wave of popularity, even while saying little and presenting a vague ideological platform.

But the shine could quickly wear off following his speech later on Tuesday, when he is expected to finally lay out his agenda. Netanyahu's allies are sure to brand Gantz as a "leftist" should he show any signs of moderation. (AP)

Searchers probe deep mud from Brazil dam breach; 65 dead

Brazil (TIP): Brazilian firefighters and Israeli rescue workers poked sticks into treacherous mud on January 28 looking for bodies as pressure mounted on the mining company responsible for a dam that burst and spilled a flood of iron ore waste. By late in the day, the death toll rose to 65, with 279 people still missing, said Lt. Col. Flavio Godinho of the civil defense department in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais.

In a sign of the risks posed by the deep mud, Col. Alexandre Ferreira, a doctor with the military police of Minas Gerais, advised rescue crews, volunteers and journalists to take antibiotics to prevent cholera, the bacterial infection leptospirosis and other diseases.

Officials said the death toll was expected to grow "exponentially," since no had been rescued alive since Saturday.

The mud was up 24 feet (8 meters) deep in some places, forcing searchers to carefully walk around the edges of the muck or slowly crawl onto it so they would not sink and drown. (AP)

There's a deeper conflict behind Venezuela's 'legitimacy' dispute

VENEZUELA (TIP): If it seems impossible that Venezuela's government could have remained in power nearly two years into the country's self-imposed economic collapse, consider that Naunihal Singh, a leading expert on power transitions and coups, is just as baffled as everyone else.

"It's just perplexing," Singh said. "It shouldn't be in anybody's interests for the country to get destabilized to this extent and for this many people to starve."

A hint as to why the crisis has stretched on lies in the growing dispute over legitimacy, just the latest sign of a monthslong deadlock over the country's future.

Both Nicolás Maduro, the president, and Juan Guaidó, an opposition lawmaker who has pointed to Maduro's widely disputed election victory, claim to be Venezuela's legitimate leader. Military leaders, political elites, protesters and foreign governments have all weighed in.

Disputes like this often emerge when countries face crises that can unseat the government. But they are not really about legitimacy, experts say.

Rather, they are elaborate games of maneuvering and signaling among military leaders, civilian leaders and foreign governments who have the power to determine the country's fate — but only if enough of them can come together to force their way.

When those powerful actors consider their options — a coup, a unity government, a peaceful transition, or reinforcing the status quo leader — they choose whatever will secure their interests and win enough support from other powerful actors to succeed.

"Legitimacy is used to wrap a bow on an option afterward, rather than to select the option," Singh said.

That process has broken down in Venezuela.

The political establishment is fractured. Foreign governments, including the United States and Russia, hold conflicting, zero-sum agendas that prevent them from coming together. Even Venezuelan citizens — who would have to be sold on any new government for it to survive — remain divided. Some, particularly among the poor, still back the



ideals of Maduro's mentor and predecessor, Hugo Chávez.

Winning Over the Military

The complex gamesmanship among Venezuela's leaders is clearest in their competing appeals for the loyalty of the military.

"The military's withdrawal of support from Mr. Maduro is crucial to enabling a change in government," Guaidó, the opposition leader, wrote in a New York Times Op-Ed, adding a promise of "amnesty to all those who are found not guilty of crimes against humanity."

Such signals can be more credible when made publicly, binding those offering such assurances to their word.

But Maduro may have more to offer. He is thought to have granted the military control of drug-smuggling routes among other income sources. This also makes it harder for officers to defect, knowing that a different government could bring criminal prosecutions.

It's a time-tested tactic. When the president of Gambia, a small West African country, refused to step down after losing the 2016 election, citizens, elites and foreign governments turned against him. But the military stuck by him, in part because he had used those forces to crack down, exposing the brass to jail time if he ever lost power. The

military's vote was so decisive that the crisis was resolved only when several nearby countries invaded.

Deadlocked Foreign Powers

Militaries are not always the ones to resolve crises like Venezuela's. In many cases, foreign allies or mediators step in.

Even when militaries do decide the outcome, they often seek the blessing of foreign powers who can ensure that the new government will be welcomed as legitimate.

When the United States declared Egypt's president no longer legitimate in 2011, the military correctly took that as a signal that it could oust him without angering the Americans. Zimbabwe's military is widely suspected to have sought approval from China, a major investor, to remove President Robert Mugabe in 2017.

But Venezuela is pulled between two sets of foreign governments that want very different things, making it nearly impossible for any Venezuelan leader or group to have confidence that it will win international approval.

On one side, the United States and a number of Latin American countries, including Brazil, Venezuela's largest neighbor, have declared Guaidó the interim leader. On the other are Cuba, a longtime ally, and Russia, which support Maduro. (NYT)

Philippine: Grenade thrown into mosque kills two Islam teachers

ZAMBOANGA (TIP): A grenade was thrown into a mosque in the southern Philippines where Muslim teachers were sleeping early on January 30 morning, killing two of them and injuring four, authorities said.

It was the second explosion at a religious site in the south this week, though authorities didn't see it as retaliation for the bombings of a Roman Catholic cathedral in nearby Jolo during Sunday Mass that killed 21 people.

Regional police Chief Superintendent Emmanuel Luis D. Licup said investigators are trying to determine the motive and identity of the suspect in the grenade attack at the mosque in Zamboanga city.

The victims were from Basilan and nearby provinces at the mosque to teach Islam to children.

Military Col Leonel M Nicolas emphasized the grenade blast was not a retaliatory act and was still under investigation. Licup said a personal grudge was among the possible motives.

The Ulama Council of Zamboanga Peninsula condemned the attack as "an inhumane act" and called for people to be "calm yet vigilant." President Rodrigo Duterte's office described the mosque attack as a taunt to the government and said the successive attacks on different places of worship



showed the ruthlessness of terrorists.

The peace process for the southern region would not be

stalled by such obstacles, presidential spokesman Salvador S. Panelo said. "The movement to change the face of Mindanao and the oppressive conditions affecting its people shall move forward despite these acts of terrorism," the statement said.

The official military and police toll for the cathedral attack was raised to 21 dead with about 100 wounded. One of the dead is still unidentified.

The Islamic State group claimed two suicide bombers carried out the cathedral attack, one who detonated an explosive belt inside the building and the other near the entrance. Philippine authorities have named as their main suspect a commander of a local Abu Sayyaf faction that has pledged allegiance to IS.

Duterte said Tuesday that an unidentified militant couple detonated the two bombs, and Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said at least one was a suicide bomber.

Duterte visited the bombed cathedral on Monday and ordered government forces "to destroy" the Abu Sayyaf. The group has carried out years of bombings, kidnappings and beheadings in the southern Philippines.

It has an estimated 300 to 400 members, mostly in Sulu where it is holding several foreign and Filipino kidnap victims. (AP)

Germany, France, Britain to launch mechanism for trade with Iran

BERLIN (TIP): Germany, France and Britain have officially set up a European mechanism to facilitate non-dollar trade with Iran and circumvent US sanctions, two diplomats said on January 31.

The EU has been preparing the system, in effect a clearing house that avoids monetary transfers in dollars between the EU and Iran for months although it is unlikely to become operational for several months due to technical details.

German broadcaster NDR reported that the European Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) would be named INSTEX-Instrument In Support Of Trade Exchanges.

The idea is for the SPV to help preserve the economic benefits for Iran derived from the curbs it placed on its nuclear programme under a 2015 deal with world powers.

Europe has been keen to show good faith towards Iran since US President Donald Trump withdrew from the deal last year.

The entity is not likely to revive trade with Iran to begin with as its focus will primarily be food, medicine and humanitarian, with transactions small. It will not be used for oil-related transactions that have been hit hard by US sanctions.

"It won't change things dramatically, but it's an important political message to Iran to show that we are determined to save the JCPOA and also the United States to show we



defend our interests despite their extraterritorial sanctions," one European diplomat said.

However, relations between Tehran and the EU have worsened, and the EU this month imposed its first sanctions on Iran since the 2015 deal in reaction to Iran's ballistic missile tests and assassination plots on European soil.

In a symbolic move, the EU added two Iranian individuals and an Iranian intelligence unit to the bloc's terrorist list.

EU member states are also finalising a joint statement on Iran to outline concerns about Tehran's regional policies and ballistic missile programme, but also to show their desire to maintain the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

France and Germany had taken joint responsibility for the SPV. A German banker would head up the vehicle, which would be based in France. France, Britain and Germany will be shareholders and they hope other states will join. (reuters)

Child abuse is 'a human problem,' Pope says, tamping down summit expectations

ROME (TIP): Pope Francis sought to downplay what he called "inflated expectations" for a global church summit on child sexual abuse next month, casting it as an educational workshop for bishops more than a definitive policymaking meeting.

"We have to deflate expectations," the pope told reporters on the papal plane returning to Rome from an international event for Roman Catholic youth in Panama. "Because the problem of abuse will continue, it is a human problem."

The summit is shaping up to be a pivotal moment in Francis' nearly six-year papacy. As abuse scandals have spread beyond the United States and Europe to Latin America and Asia, the pope has faced pressure to prove that the church is capable of removing abusive priests and disciplining negligent bishops.

The pope said that the meeting, to be held at the Vatican on Feb. 21-24, was intended to help bishops and the heads of religious orders better understand the procedures to follow when faced with allegations of abuse, and to impress on them the terrible suffering of victims.

If expectations are high, it is — at least in part — the Vatican's own doing. The summit was announced in September amid fresh reports that the Vatican had turned a blind eye to accused abusers in the hierarchy. In November, the Vatican ordered the U.S. bishops to hold off voting on new policies for keeping bishops accountable until the February summit could produce protocols that would apply to the church worldwide.

About 200 participants are expected at the summit. In recent weeks, Vatican officials have stressed that because it is a consultative meeting only four days long, the gathering should not be viewed as a panacea to the global abuse crisis.

"The meeting is a stage along the painful journey that the church has unceasingly and decisively undertaken for over 15 years," Alessandro Gisotti, the interim director of the Holy See's press office, wrote this month.

Pope Francis, speaking on the plane from Panama where he participated in the celebrations for World Youth Day, a gathering of Catholic young people, said that the idea for the meeting had developed among the group of nine cardinals that serve as his closest advisers.

"We saw that some bishops didn't properly understand, or didn't know what to do, or did one thing right and the other badly," the pope said.

"Resolving the problem in the church, we will help resolve it in society, and in families, where shame leads to cover-up," he said. Some Catholics have called for the church to reconsider the requirement of celibacy for priests, calling it a stressor that can lead to abuse. But Francis reiterated his opposition to lifting the celibacy rule, saying it was "a gift for the church" that should not "be optional." He cited the words of Pope Paul VI, now a saint, who said, "I prefer to give my life before changing the law on celibacy."

But Francis showed some openness to allowing married men to serve as priests in remote areas, like the islands of the Pacific, where there are few clergymen to administer the sacraments. In exceptional circumstances, it was right to at least study the question, and pray for guidance, he said. (NYT)

The messier Brexit gets, the better Europe looks

BRUSSELS (TIP): After Britain voted to leave the European Union in June 2016, its leaders were in a panic. It was mired in a migration crisis, and anti-Europe, populist forces were gaining. Britain's decision seemed to herald the start of a great unraveling.

Two years later, as Britain's exit from the bloc, or Brexit, looks increasingly messy and self-destructive, there is a growing sense, even in the populist corners of the continent, that if this is what leaving looks like, no, thank you.

Nothing has brought the European Union together quite as much as Britain's chaotic breakdown. "A country is leaving and has gotten itself into a right old mess, making itself ridiculous to its European partners," said Rosa Balfour, a senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund in Brussels.

The challenges facing Europe — low growth, eurozone governance, migration, debt, border security and populism — have by no means gone away. Nor has Europe found consensus on how to deal with them.

The very prospect of losing a country like Britain, considered so pragmatic and important in the world, is deeply wounding. But on the whole, while all parties will suffer with Brexit, particularly in the event of a "no deal" departure, analysts tend to agree that the EU, which will remain the world's largest market, is likely to fare far better than Britain.

Increasingly, the British experience stands as a cautionary tale, and one that others now seem less eager to embark on for themselves than just a short time ago.

Even successful populists and nationalists like Matteo Salvini and Luigi Di Maio in Italy, Victor Orban in Hungary, Jaroslaw Kaczynski in Poland and the Alternative for Deutschland have dropped the idea of leaving the euro or the EU and are instead working to alter the



functioning of the bloc from within. "Brexiters have done Europe no end of good," said Denis MacShane, a writer and former minister for Europe in the government of Tony Blair.

"Frexit and Grexit and Italexit and all the rest of it are gone," he said. "Leaving both the EU and the euro has been dropped like a ton of bricks, by populists from the right and the left, including Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain."

"Everyone looks on Britain, which was the country of a stable Parliament, with sheer horror and boredom," he added.

"Europe is still not a happy place, and a lot of people calling membership into question were elected, like Salvini, or done well," MacShane said. "But Brexit has absolutely killed the idea of leaving."

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, whose country was considered a possible "Nexit," said, "For some time, voices were going up in

the Netherlands in favor of a possible Nexit, but with Brexit those voices have receded. "All this uncertainty is of course not in our interest, also not in the U.K.'s interest, if you look at the enormous damage already done to the U.K. economy by Brexit," Rutte said. "So if anybody in political parties still thinks that Nexit would be a good idea, just look at Britain and the enormous damage that it entails."

Marietje Schaake, a Dutch member of the European Parliament, said that "Britain is imploding — we're seeing the dominance of emotional politics over substance, and now it seems to be spinning out of control."

The threat of populist forces to European cohesion is not over. The EU will remain a convenient boogeyman for populists looking to score political points at home. Given that, pro-Europe voices and Brussels bureaucrats may still get a drubbing in elections to the European Parliament in May. (NYT)



KRITI WANTS TO GO TO THEATRE AND CATCH AUDIENCE REACTION TO LUKA CHUPPI

Kriti Sanon is looking forward to the release of *Luka Chuppi*, and says she is happy that the audience is connecting with the concept. "I am always nervous when my film is releasing. But this time, I am also happy and excited because the audience is connecting with the concept," Kriti said.

"They are liking the whole concept of the film. So, I want to see how they actually react while watching the film. I feel this is one such film where I want to go to Gaiety cinema to see how audience is reacting to the film," she added.

Luka Chuppi tells the story of a couple who decide to go for live-in and how their whole family gets involved with their idea. Kriti shared her views while interacting with the media at celebrity photographer Dabboo Ratnani's calendar launch in Mumbai.

Talking about the audience response to the trailer of the film, Kriti said: "The response to the trailer has been fabulous. I am really glad about it. I am really hoping the audience will appreciate the film as much as they are appreciating trailer." *Source: IANS*

SUNNY LEONE DEMANDS MARVEL INDIAN SUPERHERO FILM

Bollywood actress Sunny Leone surely knows how to grab all the eyeballs with her stunning photos. The actress recently set the temperature soaring in her sexy last shot for celebrity photographer Dabboo Ratnani's 2019 calendar. Sunny, who is a lot in the news of late, has left her fans into a tizzy with her new hot photos as a Marvel superhero. The *Ragini MMS* actress shared a couple of photos of her wearing a grey jumpsuit that has 'Marvel Comics' written over it.

The photos are hilarious and quirky as Sunny Leone punches Rannvijay Singh in the air on the sets of *Splitsvilla 11*. Sunny tagged Russo Brothers and hinted at making an Indian Superhero Marvel movie. Sharing the pictures, she wrote, "Marvel ready!! @therussobrothers - In case you ever decide to make an Indian superhero Marvel movie #SunnyLeone #marvel #IndianSuperhero @rannvijaysingha."

On the work front, Sunny Leone is in the news for her upcoming Malayalam film with Mammooty. The actress has commenced the shooting for a dance number with Malayalam superstar Mammooty for their upcoming film *Madhura Raja*.

Meanwhile, Sunny has hit the headlines after she was accused by producer and distributor Bharat Patel of not returning the signing amount of Rs 5 lakhs which she had taken to do a special dance number for his movie *Patel Ki Punjabi Shaadi*.

Sunny Leone goes braless in red hot leather jacket for Dabboo Ratnani calendar

Celebrity photographer Dabboo Ratnani launched his 2019 calendar last night. From Kiara Advani and Tiger Shroff to Rekha and Farhan Akhtar, many stars from the



Indian film industry were clicked at the event.

Among other stars, Sunny Leone too came to the calendar launch. The actress wore a white t-shirt with a silver skirt at the event. The actress was also featured in this year's calendar. In the calendar's shoot, the actress looks jaw-droppingly hot as she is

seen wearing a red jacket with black shorts.

Sunny shared the picture on her Instagram account. She captioned it saying, "Here it is everyone!! Love my shot in the 2019 #DabbooRatnaniCalendar @dabbooratnani @manishadtratnani .make up and hair by @tomasmoucka styled by @hitendrakapopara."

Sonam Kapoor reacts to harassment accusations against Rajkumar Hirani

Bollywood actor Sonam Kapoor on Wednesday said she stands by the #MeToo movement but feels judgement should be reserved in the case of filmmaker Rajkumar Hirani, who has been accused of sexual harassment. Hirani was associated as a co-producer of *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga* but his name was dropped after an article in *HuffPost India* claimed that he had sexually abused an assistant on the set of *Sanju*. Sonam had a short role in the film.

"I am a huge supporter of the #MeToo movement and this is a very important question... This is not the right platform because our film is as important as the movement. "I know Raju Hirani very well, I have known him for many years and I have huge respect for him as a filmmaker and as a man. I think we all should reserve judgement and be very responsible before we say anything more on this subject.. Because we don't need to derail this movement," Sonam said in response to a question asked by PTI during an interaction with reporters.

Sonam, who has voiced her support for the #MeToo movement in the past, said more understanding is needed about the movement.

"Media and all journalists don't understand

how important the pen is, how important your voice is and it can make or break a person's life. So wait, do proper research and ask what is actually happening and understand what is actually happening. I promise after the film releases, I will have something to say.

"But till things are not clear, don't make click bait articles and play with somebody's life. It will derail the movement completely." She further said, "I always want to believe a woman but suppose by chance, if it is not true, then how bad it will be for the movement, especially if it is somebody like Raju Hirani." The *Veere Di Wedding* actor said one needs to be patient and have a better understanding while talking about the issue.

"With Tanushree Dutta (who kicked off the #MeToo movement in India last year) there was a lot of truth in the article, there was a lot of research done, lot of people came forward.. So you understand where it is coming from." Sonam said she would want to believe every woman but asserted in case of Hirani one needs to reserve judgement. "This film is important and it should not become about that. If I have to sit down and talk about it, I can talk about it at length but we need to be careful about the people we accuse and people whose side we take."





MARGOT ROBBIE SHARES HARLEY QUINN LOOK FROM 'BIRDS OF PREY'

Margot Robbie has shared her first look as Harley Quinn in the upcoming 'Birds of Prey (And The Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn)'. The 28-year-old actor, who reprises her 'Suicide Squad' breakout character in the female-led film, took to Instagram to post the photograph.

'Miss me? HQ,' Robbie signed the picture as her on-screen character.

Cathy Yan is directing the film from 'Bumblebee' writer Christina Hodson's script.

The movie also features Mary Elizabeth Winstead as Huntress, Jurnee Smollett-Bell as Black Canary, Ella Jay Basco as Cassandra Cain and Rosie Perez as Renee Montoya.

Ewan McGregor is the latest addition to the cast who stars as Black Mask, the villain.

According to source, the film will follow Quinn as she "assembles a girl gang of friends to take on a bad guy".

'THE PRINCESS DIARIES 3' IS IN WORKS: ANNE HATHAWAY

Actress Anne Hathaway, who worked in the two 'Princess Diaries' movies, has confirmed that she wants to do a third installment of the romantic comedy film franchise and so does her co-star Julie Andrews.

As for how far the new project is in development, the Academy Award-winning actress said there's already a script for it, reported.

"There is a script for the third movie," she said during an appearance on a show with her 'Serenity' co-star Matthew McConaughey. "I want to do it, Julie wants to do it, Debra Martin-Chase (producer) wants to do it," she said.

Hathaway added: "We all really want it to happen, we just don't want to do it unless it's perfect. We love it just as much as you guys love it, it's as important to us as it is to you, and we don't want to deliver anything until it's ready, but we're working on it."

Released in 2001, 'The Princess Diaries' marks Hathaway's breakthrough role with her portrayal of Mia Thermopolis.

The movie, is based on Meg Cabot's young adult novel of the same name, which follows a shy San Francisco teenager, Mia, who learns that she is the heir to the throne of a European kingdom, Genovia.

Under the tutelage of her estranged grandmother (Andrews), the kingdom's



reigning queen, Mia must decide whether she wishes to claim the throne she has inherited or permanently abdicate her title.

Hathaway returned in 2004's 'Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement', which centers on Mia's romantic relationship as

she's tasked with finding a husband to keep the throne. She falls in love with bad boy and rival heir, Lord Nicholas Devereaux, challenging the old royal marriages law. Unlike the first installment, the sequel is not based on any of the books.

Patty Jenkins: 'Wonder Woman 3' will be a contemporary story

Filmmaker Patty Jenkins said she will not set the third instalment of 'Wonder Woman' in the past. Wonder Woman, the character, has already fought in World War I, and in next year's 'Wonder Woman 1984', she will head to the 1980s.

Jenkins has an idea where a third film could go after that, and in a departure for the series, she does not expect 'Wonder Woman 3' to be set in the past, according to source.

"I'm not set, but I'm not dying another period piece," Jenkins told at the Sundance Film Festival.

Referring to a piece by the publication suggesting that 'Wonder Woman 3' should go to the future, Jenkins said: "It's definitely one of the things we talked about. I'm not planning to put it in the past again, because where are you going to go? You have to go forward. It's definitely a contemporary story. That's all I can say."

"Where we put it and how that gets figured out, I haven't totally nailed down."

Gadot's Wonder Woman has been seen in contemporary settings in 2016's 'Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice' and 2017's 'Justice League'.

The 2017 film 'Wonder Woman' scored unequivocal success.

ADDRESSES 'BARBIE' MOVIE RUMORS

Margot Robbie's Barbie movie may be moving forward at Warner Bros., but despite the rumors otherwise, Wonder Woman director Patty Jenkins will not be involved.

Jenkins told Deadline at the Sundance Film Festival where she was promoting her new TNT limited series, I Am the Night, that while she loves Barbie, she won't be directing the film.

"I love Barbie as well, and see an interesting thing," Jenkins said. "It's something we talked about, it's not something I'm planning on doing."

Buzz about Jenkins and a live-action adaptation of Barbie has been around since at least October of last year when rumors first surfaced that the film, which had been stuck in development at Sony for years, was moving on to Warner Bros. with Robbie in talks at the time to star. Jenkins' name came up the director for the film, though reports were refuted.



Then, earlier this month, Warner Bros. confirmed that the studio is, in fact, developing a film based on the classic Mattel toy property with Suicide Squad star Robbie set to star as the iconic doll.

"Playing with Barbie promotes confidence, curiosity and communication throughout a child's journey to self-discovery," said Robbie. "Over the brand's almost 60 years, Barbie has empowered kids to imagine themselves in aspirational roles from a princess to president. I'm so honored to take on this role and produce a film that I believe will have a tremendously positive impact on children and audiences worldwide. I can't imagine better partners than Warner Bros and Mattel to bring this film to the big screen."

Bella Thorne: No one understands bisexuality

Actor Bella Thorne believes people do not understand bisexuality. The 21-year-old actor, who came out as bisexual in August 2016, said people still have a narrow-minded attitude towards sexuality.

"It seems like no one understands bisexuality at all. In this world it's like you're either gay or you're straight; there's no in between. If you f****d a guy once, you must be gay. Like, what? No. That's just been fluid," she told.

The star said she finds it easier to date men than women.

"It's so hard. I can't tell if a girl is trying to be best friends with me or if she wants to get with me or if she just wants social media followers. I'm just so confused when a girl talks to me. Girls can be very flirtatious, so I don't want to make a move, and then you be like, 'Whoa, girl. Not what I was thinking, I don't roll that way.'

"Then it's so awkward. So I end up usually dating more guys, because with guys, I know if a guy's hitting me up. They're not just texting me to be my bestie. I know they want something, of some sort," she said.



Citing drug crime, Sri Lanka plans first executions since 1976

COLOMBO (TIP): Sri Lanka's president pledged to end the country's 43-year moratorium on capital punishment and execute condemned drug traffickers amid alarm over drug-related crimes. The statement on the government's website said President Maithripala Sirisena would order the executions soon but did not say how the prisoners would be executed. Sri Lanka last executed a prisoner in 1976. At the time, prisoners were hanged.

Thousands of suspects have been killed in the crackdown that he launched after taking office in 2016, and rights groups have denounced the killings as extrajudicial executions.

The government said Sirisena believes reinstating executions is justified because he says other countries execute prisoners for drug crimes. It said he announced his decision January 30 in a southern part of the island nation where large amounts of illegal drugs have been discovered.

Sri Lanka has 1,299 prisoners facing death sentences and 48 of them were convicted of drug offenses. Eighteen of those condemned drug convicts are on death row, while the remaining 30 still have appeals of their sentences to be heard. Sri Lankan police in recent months have intensified their efforts to crack down on drugs, seizing 90 kilograms (198 pounds) of heroin from a luxury apartment in the capital, Colombo. Two Americans, two Sri Lankans and an Afghan were arrested.

Rising crime — including gang-related killings and narcotics and sex crimes — have generated public calls to restart executions. Giada Girelli, a human rights analyst with the Harm Reduction International drug policy research group, said there is no evidence that carrying out executions in Sri Lanka would serve “as an effective deterrent to drug use or trafficking.”

“It will buck the global trend away from the use of the death penalty and only serve to harm the health and human rights of Sri Lanka's citizens.” (AP)

Nepal pays tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 71st death anniversary

KATHMANDU (TIP): Several Nepali leaders, diplomats, academicians and students paid tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 71st death anniversary during a programme held here.

A talk on “Mahatma Gandhi: Peace, Non-Violence and Humanity” was organised by the Embassy of India and DR Memorial Library Development Board in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

The speakers on the occasion highlighted the importance of Gandhian principles of peace, non-violence and inclusiveness in today's world.

Chancellor of Nepal Academy, Dr Ganga Prasad Upreti said Mahatma Gandhi was born in India but he was a globally recognised figure.

“Gandhi's commitment towards truth, non-violence and humanity is very important in human history to maintain permanent peace in the world,” Upreti said.

India's Ambassador to Nepal, Manjeev Singh Puri said Gandhi was far ahead from his time. “The relevance of Gandhi then and now for India, Nepal and other countries of the world is same,” he pointed out. (PTI)

Pakistan launches attack on India's quest for permanent seat in UNSC

UNITED NATIONS / ISLAMABAD (TIP): Pakistan has launched a strong attack on India's quest for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council blaming it as the “primary stumbling block” for reforms.

Intervening in the discussions on Council reforms on Wednesday, Pakistan's Permanent Representative Maleeha Lodhi did not mention India by name but she criticized its suggestion to look for alternatives if the current negotiating process doesn't make progress.

India's Permanent Representative Syed Akbaruddin had said on Tuesday: “If despite our best efforts, credible progress evades us once again, then we should not shy away from reviewing how we engage on this very important issue.”

“We need to look at creative pathways to forge ahead,” he added at the meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) on Council reforms.

Lodhi said: “We heard an assertion that given the perceived lack of progress in the IGN, it may be time to review the entire process with a view to pronounce on its fate.”

“Those calling for a review of the IGN



process, should instead review their own positions because the quest by some to gain permanent seats for themselves remains the primary stumbling block and this was clearly evident from our discussions, yesterday,” she said.

India, Brazil, Germany and Japan are pursuing permanent seats for themselves, while African and Arab nations want representation in the ranks of permanent members.

Bangkok is choking on air pollution and is responding with water cannons

BANGKOK (TIP): The monsoons are no longer lashing Bangkok, in that soggy season when my sons sometimes have to wade through waist-high floods to get to soccer practice. So why did I get soaked last week, as I walked along a major avenue in the Thai capital?

The liquid, which soon flooded one of Bangkok's busiest intersections, came from water cannons aimed at alleviating the smog that has shrouded Bangkok for weeks.

Pedestrians squealed as the plumes of water shot into the air. A vendor of coconut ice cream failed to stop his pushcart from careening into a sewer. A rat scurried, then swam.

Some of the giant hoses were connected to trucks that only contributed to the bad air afflicting Bangkok. Smoke spewed from the trucks' exhaust pipes. Officials from Thailand's Pollution Department estimate that vehicle emissions account for roughly 60 percent of the city's chemical haze.

A decade ago, the Thai capital was a rarity in Asia, a place where the air had gotten cleaner largely because of a ban on the most polluting vehicles. Those days are gone.

Earlier this month, Bangkok cracked the list of the top 10 cities with the foulest air on the planet.

My sons' school, like more than 400 across the Thai capital, will be closed on Thursday and Friday because of the smog.

Like many Asian megalopolises, which crowd the catalog of the world's most polluted cities, Bangkok suffers from a toxic amalgam: unchecked industrialization and urbanization, a car-crazy populace and lax regulation. The burning of fallow fields and a dry season with little wind exacerbate the crisis.

Even as pollution control monitors say they are eliminating the dirtiest diesel engines, a walk on a Bangkok road can be a choking experience. City buses belch murky smoke. There are too many cars for too few roads, and too little interest in public transportation.

“In our society, a car is not just a car,” said Tara Buakamsri, the Thailand country director for Greenpeace Southeast Asia. “It's a representation of affluence and a symbol of ownership. It will be very hard to get people to give up their cars.”

Having lived for many years in China, my family is well acquainted with dirty air.

I used to joke that we left Beijing in 2014 as pollution refugees. I had tired of strapping little face masks on our boys just so they could commute to school. On many days they couldn't play outside at all.

The smiling panda patterns on their masks couldn't disguise the fact that fine particulate matter is particularly corrosive for children's lungs.

The World Health Organization says outdoor air pollution caused 4.2 million premature deaths in 2016, claiming far more lives annually than AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined.

We moved from Beijing to Shanghai just as the air there got worse. A couple of years ago, I didn't realize that our dishwasher had caught fire and was sending smoke throughout the house because everything was already so murky from the pollution.

Then we moved to Bangkok. Like China, Thailand seems to be going through the same cycle: denial of a chronic problem, ineffectual solutions and then a sudden realization that the chemical miasma isn't going to magically disappear without coordinated policies.

For years, Beijing residents spoke of fog rather than smog. When the reality finally hit, the government considered some outlandish ideas, like using giant fans to blow the pollution out of town. (NYT)

After having already spoken at the IGN meeting on Tuesday, Lodhi took the floor again to make pointed attacks on India — as well as others sharing New Delhi's positions on the reforms and the process for it.

She said: “As for the point raised by one distinguished colleague, none of the examples and landmark documents he cited involved an amendment of the UN Charter. That's the fundamental difference between this IGN and other processes.”

“Any procedural manoeuvres are not only self-inhibiting, they are also counter-productive,” she added.

An alternative to the negotiations that has been deadlocked for over a decade would be to go directly for an amendment to the UN Charter to add more permanent and non-permanent members to the Council, which is supported by a majority of the UN members.

Even if the negotiations do succeed, the Charter would have to be amended to incorporate the reforms.

Amendments will require a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly — 129 out of 193 members — and the vote of all the permanent members. (Economic Times)

Afghan talks: Need to retain capability to act in US interests, says CIA chief

KABUL / WASHINGTON (TIP): On the potential peace agreement with the Taliban, CIA Director Gina Haspel said “a very robust monitoring regime” would be essential in Afghanistan and the US needed to retain the capability to act in “national interests”.

“It's very important that we maintain pressure on the terrorist groups that are there and so if there were an eventual peace agreement a very robust monitoring regime would be critical and we would still need to retain the capability to act in our national interests if we needed to,” Haspel said in testimony to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

She was responding to a question from Senator Angus King, who asked whether the US could trust an agreement with the Taliban. US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad was quoted Monday as saying the US and the Taliban have drafted the framework of a deal which could pave the way for peace talks with Kabul.

“Mr Khalilzad, our envoy to Afghanistan, has said that part of the basis of the current talks with the Taliban is that they would prevent Afghanistan from ever becoming a platform for international terrorist groups and of course that was the basis of our original intervention,” King said.

“Do we believe them? Are they capable of that? Did they learn something from having given safe haven to Osama bin Laden? Do we believe that there is a mindset change that that could be an enforceable or at least a reasonable expectation?” King asked.

Haspel said the peace talk is a result of Khalilzad's very intensive efforts over many months now but particularly over the last eight days in Doha where he has been engaged in talks with the Taliban to achieve a framework.

Haspel and other leaders of the American intelligence community appeared before the committee to testify on World Wide Assessment of Threats in 2019. (PTI)

SPITI VALLEY: THE 'LITTLE TIBET'

Popularly known as the 'Little Tibet', the Spiti valley is located in between Tibet and India. This defines its name 'Spiti', which means the 'Middle Land'. The Spiti Valley is a desert mountain valley based in the north-eastern part of Himachal Pradesh.

Visit this place and be awe-struck by the gigantic snow clad mountains and the captivating vistas. Antiquated monasteries like Dhankar and Lalung are the major attractions here. Some Monasteries have been established more than a 1000 years ago and hence attract innumerable tourists. Come with your best friend and discover the beauty of the natural beauty of the Spiti valley, the magnificent monasteries, and the exotic wildlife.

Chandratal Lake

A camper and trekker's paradise, Chandratal Lake is often referred to as one of the most beautiful lakes located at an altitude of about 4300 m in the mighty Himalayas. The name "Chandra Taal" (Lake of the Moon) comes from its crescent shape. Once a tentative residence for Tibetan traders traveling to Spiti and the Kullu valley, it attracts thousands of adventure enthusiasts from all over the world. Vast stretches of green meadows house the best camping sites and an array of different wildflowers during springtime.

Legend has that it lies in the vicinity of a place from where God Indra's chariot picked up Yudhishtira, the eldest of Pandava brothers in Mahabharata. This fact renders the lake sacred and thus, is flocked by a lot of Hindu devotees. The colour of water of this holy lake keeps changing from reddish to orange to blue to emerald green as the day ends.

Key Monastery

The Key Monastery is a famous Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the Lahaul and Spiti District of India. Located at an altitude of 4,166 metres above the sea level, the monastery is very close to the Spiti River in the Spiti Valley of Himachal Pradesh in India. Also known as the Kye Monastery, it is believed to have been founded by Dromton, who was a student of the famous teacher Atisha in the 11th century.

The Key Monastery is over a thousand years old, and apart from being the oldest, it is also the largest monastery that can be found in the entire Spiti Valley. The magnificent monastery doubles up as a religious training centre for the Lamas, and about 300 lamas receive their education from here. It has a long and quite fascinating history that is attached to it: a long history that involves numerous attacks that the place had to face. Nevertheless, the monastery survived and celebrated the completion of its thousand years in the year 2000 in the presence of Dalai Lama.

Pin Valley National Park

Set amidst semi-frozen rivers in the Pin Valley, the Pin Valley National Park is situated in the Cold Desert Biosphere Reserve situated in the Lahaul and Spiti District of Himachal Pradesh. The elevation of the park ranges from about 3,500 metres near Ka Dogri to more than 6,000 metres at its pinnacle. One of the fascinating facilities of its kind, the Pin Valley National Park is home to the rare species of famous Himalayan snow leopards and their prey, the Ibex. Due to its high altitude, only a limited number of animals and plants thrive here. However, Pin Valley National Park is most famous for its incredible trek which is a delight for all its visitors. Owing to the many rare plant and animal species that it houses, the National Park was established in the year 1987 and has been a major attraction for trekking enthusiasts. Pin Valley National Park acts as a joint between the separate districts of Lahaul and Spiti, and the Dhankar Gompa on the



Tibetan border can be deemed as its exact starting point. With the picture-perfect backdrop of snow-covered mountain ranges, a trek to this destination is easily a nature lover's dream. The imposing mountains that stand tall here have a sublime quality of their own, and their stone bodies seem to dissolve into the clouds that hang low here. If you are interested in learning more about the vegetation of Lahaul-Spiti, you can study the spread of alpine and dwarf juniper scrub that is most common here. Animals here include woolly hair, Tibetan gazelle, snow leopard, fox, wolf, ibex, bharal, Himalayan marmot, Indian porcupine, blue sheep, red-billed chough, Partridge, snow Partridge, blue rock pigeon and Tibetan wild ass among many others. Visit this national park to witness species and sceneries you don't get to witness every day.

Kunzum Pass

Kunzum Pass or Kunzum La as it is called by locals is one of the highest motorable mountain passes of India, located at an altitude of 4,551m above mean sea level. It serves as a gateway to the beautiful Spiti valley Via Kullu and Lahaul. It lies on the eastern Kunzum Range of the Himalayas and is at a distance of 122 km from Manali. Kunzum La offers an incredible 360-degree view of Bara- Shigri Glacier (the second longest glacier in the world), a jaw-dropping vista of Chandrabhaga Range and a spectacular view of the Spiti valley. This enthralling view makes the Pass a photographer's dream. The Pass is a beautiful mixture of two different landscapes; rugged mountains and massive glaciers of Lahaul and the dry, barren mountains and the turquoise river of Spiti.

On reaching the Kunzum Pass, the visitors have to stop at the temple of Goddess Kunzum Devi to pay their respect and seek the blessing to travel through the rugged terrain safely. The tradition is to take a complete circle of the temple in your vehicle. It is believed that this worship at Devi's temple guards from all sorts of mishappening and accidents that might take place in the rugged terrain of the



pass. It is surrounded by Buddhist style Gompas, Chortans and hundreds of colourful prayer flags as seen on monasteries. These

colourful flags swaying in the snowy wind makes the entire surrounding a sight to behold.

HOW TO APPLY LIPSTICK: HERE ARE SOME TIPS

Great lips can really set off your style, but what's the best way to choose and apply lipstick or gloss? There are definitely a few do's and don'ts when it comes to getting great looking lips. Let's explore a few insider beauty tips that makeup artists swear by.

Don't Play Up Your Eyes and Mouth

The best approach to makeup is to play up your best feature, so choose between your eyes or your mouth. Women who wear both heavy eye makeup and dark lipstick can look overdone. At times, it can even border on the edge of clownish.

If you want to wear red lipstick, keep the rest of your makeup light. If you are playing up the eyes, keep your mouth light with a gloss or light lip color that doesn't stand out. To get nude lips, cover your lips with concealer or foundation before applying gloss. This renders lips practically colorless and looks great with smokey eyes.

Plump Up Your Lips

You don't have to get fillers in your lips to have the bee-stung look. For plumper lips, apply liner just outside your natural lip line, then dab a bit of gloss in the middle of your bottom lip and smack your lips together.

Choose the Right Shade

You may like a lipstick on your friend, but it may not look good on you. Makeup artist Bobbi Brown swears that the best lipstick shade is a shade or two darker than your natural lip color.

Keep in mind that orange or brown shades, including corals, look good on only a few people.

These shades also tend to make teeth appear yellow.



The Best Way to Apply Lipstick?

There are no real rules to applying lipstick. Some women use special lipstick brushes, while others own one and never use it. Some women simply use their middle finger and most women apply it straight from the tube. Choose what's right for you.

As long as the color gets on the lips, you're good.

Use Liner as a Base

Lipstick will last longer if you fill in your lips with the liner first. If you're using light lipstick, try a nude liner. Then slick your lipstick on top.

Lip gloss is infamous for wearing off fast. However, if you fill in your lips with a liner, you're giving the gloss something to stick to.

Try a Long-Lasting Lip Stain

One of the most annoying things about lipstick and gloss is that it doesn't last long. Luckily, they now make lip stains that last hours and eliminate this problem entirely.

A favorite lip stain for many women is Chanel's Rouge Double Intense. Once you apply it, it stays put for hours. It also comes with a bit of gloss to make it appear less matte.

FOOD CORNER



EGG CURRY

Ingredients

6 hard-boiled eggs, 5 tbsp. cooking oil (vegetable, canola, or sunflower), 2 medium-sized onion (cut into quarters), 3 medium-sized tomatoes (cut into quarters), 2 green chilies, 2 tsp. garlic paste, 2 tsp. ginger paste, 2 tsp. coriander powder, 1 tsp. cumin powder, 1 tsp. garam masala powder, 1/2 tsp. turmeric powder, 1/2 tsp. red chili powder, Salt to taste, Optional: 2 potatoes cut into 1-inch cubes, To Garnish: Chopped fresh coriander leaves, To Garnish: 2 green chilies, slit lengthwise

Method

- Heat 2 tbsp. of the cooking oil in a deep pan and when hot, add the onions. Fry till slightly golden. Turn off the fire. Use a slotted spoon to remove the onions from the pan and put them in a food processor. Grind the onions, tomatoes, and green chilies into a smooth paste. Try not to add water while grinding, if possible.
- Heat the remaining oil in the same pan and add the paste you just made. Fry for 2 to 3 minutes.
- Add the ginger and garlic pastes, all the dry spices (coriander powder, cumin powder, garam masala powder, turmeric powder, and red chili powder) then mix and fry till the oil begins to separate from the masala (onion-tomato-spice mix).
- Add 2 cups of warm water to this masala and bring to a boil on a medium flame.
- If adding potatoes to the curry, add them now and cook till half done. Half slit the boiled eggs vertically and add them gently to the gravy. Simmer the flame and cook for 10 minutes or till the gravy has thickened or reduced to about 3/4 of the original quantity (before you added the water). If you have added potatoes they should ideally be cooked by now. Turn off the fire and garnish with chopped coriander leaves.

Weighed down by the responsibility of raising happy, health and respectful children, evidence shows that most parents and teachers want to help kids to be caring to others.

But while their carers might prioritise kindness children are apparently not getting the message -and instead value personal success over concern for others, according to a recent study at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Despite their carers' efforts, almost 80 per cent of young people picked high achievement or personal happiness when asked what is most important to them, while a fifth said caring for others. Researchers at the Ivy League university made their findings by assessing survey of 10,000 middle and high school students from 33 schools representing a diverse range of young people from across the US. They also used hundreds of conversations with young people and their parents over a decade.

"Our youth's values appear to be awry, and the messages that adults are sending may be at the heart of the problem," was the authors' bleak assessment of the situation.

Researchers said the problem lies in what they call the rhetoric/reality gap: between what parents say are their priorities and the message they put forward on a daily basis.

And parents in affluent communities who pressure their children to be high achievers did not increase a child's attainment level or happiness, according to the study. In addition, not prioritising caring for others made it more



difficult children to form strong relationships - a vital part of a person's well-being.

In light of their findings, the team formulated five tips to help parents and teachers instill the importance of caring in their children.

"The guidelines can help shift the balance toward children and youth caring for others and help them become caring, ethical family members, workers, and citizens," the researchers said. "Children and youth need on-

How to make your child kind

going opportunities to practice caring and helpfulness, sometimes with guidance from adults" The team stressed that anyone can become a "good person" and that learning to be kind and fair is like "learning to play an instrument". "Daily repetition", be it by helping a friend with the schoolwork or doing chores around the home, can "make caring second nature".

"Children and youth need to learn to zoom in" Young people must both listen to those around them, and try to understand the bigger picture, according to the experts. This enables a child to "expand their circle of concern" and makes it possible for them to "consider the justice of their communities and society."

The researchers stress that this does not mean that parents and teachers needs to be perfect or "have all the answers." Rather, they emphasise "grappling with our flaws", realising when you are wrong, and listening to children and students. This means that parents and teacher also need to "continually practice and zooming in and out". "Children need to be guided in managing destructive feelings"

"Often the ability to care for others is overwhelmed by anger, shame, envy, or other negative feelings," said the reserachers. Therefore, adults must teach children that while such feelings are normal, they must be dealt properly and in "productive ways."

EXERCISE MAY BOOST COGNITION EVEN IN YOUNG ADULTS: STUDY

Aerobic exercise training improves cognition—acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses—even in young and middle-aged adults, according to a study.

The study, published in the journal *Neurology*, involved 132 adults between the ages of 20 and 67.

It found aerobic exercise training increases executive function—cognitive processes important for reasoning, planning, and problem-solving—in adults as young as 20, although the effect was stronger with increasing age.

The study led by researchers at Columbia University in the US indicates that aerobic exercise training improves cognition in younger adults, suggesting that exercise can prevent or slow the appearance of at least some age-related cognitive changes.

The flexibility of the exercise protocol in which participants choose when and how to exercise could make the intervention more attractive to the general population and increase its chances for adoption.

Researchers assigned 132 individuals with below median aerobic capacity to an aerobic exercise training programme or to a control programme of stretching and core-strengthening exercises.

All participants worked out four times a week, and those in the exercise group could choose any form of aerobic exercise as long as they reached target heart rates.

Data from heart rate monitors worn by the participants were downloaded to an on-site computer.

Participants were tested for executive function, processing speed, language, attention, and episodic memory prior to



being assigned to groups and at 12 and 24 weeks.

After 24 weeks, there was significant improvement in executive function in the aerobic exercise group for participants of all ages, and the greater the participant's age, the greater the improvement in executive function.

"Executive function usually peaks around age 30 and I think that aerobic exercise is good at rescuing lost function, as opposed to increasing performance in those without a decline," said Yaakov Stern from Columbia University.

Executive function underlies many day-to-day activities. For example paying a bill requires planning, organising, and shifting from one related task to another. These activities rely on intact executive function.

Aerobic exercise did not improve cognitive function in processing speed, language, attention, or episodic memory

for participants of any age, researchers said.

Some studies have found that aerobic exercise improves these features in adults above 55, and Stern said that a larger study may be able to detect improvement in younger adults.

It is also possible that exercise has different effects in young vs older adults.

Brain imaging at baseline and 24 weeks revealed that aerobic exercise training is associated with significantly increased cortical thickness in the left caudal middle frontal cortex.

The increase in gray matter was not associated with the participant's age, researchers said.

Several aerobic exercise studies in older adults have noted comparable changes in the frontal lobe, suggesting that aerobic exercise has a beneficial effect on a brain area that is associated with executive function, they said.

Source: PTI



Hearing loss can contribute to mental decline, dementia

Hearing loss can lead to impaired memory and higher risk of dementia and ensuing Alzheimer's disease in older people, health experts say.

Deafness, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), refers to the complete loss of hearing ability in one or both ears, while "hearing impairment" refers to both complete and partial loss of hearing ability.

Nearly 360 million people, nearly one-tenth of them children, suffer from hearing loss worldwide.

"Yes, hearing loss can lead to cognitive decline. Our two senses—vision and hearing—contribute to our cognitive development. When we are not able to hear well, most of the information that is delivered to us that way is not received properly. This way, less hearing slowly contributes to cognitive decline," Suresh Singh Naruka, Senior Consultant - ENT at Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals here, told IANS.

"It is important to understand that brain development and cognition development is a slow process. Intelligence is not a static thing; it is a dynamic and continuous process. It may not be visible in a day or two, but over a period of time one can witness the decline in cognitive behaviour," Naruka added.

A study led by researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital in the US suggests that hearing loss is associated with new onset of subjective cognitive concerns which may be indicative of early stage changes in cognition.

The study, published in the *Alzheimer's and Dementia* journal, examined 10,107 men aged 62 years.

The team found that compared with men with no hearing loss, the relative risk of cognitive decline was 30 per cent higher among men with mild hearing loss, 42 per cent higher among men with moderate hearing loss and 54 per cent higher among men with severe hearing loss but who did not use hearing aids.

The findings may help identify individuals at greater risk of cognitive decline.

It may help identify individuals at greater risk of cognitive decline and could provide insights for earlier intervention and prevention, the researchers said.

Moreover, "while hearing loss can lead to impaired memory and higher risk of dementia in older people, in children it hampers with development of speech and brain development", Virender Singh, Consultant—ENT, Fortis Hospital, Shalimar Bagh, told IANS.

According to a 2016 study published in the *Indian Journal of Otolaryngology and Head and Neck Surgery*, 63 million people (6.3 per cent) suffer from significant auditory loss in India.

Women tend to gain weight in high demand jobs

Women who face heavy psychological pressures at work are more likely to gain weight, a study claims.

The study, published in the journal *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*, included data from over 3,872 participants in Sweden.

"We were able to see that high job demands played a part in women's weight gain, while for men there was no association between high demands and weight gain," said Sofia Klingberg, a researcher at University of Gothenburg in Sweden.

The participants in the study were investigated on three occasions over a 20-year period with respect to such variables as body weight and demands and control at work. They were followed either from age 30 to 50 or from 40 to 60.

To estimate the level of job demands, the respondents were asked about their



work pace, psychological pressures, whether there was enough time for their duties and how often the demands made were contradictory.

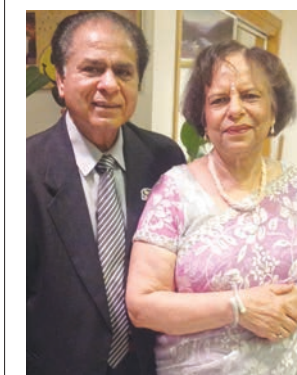
The questions about control at work covered such matters as how often they learned something new; whether the job called for imagination or advanced skills; and whether the respondent was

personally able to choose what to do and how to do it.

The results show that the respondents with a low degree of control in their work more frequently gained considerable weight, defined as a weight gain of 10 per cent or more, in the course of the study. This applied to women and men alike.

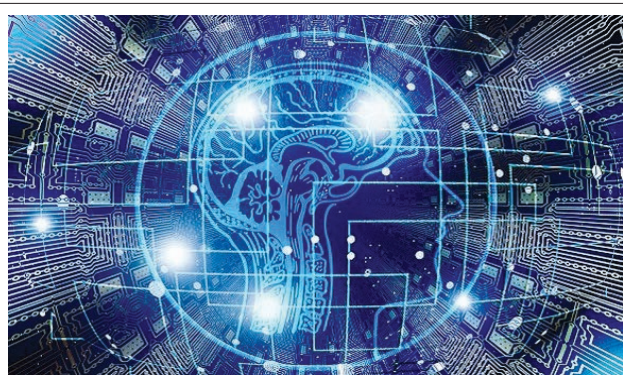
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NEW AI-ENABLED SYSTEM TRANSLATES BRAIN SIGNALS INTO SPEECH

In a first, scientists have created an artificial intelligence (AI) based system that directly translates thoughts into intelligible, recognisable speech, an advance that may help people who cannot speak regain their ability to communicate with the outside world.

By monitoring someone's brain activity, the technology developed by researchers from Columbia University in the US can reconstruct the words a person hears with unprecedented clarity.

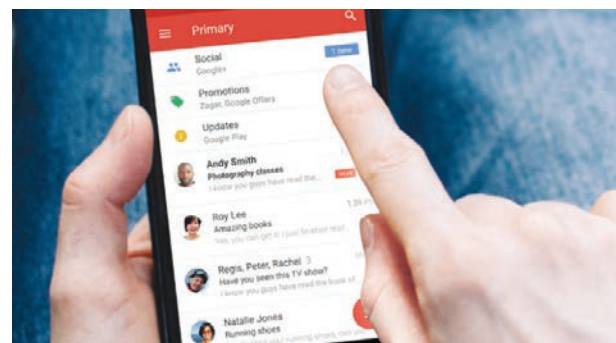
The breakthrough, which harnesses the power of speech synthesisers and artificial intelligence, could lead to new ways for computers to communicate directly with the brain.

It also lays the groundwork for helping people who cannot speak, such as those living with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) or recovering from stroke, regain their ability to communicate with the outside world, researchers said.

"Our voices help connect us to our friends, family and the world around us, which is why losing the power of one's voice due to injury or disease is so devastating," said Nima Mesgarani, of Columbia University in the US.

"With today's study, we have a potential way to restore that power. We've shown that, with the right technology, these people's thoughts could be decoded and understood by any listener," said Mesgarani, a principal investigator of the study published in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

Decades of research has shown that when people speak or even imagine speaking, telltale patterns of activity appear in their brain.



Google releases new Gmail design for mobile users

Google has released a new interface design for the mobile version of Gmail that includes new visual implementations as well as feature additions.

As part of the new design, users will be able to quickly view attachments like photos without having to open or scroll through the entire conversation, Nikolus Ray, Product Manager, Gmail, Google wrote in a blog post on Tuesday.

The new design is intended to make switching between personal and professional accounts smoother to enable users to access their emails quicker.

"Just like on Gmail web, you'll get big, red warnings to alert you when something looks phish-y," Ray said.

The update is aimed at making 'G Suite' look and act like a family of products designed in the "Google Material Theme." "We've already updated the web experiences for Gmail, Drive, Calendar, and most recently Google Docs and Sites, and more G Suite mobile apps to follow later this year," Ray added.

Along with tweaks in the interface, in April 2018 Google added a plethora of new features on Gmail for web including the "Nudge" feature for quick message reminders, "Smart Reply" feature and a "Confidential Mode" that allows users to remove the option to forward, copy, download or print a message. The new Gmail design for mobile is expected to reach all iOS and Android users in the coming weeks, the post noted.

Source: IANS

NASA SOLAR PROBE TO MAKE CLOSEST APPROACH TO SUN IN APRIL

Just 161 days after its launch, NASA's Parker Solar Probe has completed its first orbit of the Sun and has now begun the second of 24 planned orbits, which will mark its closest approach to the Sun in April, the US space agency has said.

Launched on August 12, the Parker Solar Probe, NASA's historic small car-sized probe, will journey steadily closer to the Sun, until it makes its closest approach at 3.8 million miles.

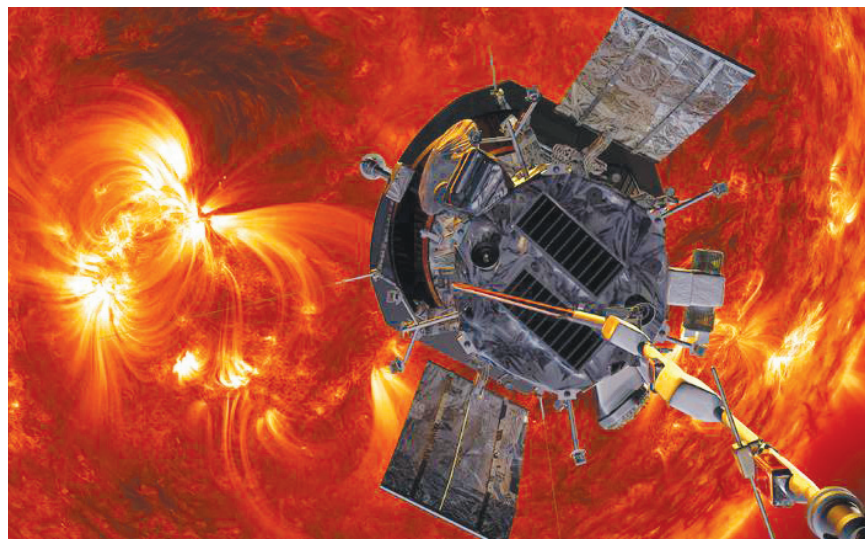
Throughout its mission, the probe will make six more Venus gravity assists and 24 total passes by the Sun.

The spacecraft completed its first orbit of the Sun, reaching the point in its orbit farthest from our star, called aphelion, NASA said in a statement.

It has now begun the second of 24 planned orbits, on track for its second perihelion, or closest approach to the Sun, on April 4, 2019.

"It's been an illuminating and fascinating first orbit," said Andy Driesman, Project Manager at the Johns Hopkins University's Applied Physics Laboratory.

"We've learned a lot about how the spacecraft operates and reacts to the



solar environment, and I'm proud to say the team's projections have been very accurate," Driesman added.

Parker Solar Probe entered full operational status (known as Phase E) on January 1, with all systems online and operating as designed.

The spacecraft has been delivering data from its instruments to Earth via the Deep Space Network, and to date more than 17 gigabits of science data has

been downloaded. The full dataset from the first orbit will be downloaded by April.

Like its first perihelion in November 2018, Parker Solar Probe's second perihelion in April will bring the spacecraft to a distance of about 15 million miles from the Sun—just over half the previous close solar approach record of about 27 million miles set by Helios 2 in 1976.

Source: IANS

Artificial skin could give humans 'superpowers'

Scientists have developed a sensor for artificial skin that may not only help burn victims feel, but also lend humans 'superpowers' to detect sound waves and magnetic fields.

Our skin's ability to perceive pressure, heat, cold, and vibration is a critical safety function that most people take for granted.

However, burn victims, those with prosthetic limbs, and others who have lost skin sensitivity for one reason or another, cannot take it for granted, and often injure themselves unintentionally.

Researchers from University of Connecticut in the US wanted to create a sensor that can mimic the sensing properties of skin. Such a sensor would need to be able to detect pressure, temperature, and vibration.

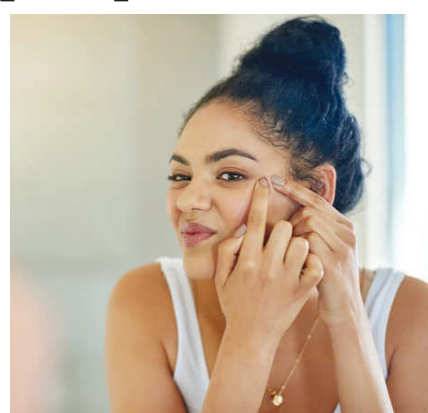
However, the artificial skin could do other things too, researchers said.

"It would be very cool if it had abilities human skin does not; for example, the ability to detect magnetic fields, sound waves, and abnormal behaviours," Islam Mosa from University of Connecticut.

Researchers created such a sensor with a silicone tube wrapped in a copper wire and filled with a special fluid made of tiny particles of iron oxide just one billionth of a meter long, called nanoparticles.

The nanoparticles rub around the inside of the silicone tube and create an electric current. The copper wire surrounding the silicone tube picks up the current as a signal.

When this tube is bumped by something experiencing pressure, the nanoparticles move and the electric signal changes.



Sound waves also create waves in the nanoparticle fluid, and the electric signal changes in a different way than when the tube is bumped.

The researchers found that magnetic fields alter the signal too, in a way distinct from pressure or sound waves.

Even a person moving around while carrying the sensor changes the electrical current, and the team found they could distinguish between the electrical signals caused by walking, running, jumping, and swimming.

Metal skin could perhaps act as an early warning for workers exposed to dangerously high magnetic fields.

Because the rubber exterior is completely sealed and waterproof, it could also serve as a wearable monitor to alert parents if their child fell into deep water in a pool, for example.

"The inspiration was to make something durable that would last for a very long time, and could detect multiple hazards," Mosa said.

Twitter testing news-first timeline on Android

Micro-blogging site Twitter is testing a new feature on Android that puts news stories at the top of the timeline to help users keep up with what is happening around the world.

"With this update, we're making it easier for people to see the news and stories their followers have been discussing while they've been away right at the top of their timeline," Mashable quoted Wally Gurzynski, Product Manager, Twitter as saying on Tuesday.

The feature comes with a prompt that says—"Catch up on what's happened while you were away".

Earlier in 2015 and 2016 Twitter released "While you were away" and "Never miss an important tweet" features but they were not to specifically highlight news stories.

This feature, however, rather than just surfacing interesting and popular tweets, focuses on news stories from news agencies and organisations.



ICICI SAYS CHANDA KOCHHAR VIOLATED CODE OF CONDUCT, HAS TO RETURN BONUSES

NEW DELHI (TIP): ICICI Bank Ltd said on Wednesday it would treat former chief executive Chanda Kochhar's exit from the bank as a "termination for cause" after an enquiry report ruled that she had violated internal bank policies.

The bank's internal enquiry report said that Kochhar violated the code of conduct and framework dealing with conflict of interest.

ICICI Bank, India's third biggest lender, said it will treat Kochhar's resignation as "termination for cause" and will stop payment of unpaid benefits, including bonus.

This means revocation of all her existing and future entitlements such as any unpaid amounts, unpaid bonuses or increments, unvested and vested & unexercised stock options, and medical benefits, and the clawback of all bonuses paid from April 2009 until March 2018.

Kochhar resigned in October after being mired in allegations that she favoured Videocon Group, a consumer electronics and oil and gas exploration company, in the bank's lending practices.

Videocon had got a loan of Rs 40,000 crore from a consortium of 20 banks led by the State Bank of India. The Rs 3,250



crore loan from ICICI Bank was a part of that.

ICICI has been in the grips of a controversy over allegations that Kochhar had favoured Videocon, a consumer electronics and oil and gas exploration company, in the bank's lending practices. Videocon's founders had an investment in a renewable energy company founded by Kochhar's husband, Deepak Kochhar.

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CHINA'S TOP TRADE NEGOTIATOR ARRIVES IN US FOR TALKS

BEIJING (TIP): China's top trade negotiator arrived in Washington as the world's top two economies prepare for high-stakes trade talks, Chinese state media said Tuesday.

The large delegation led by Vice Premier Liu He and including the head of the central bank arrived Monday as a US Justice Department indictment against top Chinese tech firm Huawei was unsealed, possibly complicating the discussions.

Beijing and Washington have a month remaining on a truce - declared in December by Donald Trump and Xi Jinping - that delayed a hike in tariffs on hundreds of billions in Chinese exports economists say could further damage an already-faltering global economy.

Trump will meet with Liu during the two-day talks, which are slated to open Wednesday, US officials said, as pressure mounts on both sides to reach a deal, with China in particular struggling with stuttering growth.

While there have been contradictory reports on the chances of success for the negotiations, global equities have been risen in recent weeks on hopes the two will reach some sort of deal.

China's negotiating team includes central bank chief Yi Gang, Vice Finance Minister Liao Min and Vice Foreign Minister Zheng Zeguang, among other high level officials, official state news agency Xinhua reported.

But the gathering comes days after the US Justice Department unveiled sweeping charges against Chinese telecoms giant Huawei and its chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou -- also the daughter of the company's founder.

Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross said on Monday the indictments were "wholly separate from our trade negotiations with China".

However, he added: "Commerce will continue to work with our interagency partners to protect US national security interests."

Source: PTI

Indian-origin British retailer brothers among UK's top 50 taxpayers: Report

LONDON (TIP): Indian-origin retail brothers -- Simon, Bobby and Robin Arora -- have been ranked Britain's 24th highest taxpayers, according to a new top 50 list compiled by 'The Sunday Times'.

The Arora family, behind the B&M chain of discount stores, paid 25.6 million pounds towards their 2017-18 tax bill against wealth estimated at 2,300 million pounds.

The UK's highest taxpayer was named as sportswear businessman Stephen Rubin, who paid 181.6 million pounds in tax in 2017-18 against a wealth estimate of 2,820 million pounds.

"These are the taxman's best friends -- those who make the inaugural 'Sunday Times Tax List' based on the taxes due on their business profits, share sales, dividend income, house purchases and, where known, personal income through their salaries," the newspaper noted.

"The super-rich are often castigated for not paying their fair share of tax, for deploying all tax avoidance measures at their disposal, yet the top 1 per cent of earners are expected to yield 28 per cent of all income tax receipts for 2017-18," it noted. Based on Merseyside in north-west England, B&M paid 143.2 million pounds in corporation tax, customs duties, stamp duty and other taxes in 2017-18, with 63 million pounds in dividends. The Arora brothers, who built the business, own just under 15 per cent of it, with 49-year-old Simon its chief executive.

E-commerce curbs may cover domestic companies like Snapdeal and Paytm too

NEW DELHI (TIP): The government is considering extending recently announced restrictions on foreign-owned e-commerce entities such as Amazon India and Flipkart to domestic firms like Snapdeal and Paytm as well to avoid complaints that it is discriminating against online retailers based overseas, two officials aware of the development said.

The matter is under consideration at the highest level of the government as pressure mounts on it from two fronts -- giant foreign investors and the governments of their country of origin, and millions of small domestic traders, who want curbs on all e-commerce entities, domestic as well as foreign, the officials at two different ministries said on condition of anonymity.

On December 26, the government barred online retailers like Flipkart India, in which Walmart is the majority shareholder, and Amazon, a unit of Amazon Inc., from selling products of companies in which they own stakes and disallowed them from entering into exclusive deals with companies such as phone-makers for selling merchandise.

The new norms kick into force on Friday, February 1.

The commerce ministry's decision to introduce the new norms followed complaints by small traders, who form a core support base of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), that the deep discounts offered by e-commerce firms are hurting their business.



An email query sent to the commerce ministry did not elicit any response.

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), which claims to have the support of 70 million small offline and online traders, including small mom-and-pop stores, wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi last week demanding similar curbs on domestic e-commerce firms. "The FDI (foreign direct investment) norms as spelled out in the policy should be made applicable on domestic e-commerce players as well to restrict them from adopting any unethical business practices and remain at par with other e-commerce players," CAIT national secretary general Praveen Khandelwal wrote to PM Modi on January 24 in a

letter, a copy of which has been seen by HT.

The letter said, "In larger interest of the country and the economy, we request your good self to kindly direct the Ministry of Commerce not to budge against any pressure and do not defer or extend the stipulated date of 1st February, 2019 for implementing the policy nor bring any change or amendment in the policy".

The government press release of December 26, 2018 contained nothing new on e-commerce norms, according to Ashwani Mahajan, national co-convenor of the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch (SJM), an affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the ideological mentor of the BJP. Source: HT

Indian American John Kapoor Faces Trial in Racketeering Conspiracy



Kapoor faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted

BOSTON (TIP): Indian American billionaire John N. Kapoor, the founder and former CEO and chairman of controversial opioid manufacturer Insys Therapeutics, went on trial in US District Court in Boston January 28 along with four former company executives on charges that they participated in a nationwide scheme to bribe doctors to prescribe an addictive opioid medication.

The 75-year-old and four other former employees of the company are accused of paying doctors millions of dollars in bribes and kickbacks in order to boost sales for fentanyl spray Subsys - a painkiller which is a powerful and addictive opioid, meant for cancer patients with severe pain.

In October 2017 Kapoor was arrested in Arizona and charged with conspiring the scheme. He denied the charges. But Michael Babich, former Insys CEO who resigned from the position in 2015, has already pleaded guilty and agreed to become a government witness.

Insys has been embroiled in a legal controversy including multiple investigations in connection with the marketing and sales of Subsys. Kapoor owns nearly 70% of Insys Therapeutics' shares.

He also resigned in October 2017 as chairman of Akorn, which makes generic prescription drugs. Kapoor faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted of racketeering conspiracy.

Eight Indian Men Indicted in Immigration Fraud Case

MICHIGAN (TIP): Eight people of Indian origin were arrested and indicted in an immigration fraud case for conspiracy to commit visa fraud and harboring aliens for profit, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan Matthew Schneider announced.

The Department of Homeland Security set up a fake university in Farmington Hills to target foreign students who wanted to stay in the U.S. without proper authorization, according to federal indictments unsealed in Detroit. The indictments were filed Jan. 15 and unsealed Jan 30.

Charged in the indictments were:

- Barath Kakireddy, 29, of Lake Mary, Florida
- Suresh Kandala, 31, of Culpeper, Virginia
- Phanideep Karnati, 35, of Louisville, Kentucky
- Prem Rampeesa, 26, of Charlotte, North Carolina
- Santosh Sama, 28, of Fremont, California
- Avinash Thakkallapally, 28, of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
- Aswanth Nune, 26, of Atlanta
- Naveen Prathipati, 26, of Dallas

Six of them were arrested in metro Detroit, one in Florida and another in Virginia. The students enrolled at the fake university with the intent to obtain jobs under a student visa program called CPT (Curricular Practical Training) that allows students to work in the U.S., said prosecutors.

An indictment says the defendants helped at least 600 "foreign citizens to illegally remain, re-enter and work in the United States and actively recruited them to enroll in a fraudulent school as part of a 'pay to stay' scheme."

While eight Indian agents, almost all of them from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, have been arrested so far, at least 600 'students' of the university are under the scanner - and most of them are Indians. These are people who entered the US on a valid student visa, but decided to extend their stay illegally, according to reports.

Indian Arrested at Australian Airport for Carrying Child Pornography

PERTH (TIP): An Indian origin man has been charged in Perth, Australia after he was allegedly caught at an airport with two phones containing child pornography videos and other objectionable material, according to media reports.

Authorities did not disclose the identity of the 32-year-old Indian. According to Australian Border Force (ABF) officers, the content was discovered on his mobile phones and other objectionable goods during a baggage search after he arrived at Perth Airport on a flight from Kuala Lumpur on Saturday. His phones were then seized, and his visitor's visa was cancelled.

The man was later charged with one offence related to possessing child pornography and one of importing objectionable goods. The maximum penalty for the importation of child exploitation material in Australia is 10 years imprisonment and/or a fine of up to 525,000 Australian dollars.

Indian Charged with Operating 'Provisional Credit' Fraud Scheme

BOSTON (TIP): Kishore Babu Ammisetti, 30, a citizen of India, has been charged by federal criminal complaint with fraud offenses stemming from an alleged "provisional credit" scheme, John H. Durham, United States Attorney for the District of Connecticut, and Peter C. Fitzhugh, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in Boston, announced Jan 30.

As alleged in the complaint, Ammisetti used Facebook Marketplace and other media to victimize individuals, primarily of Indian decent, who advertised items for sale or rooms for rent. Through this scheme, Ammisetti would contact a victim to express interest in purchasing an item or renting a room. He would then gather the victim's bank account information and other personal information under the guise of making a deposit to the



victim's bank account. He also would offer to provide a "deposit" directly into the victim's account via a Peer-to-Peer (P2P) transfer.

The complaint further alleges that Ammisetti would then contact the victim's bank and, posing as the victim, would claim to have made an ATM deposit that did not register on the victim's bank account. While researching the "unregistered deposit," the

bank would credit the victim's account with a provisional credit. Ammisetti would then contact the victim and claim that the provisional credit to the victim's bank account was a mistaken transfer by Ammisetti to the victim's account. Ammisetti would then request either a full or partial refund of that money, which the victim would provide via a P2P transfer. After the bank determined that there was no unregistered deposit to the victim's account, the funds provided as a provisional credit would be removed from the account.

It is alleged that Ammisetti stole at least \$800,000 from more than 400 victims through this scheme. The investigation has revealed that Ammisetti often operated this scheme while staying at casino hotels in Connecticut.

Ammisetti was arrested on January 25, 2019.

contd from page 1

President Kovind defends Demonetization, Rafale deal

a "means to establish an honest system of trade"; call surgical strikes India's "new policy and strategy"; and laud Rafale jets as ultra-modern aircraft that will strengthen India's strike capability.

The speech also lavished praises on government's recent legislative moves, including the controversial Citizenship Amendment Bill that the Opposition is questioning, Triple Talaq Bill, death penalty for aggravated child sexual assault and the new law on 10 per cent quota for General Category poor in education and public jobs. The Address drew thunderous applause from the ruling MPs when the President mentioned Rafale jet induction into the IAF and surgical strikes by the Army. On both occasions Opposition leaders Rahul Gandhi, Manmohan Singh and Ghulam Nabi Azad sat unamused as the Congress continues to question the government over Rafale fighter jets deal, demonetization and GST.

The President said: "The (demonetization) decision struck at the very root of parallel economy thriving on black money and the money outside the formal system was brought within the

ambit of nation's economy... and broke the back of the forces destabilizing the country and the systems sustaining the flow of black money."

Listing other achievements of the government, including women-centric schemes like Mudra loan, Swachh Bharat and Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana besides Ayushman Bharat for cashless medical care, Kovind said the "new India" vowed by the BJP-led NDA government had no place for "imperfect, corrupt and inertia-ridden systems".

On Rafale fighter jets purchase, he said, "My government believes that neglecting the country's defense needs even for a moment is detrimental to the present and future of the country... after a gap of many decades, the Indian Air Force is preparing to welcome, in the coming months, its new generation ultra-modern fighter aircraft Rafale and strengthen its strike capability."

Hailing surgical strikes, the President said, "Through the surgical strike on cross-border terror posts, India has shown its new policy and strategy." The President also listed the Central Government's flagship plans, including doubling farmers' incomes and housing for all by 2022 as he wished the best to first time voters of the 2019 General Election before delineating contours of government's "New India".

The Budget Session will conclude on February 13. (Source: *Tribune India*)

President Trump wants wall, with or without Congress

he would declare a national emergency to acquire money to build the wall, he said, "I've set the table. I've set the stage for doing what I'm going to do."

Trump's move to end the shutdown last Friday marked the start of a new chapter in the border wall saga, kicking off three weeks of negotiations between Republicans and Democrats of both chambers in pursuit of an agreement on border security. If Trump does not find the deal delivered to him by February 15 satisfactory, parts of the government may shut down again -- and he could declare a national emergency to fund the wall himself.

Trump intimated that he would no longer work with Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, and stressed that he would see the wall's construction through one way or another.

"I've actually always gotten along with her, but now I don't think I will anymore," Trump told the Times, accusing Pelosi of "doing a tremendous disservice to the country."

"I'll continue to build the wall, and we'll get the wall finished," Trump added. "Now whether or not I declare a national emergency -- that you'll see."

BENEFITS OF PILGRIMAGES

In Hinduism, pilgrimages are considered important for one's spiritual progress, peace and prosperity upon earth. According to it, they contribute to the preservation, propagation and continuation of the faith, by drawing the people to gods and increasing their religious and spiritual awareness. In the ritual practices of Hinduism, they constitute an important and integral aspect of Hindu devotional service.

Each year, millions of Hindus undertake pilgrimages to various places in India where temples and sacred objects are located. They do it primarily to declare their love and devotion, fulfill their vows or seek divine help. The pilgrim places serve as God's foot prints upon earth, and make India a sacred country. They also serve as power houses, radiating enormous sacred energy, and thereby contribute to the spiritual wellbeing of the people and the community.

They also elevate our consciousness, by helping us engage in religious and spiritual activity, besides strengthening our commitment to the Dharma (duty) of nurturing the gods and to our ultimate aim of achieving liberation (Moksha) in the pilgrimage of life, which we undertake upon earth as mortal beings. In the past, pilgrimages played an important role in uniting the people of the faith, despite their cultural, linguistic and regional differences.

They played a significant role in creating the national identity and unity of Hindus during foreign occupation. They continue to promote the Dharma and feelings of universal brotherhood, perhaps even with greater vigor, despite the growing shadow of materialism. The following ones are a few important benefits of undertaking pilgrimages according to our tenets.

Prepare you for renunciation

Pilgrimages help you break free from your daily routine and mundane problems, and perform devotional service to God. While for the wandering monks, life itself is a long pilgrimage to the abode of Brahman, for the householders it is an opportunity to practice temporary renunciation, in which they have to briefly leave everything behind and go on a spiritual journey to the abode of God. Each pilgrimage prepares worldly people for the ultimate renunciation in the last stage (ashrama) of their lives, reminding them of the life they have to lead someday in search of liberation.

Strengthen your devotional fervor

In daily life we remain preoccupied with our worldly goals and concerns and do not think much about God, nor do we pay attention to our spiritual goals or religious obligations. When we are on a pilgrimage, we find many opportunities to divert our minds to spiritual matters and strengthen our devotion. Pilgrimages are thus very useful to withdraw the mind from worldly matters and stabilize it in devotion or spirituality. One should not undertake them purely for pleasure or for recreation, but to honor one's obligations or declare one's love and veneration for the deity.

Help you engage in sacrificial actions

Each pilgrimage is a form of devotional service and sacrifice, during which you will find many opportunities to make small sacrifices to appease the gods or forgo your selfishness. During the pilgrimage, you will spend time and money, forgo personal comforts, leave behind your worldly priorities and bear with the stress and strain caused by the journey. Thus, pilgrimages introduce you



to the practice of sacrifice and selflessness, by helping you put others before you, give up your selfish desires and personal comforts, endure the suffering caused by it, and in the process subdue your ego and practice virtue.

Help meet spiritual people

Many pious and spiritual people live in and around the pilgrim places because of their purity and sanctity. For example, places such as Kashi, Mathura, Prayag, abound in religious ashrams and spiritual masters. It has been so since ancient times. The Buddha and Mahavira used to frequent them to gain followers. Even now, many spiritual people, sadhus and holy men regularly visit them and make them the centers of their activities. Hence, when you go on a pilgrimage, you will come across many spiritual people, yogis and babas, with whom you can interact and benefit from the association (satsang), seeking their advice, knowledge or blessings.

Cleanse your mind and body

Pilgrim places are powerful energy centers. They are filled with sacred presence and aura of the deities as well as the strong vibrations caused by the prayers and supplications of devotees, priests and saintly people. When you visit them, you become soaked in that positive energy and feel refreshed and uplifted. The strong currents of spiritual energy radiating from the powerhouses of gods cleanse your mind and body and remove your negativity and impurities. Thus, each pilgrimage is an opportunity to accumulate sattva, fill your mind and body with divine energy and elevate your consciousness.

Strengthen your relationship with God

Pilgrimages are good opportunities to cultivate nearness to God and strengthen your relationship with him. Just as your relationship with people improve with frequent and positive interactions, your

if their prayers are heard, and they do when it happens. Thus, pilgrimages offer hope and courage to people to deal with their problems or endure their suffering. It helps them persevere in the face of adversity.

Help you overcome sinful karma

According to our scriptures, pilgrimages are the best way to overcome sinful karma. The Puranas described how in the past many devotees were able to rid themselves of the gravest of sins by going on pilgrimages. They also state that most pilgrim places where the deities reside have the power to cleanse your karma. For example, many people go to Varanasi (Kashi) to take a dip in the River Ganga and cleanse themselves of all sins. Many Hindu pilgrim places are considered good enough to overcome sinful karma, including past birth transgressions. Therefore, it is certainly beneficial to visit them and clear one's sins to begin afresh.

Heal your mind and body

We have already stated that pilgrim places are suffused with a lot of spiritual energy due to the sacred presence of gods. Due to their auspicious and healing nature, they have the power not only to cleanse your mind and body but also remove your physical and mental ailments. The epics and Puranas vouch for the miraculous healing powers of many pilgrim places. They contain stories which narrate how by going on pilgrimages several devotees, pious men and women and even gods were able to overcome ancient curses or recover from incurable diseases. By those accounts, pilgrimages are considered useful for divine healing, especially when known methods of treatment are found ineffective.

Help you practice Dharma

Pilgrimages play an important role in the preservation and propagation of Hinduism. For all practical and spiritual purposes, each pilgrim center also serves as a center of Hindu Dharma. In the absence of centralized institutions and religious authority, they keep people bound to their gods and their faith, by helping them serve their gods and people who need help.

As a pilgrim, you will find many opportunities to engage in purification practices such as charity and selfless service and cultivate virtue. In Hinduism, many rituals and sacraments are customarily performed at religious places so that devotees can benefit from the visit by engaging in good actions. Even today, many Hindus perform religious ceremonies such as a marriage or a tonsure ceremony near temples and other sacred places as a part of their religious duties.

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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."

4TH ODI

Boult's fifer hands NZ consolation win over India

HAMILTON (TIP): India seemed shorn of their aura in the absence of talismanic skipper Virat Kohli as pacer Trent Boult's fiery five-wicket haul guided New Zealand to a stunning eight-wicket win in the fourth one-dayer, halting the visitors' domination here on Thursday (Jan 31).

With run-machine Kohli rested after the side claimed an unbeatable 3-0 lead in the five-match series, India's much-vaunted batting was dismissed for its seventh lowest ODI total -- 92 in 30.5 overs here -- after Boult (5/21) dished out a deadly opening spell. It was also the lowest total posted by any side on this venue, the previous lowest of 122 also against India's name.

Boult wreaked havoc with the new ball and in Colin de Grandhomme's (3/26) company utilised the swinging conditions at the Seddon Park perfectly. "Never expected this to happen. (But) games like this happen...We've got ourselves to blame for this," said India's stand-in captain Rohit Sharma.

In the absence of Kohli and an injured Mahendra Singh Dhoni, the Indian batting unit found the going tough against the Kiwi bowling attack.

India's lowest ODI total is 54 against Sri Lanka at Sharjah in 2000. It was also India's second lowest total in ODIs against New Zealand, having somehow managed to surpass the 88 scored at Dambulla.

"I don't think we expected this much. But the guys bowled well. It was nice to bowl them out for 90 odd. It was just one of those days. It was an outstanding performance today," said New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson said.

Bowling his 10 overs at a stretch, Boult troubled the Indian batsmen with both ways movement to return with impressive figures of 5 for 21, while Grandhomme gave him perfect support from the other end after New Zealand won the toss and elected to bowl. "Nice to see the ball moving around, made the



most of it," said Boult, who was adjudged man of the match for his stupendous performance. While chasing, even though New Zealand lost Martin Guptill (14) and skipper Kane Williamson (11) early to Bhuvneshwar Kumar (2/25), the hosts completed the formalities in 14.4 overs with eight wickets in hand.

Henry Nicholls (30 not out) and Ross Taylor (37 not out) then completed the easy task for the Kiwis without any further damage.

Earlier, the pitch didn't seem unplayable but the Indian batsmen failed to apply themselves against the swing bowling of Boult and Grandhomme. Only four Indian batsmen -- Shikhar Dhawan (13), Hardik Pandya (16), Kuldeep Yadav (15) and Yuzvendra Chahal (18 not out) -- posted double digit scores.

Dhawan's search for big runs continued and he was the first to depart, caught plumb in front of the wicket by Boult in the sixth over.

Rohit, who is leading India in the last

two matches of the series in the absence of Kohli, didn't have a happy outing on his 200th ODI and was caught by Boult off his own bowling an over later.

Grandhomme then joined the party and dismissed both Ambati Rayudu and Dinesh Karthik for ducks in a span of four balls in the 11th over.

A lot was expected from debutant Shubman Gill (9) but pressure got the better of him as he got out like Rohit, caught by Boult off his own bowling.

Reeling at 33 for 5, India desperately needed the experience of Kohli or Dhoni to bail the team out but in the duo's absence, the onus was on Pandya and Kedar Jadhav to do the repair job.

But it was not to be as wickets kept tumbling with Boult ripping apart India's line-up, dismissing both Jadhav and Pandya in quick succession.

Struggling at 55 for 8, Chahal and Kuldeep shared 25 runs for the ninth wicket to take India close to the 100-run mark before being shot out in 30.5 overs. The last match of the series is on Sunday in Wellington.



ONE OF OUR WORST PERFORMANCES WITH THE BAT, SAYS ROHIT

HAMILTON (TIP): With regular skipper Virat Kohli rested for the last two matches, India's stand-in captain Rohit Sharma said the performance against New Zealand in the fourth One Day International match on Thursday was one of the worst performances with the bat.

Electing to field, pacer Trent Boult's five wicket haul and Colin de Grandhomme's disciplined bowling wreaked havoc in India's batting line-up to bowl them out for 92.

Despite having a long batting line-up, India failed miserably as only two batsmen -- Shikhar Dhawan (13) and Hardik Pandya (16) -- managed to reach double digits.

"One of our worst performances with the bat in a long, long time. Something we didn't expect. You got to give credit to the NZ bowlers," Rohit said after the match.

"At times, you need to absorb pressure (when asked about how to bat in swinging conditions). We need to blame ourselves for it. Things were looking good at that stage. It was about applying ourselves," he added.

"We played some bad shots as well. It's always challenging when the ball is swinging. Having a good run in the limited formats for a number of series. Everyone knows what went wrong," Rohit said.

"When you are playing for your country, you try to give your best. Good teams usually keep ticking the boxes and today we didn't tick the right boxes," he added.



Mithali Raj becomes first woman cricketer to play 200 ODIs

HAMILTON (TIP): India captain Mithali Raj on Friday became the first woman cricketer to play 200 ODIs, adding another achievement to her illustrious career.

The 36-year-old is also the highest run-getter in ODIs with 6,622 runs at an average of 51.33, including seven hundreds.

Mithali could not make a big impact in her 200th game, scoring nine off 28 balls as India were bowled out for 149 in the third and final ODI against New Zealand here.

She had hit an unbeaten 63 in the second ODI, helping India take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series.

Mithali made her ODI debut way back in 1999 and has featured in 200 games out of the 263 ODIs India have played.

She has also played 10 Tests and 85 T20s.

Djokovic's rocky road to magnificent 7

MELBOURNE (TIP): Twelve months after exiting the Australian Open with fitness, form and career doubts swirling, Novak Djokovic on Sunday struggled to keep his emotions from reducing him to tears.

The Serb world number one had just lifted the Norman Brookes trophy for a record seventh time, after completing a Wimbledon, Flushing Meadows and Melbourne Park hat-trick that would have seemed scarcely possible this time last year.

His 6-3, 6-2, 6-3 rout of Rafael Nadal saw him stretch his lead at the top of the world rankings, just a few months after he plummeted outside the top 20 for the first time in 12 years.

"I'm just trying to contemplate on the journey in the last 12 months," said an emotional Djokovic, pausing for breath to compose himself and not become tearful.

"To be standing now here in front of you today and managing to win this title and three out of four Slams, this is amazing. I am speechless."

After missing the 2017 US Open with a bothersome elbow and losing in the last 16 at the Australian Open in January 2018, Djokovic underwent surgery to fix the nagging problem.

His return was not smooth, his form tanked and when he lost in the quarter-finals at Roland Garros in 2018 he slumped to 22nd in the rankings and even briefly threatened to pull out of Wimbledon.

Now Djokovic heads to the next major, at Roland Garros,



aiming to hold all four Grand Slam titles concurrently for a second time in his career -- he first achieved it when winning the French Open in 2016 -- despite only managing to be competitive for the second half of 2018.

He opted to play on the grass after all and romped to a fourth Wimbledon crown, a 32nd Masters title in Cincinnati and then a third triumph at the US Open in September.

Despite a 22-match winning streak ending with defeat to young tyro Karen Khachanov in Paris, followed by a loss to another NextGen force, Alexander Zverev, at the ATP Finals in London, he finished the year on top of the world.



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 4 - FEBRUARY 10, 2019

Aries:

Ganesha says you are networking furiously. There are fun times. Friends drop in and you plan a holiday together. You also spend a lot and go looking for gurus. You may be away on pilgrimages, seeking to pacify a troubled soul. You look for answers to life's pressing questions. But there are no easy solutions. You just have to live through the maze and find your way out. It is the destiny of every human form.

Taurus:

There are maudlin moments and flashbacks to a life lived well, even if not appropriately at all times, which cannot happen anyway. This is a great time for creative folk. You excel, there are money and honey, rewards and awards, applause and accolades. There is also new love that takes you by storm. You miss a heartbeat and are in fantasy land. You are gripped by amour. This can be a tough time for youngsters, as they will heed no other call but the sweet stirrings of love.

Gemini:

You are recoiling from the mood of the previous period, like a boa constrictor slowly digesting an elk. You feel satiated. Work is not on your mind now. Of course, there are bills to be paid and the real world is calling. You will have to get out of your stupor soon. But tomorrow is another day, and it is still a long way off. I am reminded of an interesting quote from Steve Jobs: 'I think death is the most wonderful invention of life.'

Cancer:

'Be content with what you have; rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you,' said Lao-tzu. There are several expenses and money flows through your fingers without a care in the world. You party, shop, eat, drink, indulge. You buy beautiful things and surround yourself with them. There may be holidays, and you take off to exotic locales.

Leo:

You are moving at great speed. Expenses skyrocket. You make valuable investments. There are powerful ego drives and there could be minor altercations. But nothing will stand in your way as you bulldoze all opposition into submission. You are in overdrive, on a fantastic bull run. There could be a new home as you gather several luxuries in your kitty. Like the Bard said, take the tide at the flood.

Virgo:

'The best portion of a good man's life is his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love,' said William Wordsworth, the poet. You live and love large. You help others, and may join some NGO or group that helps the downtrodden. Your heart goes out to the less fortunate. You win brownie points and could be toasted and feted for your efforts. The great times continue.

Libra:

You sow your seed. There are innumerable affairs of the heart. Singles have a wild time and those in relationships bond magically. This is a fantasy time when it all works for you. Ganesha is happy and so am I. Keep cool, make the right choices and go for the kill. Let not ego cloud your judgement. Life is like snakes and ladders. Do not trip when you are nearing the summit of Everest!

Scorpio:

The grand times continue. They just never seem to end. The cards are in your favor and you have the Midas touch. You simply cannot do anything wrong. The period favors travels, meetings, conferences, interviews, trips, more brain power, contacts, communication, correspondence and contracts. Chess, crossword and other such games belong to you. You laugh loud, sleep well and explore every aspect of life.

Sagittarius:

You are charged, and want to be a person of consequence. This is not daydreaming. It will happen, says Ganesha. While the going is good, ensure that you do not trip. There can be minor scrapes, accidents, or health issues. But they will be minor, and recovery is immediate. Even those who have had long-standing issues will find remedies now. Use the powerful energies wisely. Ganesha watches over you.

Capricorn:

You power your way ahead; you are on a bull run, like the stock market when there is political stability. There is very little that can derail you. You make money, spend, buy expensive things, make excellent investments and your portfolio grows like a fattened calf. You are also sober, and use this windfall well. You are filled with drive, gusto, ambition and self-belief. You are also prepared to work hard and straight.

Aquarius:

This is a propitious tie for those who deal in the market, real estate and high finance. You make a killing. It depends on your personal chart too, but you could get so much money that you won't know where to put it! You are particularly good with numbers, and sign the fine print with great care. You are meticulous and careful to the point of absurdity. But all this pays off in the long run. No one can cheat you out of your windfall gains. You open the throttle and move in a million directions.

Pisces:

You are moving in several directions but there is a purpose in what you do. You are not a headless chicken. You put all your attention and energy into getting ahead and attaining your goals. There is powerful ego expression. You are more strong-willed than usual and do not suffer fools. You do not make compromises or even go halfway. Do not alienate others without cause. There is a lot of family bonding, fellowship and love. Ganesha is happy.

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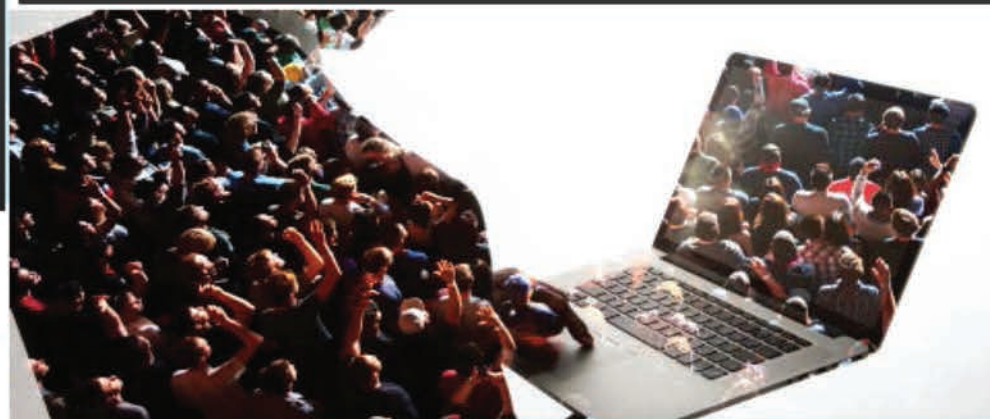
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