



Indian Students' Future in Jeopardy despite "Weight of India government behind them"



A website picture of students in a class

Photo / <http://universityoffarmington.edu/about.html>

fake University of Farmington, is uncertain as the US is

NEW YORK (TIP): The future of 129 Indian students, who were among those detained Jan. 30 by the U.S. immigration authorities in connection with enrollment at the fake University of Farmington, is uncertain as the US is

contd on Page 20

House Launches New Investigation into President Trump's Foreign Financial Interests and Russia Ties

WASHINGTON (TIP): The House intelligence committee will launch a broad new investigation looking at Russian interference in the 2016 election and President Donald Trump's foreign financial interests, Chairman Adam Schiff announced Wednesday, February 6, moving ahead with the aggressive oversight that Democrats have promised now that they are in the majority.

contd on Page 20

Trump Speaks of conciliation and conflict in the same breath in the SOTU Address

Reiterates resolve to build the wall

"If there is going to be peace and legislation," he said, "there cannot be war and investigation. It just doesn't work that way."

WASHINGTON, DC. (TIP): Speaking words of bipartisanship, U.S. President Donald Trump delivered a State of the Union (SOTU) address, February 5, that suggested he would continue to pursue policies that have most deeply divided the country.

Standing in front of Nancy Pelosi, the House Speaker, Mr. Trump delivered an hour-and-twenty-minute speech that exposed, in parts, a chasm between his words and the reality of his governance.

"Millions of our fellow citizens are watching us now, gathered in this great chamber, hoping that we will govern not as two parties but as one nation," he said, adding, "...we must reject the politics of revenge, resistance and retribution - and embrace the boundless potential of

contd on Page 20



President Donald Trump delivered the State of the Union address, with Vice President Mike Pence and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, at the Capitol in Washington, DC on February 5, 2019. Photo / Reuters

India-US Economic Ties Focus of Ambassador Harsh Vardhan Shringla's Visit to New York

NEW YORK (TIP): Ambassador of India to the United States Mr. Harsh Vardhan Shringla visited New York on his first official visit after taking up his new responsibilities last month. It may be recalled that Amb. Shringla assumed charge of Ambassador on January 9, 2019 and on January 11 he presented credentials to Mr. Donald Trump, President of the United States. During his day-long visit Amb. Shringla had a hectic schedule interacting with

contd on Page 5

Ambassador Harsh Vardhan Shringla speaking at the Indian Consulate, New York Feb 6. Consul General Sandeep Chakravorty is seen seated left.



Indian-American engineer appointed president of Texas Lyceum

DALLAS (TIP): Indian-American engineer Sanjay Ramabhadran has been appointed as the president of Texas Lyceum, a nonprofit organization focused

on cultivating the next generation of Texas leaders, becoming the first immigrant to hold the post.

Ramabhadran was sworn in as the Texas Lyceum's 2019 President on the floor of the Texas House of Representatives at the Texas Capitol in Austin.

Sanjay is the first immigrant and Indian American president of Texas Lyceum. The organization cultivates next-generation leader and educates them on issues critical to the future of Texas and inspires them to action and stewardship of Texas values.

"In 2019, the Texas Lyceum enters its 40th year of service to Texas. We will start off this month with our investiture of 26 outstanding new Lyceum Directors and our dynamic public conference on workforce preparedness, Sanjay said.

"I am honored to lead this unique organization, which has a rich history of bringing together a diverse group of

engaged young Texas leaders to examine our state's public policy challenges and respectfully debate possible solutions to these challenges," he said.

Sanjay, a registered engineer, originally from Southern India and a graduate of BITS Pilani and later Texas A&M university, serves on the Houston METRO board of directors and is a founding Principal at VERSA Infrastructure, an engineering consulting firm specializing in program and construction management. In addition to serving on the board of Houston METRO, some of Ram's additional civic engagement includes service as Chairman of Leadership Houston, on the Houston Mayor's Council on International Trade and Development, as President of the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce, and on Rice University's Kinder Institute's Connecting Communities Initiative.

Read full story on www.theindianpanorama.news



"I am honored to lead this unique organization": Ramabhadran

NEW YORK- DALLAS

MARKETING STAFF REQUIRED

We are looking for marketing persons for The Indian Panorama print editions and the web portal at a couple of locations which include Long Island, Queens, Manhattan and Buffalo in New York, Jersey City and Edison in New Jersey, Stamford in Connecticut, Atlanta in Georgia, Houston and Dallas in Texas, and Chicago in Illinois.

Persons with experience in newspaper reporting will be preferred.

The individual must be a person with experience in marketing and public relations, confident, independent and able to handle marketing on his/her own with minimum support from the management.

Compensation will be based on experience with up to 40% revenue created by the individual.

Anyone who would like to work with us part time and on the basis of revenue sharing may email to salujaindra@gmail.com or contact at 646-247-9458.



Shree Ganeshaya Namah

Bejan Daruwalla is world's most famous astrologer today. He appears regularly on world wide TV shows. Bejan who has been a professor in English, has authored a number of books on astrology. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on March 29, 2012, lunched one of Bejan's books, '2012- End of the World? Bejan contributes to a number of journals and newspapers in many parts of the world which include Berkley Communications (London) Times of India (Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai) and The Indian Panorama (New York and Texas). Bejan's predictions have mostly been correct and people the world over rely on his predictions.



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

WEEKLY HOROSCOPE FEBRUARY 11 - FEBRUARY 17, 2019

Aries:

Ganesha says with the special insights of last period, you will examine all your relationships almost under a microscope. You will also seek to put them into perspective. You redefine your own role to your parents, your children, your spouse or lover or mate. In all, you will seek to fulfil the expectations they have of you. These expectations will not be voiced by them but perceived by you, your psyche, yourself.

Taurus:

The pressure of your work never really goes away from you. In addition you will feel the pressure, pulls, demands. It is still a time for success and achievements, though not as spectacular as the first half of the period. That is the way it was for you past period, too. And like last material / worldly success and the second half, as spiritual and emotional growth. Family, money issues, love and passion, travel and spirituality - many things are happening to you simultaneously.

Gemini:

The tensions, worries, fears and anxieties of the past period will fade away now. Ease and comfort in living, peace and calm of mind are experienced. Work / business / career / will find you greatly successful. In fact, you have been successful right through, but the satisfaction quotient will be much higher now. It is not just experienced professionally. You get the same aura of success in family life, in love, in friendship.

Cancer:

Fun, family, entertaining and finance - once again, they are all there but on a much larger scale now. Therefore, heavier expenses are bound to happen, too. Finances, too, will not mean family or domestic budgeting alone. There could be international transactions and transfers of funds, joint - finances, deals, abroad, also collaborations, mergers, tie-ups.

Leo:

You're in a mood to solve problems, extend help, support commitment. These problems could be global or world - related, or closer to home. Your attitude will be equally sincere and caring towards both. Also while dealing with financial matters like generating capital, dealing with loans, trusts, endowments, you take equally good care of your dependents, children, subordinates, servants.

Virgo:

If Ganesha gave you no spare time, He must be fair and give you the energy, will-power, strength to cope. And that's just what you experience now. Love and money angles will be particularly energized. Health will be better. You'll also take better care of yourself physically. You want to be fighting fit, in appearance and turnout too.

Libra:

Realizing that you cannot live in splendid isolation, as you were tempted to do in the previous period, you now brush up communication skills, and public relations. New places will attract you. New friends enthuse and excite you. There is a glorious exchange of ideas, opinions, hopes and plans for the future. Your enthusiasm, energy, joi de vivre all register without gains!

Scorpio:

You got so much out of social interaction and friendship that you will now raise it to the level of a fine art! This is no exaggeration. New friends and old, and even your rivals, competitors, enemies - you interact with them all. Only the ways you will vary! Your performance at interviews, meetings, presentations, debates will be dazzling.

Sagittarius:

People and people and people. That's how important they will be for you. As I said last period, even rivals and competitors. You are now confident, full of energy, daring, enterprise, ready to take on all-comers. You are loving, warm, caring - and busy. You will be popular, successful, very much in demand at social gatherings, functions, ceremonies.

Capricorn:

Ganesha gives you many rewards - success, power, recognition and prestige, perks and benefits. These are the tangibles. In addition, His gifts are - greater intuition and perceptiveness, therefore much more kindness, tolerance, warmth, sincere caring and affection. Your spiritual and psychological gains are truly spectacular and much more valuable.

Aquarius:

You will not seek to exhibit or show off your personal values, idealism, even convictions. Perhaps you are afraid it will all get dissipated or frittered away. Perhaps it is too intensely personal to be displayed. However, you will be concerned about how others see you, about the image you project. You will have the desire and the confidence to try to excel in new fields; new challenges will be faced, fresh skills acquired.

Pisces:

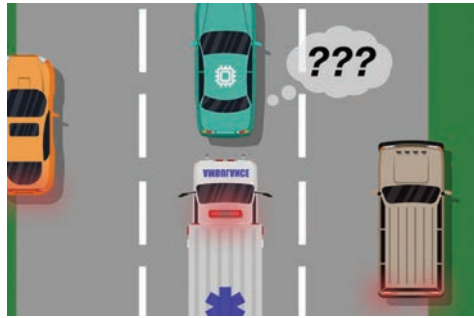
Perhaps you feel that where you're happiest, where things go best for you in terms of satisfaction is at home. Whatever the reason, the end of this period finds you looking at domestic life as your special world. You will seek to address disputes, contentions regarding family / joint property; perhaps there could be family funds or even a divorce to be negotiated. What you realize now is that that is where you're needed the most.

Indian American Researchers Develop Model for Safer Self-Driving Cars

BOSTON (TIP): A group of Indian American researchers from MIT and Microsoft developed a novel model that identifies instances in which autonomous systems have "learned" from training examples that don't match what's actually happening in the real world. Engineers could use this model to improve the safety of artificial intelligence systems, such as driverless vehicles and autonomous robots.

The first author is Ramya Ramakrishnan, a graduate student in the Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory. Co-authors on both papers are: Julie Shah, an associate professor in the Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics and head of the CSAIL's Interactive Robotics Group; and Ece Kamar, Debadepta Dey, and Eric Horvitz, all from Microsoft Research. Besmira Nushi is an additional co-author on the upcoming paper.

In a pair of papers - presented at last year's Autonomous Agents and Multiagent Systems conference and the upcoming Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence conference - the researchers describe a model that uses human input to uncover these



Model identifies instances when autonomous systems have learned from examples that may cause dangerous errors in the real world

training "blind spots."

The AI systems powering driverless cars, for example, are trained extensively in virtual simulations to prepare the vehicle for nearly every event on the road. But sometimes the car makes an unexpected error in the real world because an event occurs that should, but doesn't, alter the car's behaviour.

As with traditional approaches, the researchers put an AI system through simulation training. But then, a human

closely monitors the system's actions as it acts in the real world, providing feedback when the system made, or was about to make, any mistakes. The researchers then combine the training data with the human feedback data and use machine-learning techniques to produce a model that pinpoints situations where the system most likely needs more information about how to act correctly.

"The model helps autonomous systems better know what they don't know," says first author Ramya Ramakrishnan. "Many times, when these systems are deployed, their trained simulations don't match the real-world setting [and] they could make mistakes, such as getting into accidents. The idea is to use humans to bridge that gap between simulation and the real world, in a safe way, so we can reduce some of those errors."

The researchers validated their method using video games, with a simulated human correcting the learned path of an on-screen character. But the next step is to incorporate the model with traditional training and testing approaches for autonomous cars and robots with human feedback.

(Source: MIT News Office)

Indian American Author Wins Asian American Literature Award



Sharmila Sen is executive editor-at-large at Harvard University Press

NEW YORK (TIP): Indian American author Sharmila Sen has won a 2019 Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature for her book *Not Quite Not White: Losing and Finding Race in America* in Adult Non-Fiction category.

The Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA), an affiliate of the American Library Association, on Jan 28 announced the winners of the 2019 Asian/Pacific American Awards for Literature (APAAL). The awards promote Asian/Pacific American culture and heritage and are awarded to titles published from October 2017 to September 2018 based on their literary and artistic merit.

At once a deeply personal memoir and a primer on race in America from the perspective of an Indian immigrant, Sen's *Not Quite Not White* offers a richly literary examination of the various systems of class, race, religion, and culture that defined who she is, drawing on her familial and educational backgrounds in Hindu mythology, Indian politics, British and American literature, Bollywood, American television, and more. Even as she makes her way into narratives of success as whiteness in America, Sen challenges this yearning for whiteness and searches instead for a messy but fuller embrace of all races in America.

Sharmila Sen grew up in Calcutta, India, and immigrated to the United States when she was twelve. She was educated in the public schools of Cambridge, Mass., received her A.B. from Harvard and her Ph.D. from Yale in English literature. As an assistant professor at Harvard she taught courses on literatures from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean for seven years. Currently, she is executive editor-at-large at Harvard University Press. Sharmila has lived and worked in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. She has lectured around the world on postcolonial literature and culture and published essays on racism and immigration.

Indian American Charged with Visa and Naturalization Fraud

NEWARK, NJ(TIP): An Indian origin man, resident of Middlesex County, New Jersey, was arrested Feb 5 morning for allegedly submitting 11 fraudulent H-1B visa applications as well as fraudulently procuring his own citizenship, U.S. Attorney Craig Carpenito announced. Neeraj Sharma, 43, of Piscataway, New Jersey, is charged in complaint with one count of visa fraud and one count of naturalization fraud. (Read full story on www.theindianpanorama.news)

Indian-Origin Billionaire Creates Sensation for Spending Rs. 50 Crore to Buy Rolls-Royce Cars

LONDON (TIP): London-based entrepreneur of Indian origin Reuben Singh has emerged as an Internet sensation for buying six more Rolls Royce cars in ruby, sapphire and emerald colours that cost him just Rs 50 crore. He is calling his new additions his very own 'Jewel Collection' which includes the most expensive Rolls Royce sedan-Phantom and the only SUV produced by British luxury car maker - Cullinan. And the Rolls Royce CEO Torsten Muller-Otvos himself personally delivered those cars at Mr Singh's doorstep, according to media reports.

"The Jewels Collection. Rubies, Sapphires & Emeralds. It's ok to be a little obsessed with jewellery as jewellery is like ice cream "there is always a little room for more", he wrote on his social media account.

The Sikh entrepreneur is the chief executive of contact centre company alldayPA and private equity firm Isher Capital. Famously known as the Bill Gates of Britain, Mr Singh is also the proud owner of a



The car enthusiast now owns 20 Rolls Royce in his garage

Bugatti Veyron, Porche 918 Spyder, Pagani Huayara, and Lamborghini Huracan alongside the only one in the world Ferrari

F12 Berlinetta limited edition. The car enthusiast now owns 20 Rolls Royce in his garage.

Indian National Pleads Guilty in Human Smuggling Conspiracy

NEW YORK (TIP): An Indian national pleaded guilty last month for his role in a complex, transnational conspiracy to smuggle aliens from India to the United States for profit, which claimed at least one life and endangered many others. Yadvinder Singh Bhamba, 60, pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy and 15 counts of smuggling aliens to the United States for profit before U.S. Magistrate Judge Sivia Carreño-Coll of the District of Puerto Rico.

According to admissions in Bhamba's plea agreement, since 2013, Bhamba had a leadership role in a human smuggling conspiracy operating out of the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Puerto Rico, India and elsewhere. As part of the conspiracy, Bhamba personally assisted around 400 aliens to unlawfully enter the United States between 2013 and 2015. He also oversaw and directed co-conspirators operating out of the Caribbean.

Bhamba and other members of the conspiracy made flight arrangements for aliens to travel from India through other countries - including Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Iran, Panama, Venezuela, Belize, and Haiti - to the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic was used as a staging area, where aliens were housed before being transported to the United States. The organization brought groups of aliens from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico or Florida by boat.

(Read full story on www.theindianpanorama.news)

Indian Origin Man Jailed for Two-and-a-Half Years in UK for Drug Smuggling

LONDON (TIP): An Indian-origin man has been sentenced to two-and-a-half-years in jail for his part in an illegal drug trafficking network in the UK, reports The Eastern Eye. According to reports, Bhavin Patel, 27, was sentenced at Harrow Crown Court in London on Jan 31 along with an accomplice, 25-year-old Lawrence Amoah, who was jailed for five years and seven months after the duo pleaded guilty to the offence of supplying Class 'A' drugs.

The case dates back to October last year, when Scotland Yard officers on patrol came across a black BMW X5 parked up on Cambridge Road in Harrow, north London.

Officers approached the car and noticed Patel, who was sitting in the driver's seat, and Amoah, in the passenger's seat, were pretending to be asleep.

(Read full story on www.theindianpanorama.news)

AAPI to Organize 9-City Jai Ho Musical Dhamaka in May 2019

Bollywood Singer Sukhwinder Singh and Amruta Fadnavis will rock

CHICAGO (TIP): After mesmerizing musical lovers all across the world with his enchanting voice, Sukhwinder Singh, a top Bollywood singer, accompanied by the first lady of Maharashtra, Ms. Amruta Fadnavis, is now on AAPI's Nine-City Jai Ho Musical Dhamaka this spring, performing in Nine Cities around the United States.

Organized by the American Association of Physicians of Indian origin (AAPI), the spectacular musical program combined with educational and networking opportunities for AAPI members, supporters and sponsors, is being organized with the objective of bringing CME and non-CME sponsored medical lectures, exhibits, Gala Dinner, community outreach talks and lively musical nite in each of the 9 cities across the country.

"Following the past successes of multi-city musical tours organized by AAPI, I am inspired by the concept and how such events have helped in strengthening the relationship between the AAPI Chapters and national office, in addition to help raise funds for the many noble programs for AAPI and the local Chapters" says Dr. Naresh Parikh, President of AAPI.

Dr. Hemant Dhingra, Entertainment Chair of AAPI provided a detailed description of the planned 9-City Tour by popular Bollywood star, Sukhwinder, which is a way to raise funds for AAPI and its many local Chapters. Dr. Dhingra, who has close relationship with the Entertainment Industry, worked with Sukhwinder Singh and team to put together the mega event.

The 9-city musical and educational tour is being launched on Friday, May 10 Columbus, Ohio and will be followed by Atlanta on May 11th and in Washington DC on May 12th. Sukhwinder and his team will perform in Charlotte, NC on May 17th, in New Jersey on May 18th and in Dallas, TX on May 19th. In the final weekend, the popular artist will begin his tour in Milwaukee, WI on May 24th, in San Jose, CA on May 25th and the grand finale will be in Hollywood City, Los Angeles on May 26th.

"A major objective of this program is to bring together various local Chapters, says Dr. Parikh. "National coordinators of the program, Drs. Narendra Kumar, Hemant Dhingra, Raj Bhayani, Amit Chkrabarty, Anjana Samadder, and Gautam Samadder, as well as the entire AAPI team and leadership enthusiastically received this idea and the net result of our collaboration and dialogue is the 9-city grand mega concert."

Senior leadership and several past Presidents and leaders of AAPI have extended their whole-hearted support in organizing this mega event across the nation, Dr. Parikh says. "I am sincerely grateful to Dr. Narendra Kumar, Dr. Sanku Rao, Dr. Vinod Shah, Dr. Ravi Jahagirdar, Dr. Ajay Lodha, Dr. Jayesh Shah, Dr. Vijay Koli, Mr. Anwar Feroz Siddiqi and all past Presidents of AAPI for their senior advisory role in making this mega event a grand success."

Anwar Feroz Siddiqi, Chief Strategy Adviser



:Bollywood Singer Sukhwinder Singh and Amruta Fadnavis will rock 9 Cities in the US in May 2019

says, "We are now poised to take our commitment to newer heights, the 9 City Musical Tour by world renowned Bollywood artist Sukhwinder accompanied by an icon of women leadership, the first lady of Maharashtra, Ms. Amruta Fadnavis, a very well know personality, a great singer and amazing community leader that continues to pursue her career with her spouse being in the most powerful office in Maharashtra, a true demonstration of great leadership." Coupled with three honorable causes addressing cardiovascular disease, lymphoma and leukemia, this is truly a worthy and honorable effort that enhances AAPI's commitment to major health issues and its strong support to eradicate them. "Entertainment was only just one component of the entire program," Dr. Parikh adds. "The idea is to put together mini seminars, networking and strengthening the relationship between members and the national office. "Due to popular demand from several physicians on the need for enhancing scientific component at AAPI meetings and allowing greater number of members to participate, AAPI is now organizing the 13-city programs to make it easy for physicians to participate locally avoiding extensive travel and time away from practice," he explains.

"Many of our industry partners liked this concept where they could get prime time with a few hundred doctors in each location for product promotion/theater, non-CME lectures, exhibits, booths," Dr. Narendra Kumar, national coordinator of the event, says. "These multi-city mini-seminars are a novel concept for education and recreation that will raise funds for the local chapters of AAPI, the national AAPI and the AAPI Charitable Foundation."

Describing the process leading to the Tour, Dr. Suresh Reddy, President-Elect of AAPI, recalls, "Realizing that it takes a lot of coordination and tremendous effort, we were successful in involving dozens of AAPI office-bearers of various Chapters and Executive Committee members. Each of them is committed to work hard, coordinate with the local leadership, while committing to have the funds raised would be given to AAPI, the local Chapters, and the many philanthropic endeavors organized by AAPI and its

Charitable Foundation."

AAPI has established itself as the most successful and premiere ethnic medical organization in the United States. AAPI-Charitable Foundation, the crest jewel of AAPI, is committed to serve the poorest of the poor in remote areas of India and USA.

Since 1992, the Foundation has been providing an infrastructure support system for needy patients in India with two main goals: enabling AAPI members to commit their time and resources to support the clinics for the indigent; and to monitor effectively the clinics' progress and be accountable for the overall success of the project.

The Seminars, CMEs, and workshops will be led by accomplished faculty of leading Physicians, Industry Leaders, Cardiologists, Cardiovascular Surgeons and Psychiatrists. Each of the nine medical educational programs is expected to have an audience of 250-400 Physicians, which will be followed by an annual gala event and entertainment with an expected 2,500+ audience at each location.

Sukhwinder Singh, an internationally recognized Bollywood playback artist, best known for singing "Chaiyya," for which he won the Best Male Playback Award at the 1999 Filmfare Awards, in association with composer A.R. Rahman has resulted in numerous hit songs. The list includes Chaiyya from Dil Se, Ramta Jogi, Ni Main Samajh Gayee, Taal Se Taal Mila and Nahin Samne from Taal, Ruth Aa Gayee Re, Raat Ki Daldal Hain and Yeh Jo Zindagi Hain from Earth, Jaane Tu Mera Kya Hai from Jaane Tu... Ya Jaane Na, Aayo Re Sakhi, Bhangari Morori and Piya Ho from Water, Chinnamma Chilakkamma from Meenaxi, Thok De Killi from Raavan and the most popular Jai Ho from Slumdog Millionaire.

The song "Jai Ho", sung by Singh, composed by A.R. Rahman and written by Gulzar; was nominated as a Critics' Choice Award for Best Song and won an Oscar Academy Award for Best Original Song. It also won the Grammy Award for Best Song Written for a Motion Picture, Television or Other Visual Media in 2010.

Proceeds from the 9-city tour will support some of the noble initiatives of AAPI, says, Dr. Parikh. "We are requesting all AAPI members,

all doctors of Indian origin, all south Asians to rally and support this amazing opportunity of the 9-city musical tour to promote awareness and raise funds for supporting programs to address the rapidly growing problem of cardiovascular diseases in south Asians and minorities living in the United States and Lymphoma & Leukemia in India.'

Ms. Amruta Fadnavis was born, as Amruta Ranade on 9 April 1979 in Nagpur, Maharashtra, to Dr. Sharad Ranade, an Ophthalmologist and Dr. Charulata Ranade, a Gynaecologist. She grew up in a household where education and independence for women was essential. She initially studied at St. Joseph Convent School, Nagpur. She graduated from G.S. College of Commerce and Economics. Later she pursued MBA in finance and studied taxation laws from Symbiosis Law School, Pune. Along with studies she also participated in sports and an excellent sports person. She was a state level under 16 tennis player.

Dr. Parikh promises to "make this event both transparent and successful, and we hope it becomes an annual event. Many of our industry partners have also shown great interest in this concept, where they can receive prime time with a few hundred doctors for product promotion, theater, non-CME lectures, exhibits and booths. Because of this, we hope to have a significant number of national sponsors for this program."

This extensive Musical/Educational Tour program put together by Dr. Parikh and his Team is a step towards reaching the message of AAPI across the globe and help AAPI realize its noble mission. "I am calling on all AAPI members, all doctors of Indian origin, all South Asians to rally and support an amazing opportunity of the 9-city musical tour to promote awareness and raise funds for supporting essential programs to address the rapidly growing problem of cardiovascular diseases in South Asians and minorities living in the United States and Lymphoma & Leukemia in India." For more details on the Musical Tour and for sponsorship opportunities, please visit: <http://www.aapiusa.org/> <https://www.aapievents.com/>

(Press Release issued by Ajay Ghosh)



Raja Krishnamoorthi, among those who have written the letter

Lawmakers call for humane treatment of Indian detainees

WASHINGTON (TIP): A group of Congressmen, including Indian American Raja Krishnamoorthi, have written to the U.S. authorities, asking that the Indian students arrested in the University of Farmington sting operation be "treated properly".

The letter, sent to the heads of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), has three other

signatories - Thomas R. Suozzi, Brenda Lawrence and Rob Woodall. "The Indian-American community and Indian Consulate have expressed concerns regarding the treatment of these detained foreign nationals," they write. "We urge DHS and ICE to ensure the detained students are treated properly and afforded all rights provided to them under the law, including access to an attorney and release on bond, if they are eligible," the letter says.

The Members of Congress highlight the numbers on Indian students in the U.S. - 17.3% of all international students or over 1,86,000 - and their role

in people-to-people exchanges. "In the spirit of continuing cooperation on educational exchange programs, which benefit both countries economically and culturally, we ask that you ensure the students involved in this case are treated fairly, humanely, and in accordance with due process," the letter says.

The lawmakers have requested that "full details and regular updates" be shared with Indian officials and that the DHS and ICE facilitate consular access to the detainees. Their own offices have also requested an update.

India-US Economic Ties Focus of Ambassador Harsh Vardhan Shringla's Visit to New York

CONTD FROM PAGE 1

a cross section of business leaders, professionals and think tank community. He participated in a Forum with business leaders including Mr. Ajay Banga, CEO, Mastercard; Mr. Purna Saggurti, Chairman of Global Commercial & Investment Banking, Bank of America Merrill Lynch; Mr. Charles R. Kaye, Co-Chief Executive Officer, Warburg Pincus; Darlene J. Rosenkoetter, Global Head, Government Affairs and Public Policy, S&P Global; Mr. Nik Deogun, CEO of the Americas and U.S. Senior Partner, Brunswick Group; Mr. Nalin Miglani, Executive Vice President & Chief Human Resources Officer, Exl Service Holdings; Mr. Harit Talwar, Head of Digital Finance, Goldman Sachs Bank USA; Mr. Mike Narula, Founder, President and CEO of Reliance Communications LLC and Mr. Chintu Patel, Co-Chairman, Amneal Pharmaceuticals.

In his interactions with the business leaders Ambassador Shringla spoke about growth in bilateral trade between India and the U.S. He also noted that new items including oil, gas and agricultural products had been added to the trade basket. He noted with satisfaction that India-US defense partnership is moving in the right direction. He invited business leaders to fully utilize the investment opportunities available in India.

President and CEO of US India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF), Dr. Mukesh Aghi called on the Ambassador and briefed him about the activities of USISPF. Ambassador Shringla also met Mr. Stephen Schwarzman, Chairman of Blackstone, whose firm has significant investments in India. During his visit to the NYC Tech Hub of MasterCard, Ambassador Shringla was briefed about initiatives of MasterCard to promote financial inclusion.

With Mr. Fareed Zakaria, noted journalist and author, Amb. Shringla exchanged views on global affairs, recent developments in India and India-US ties. He also met Richard Haass, President of Council on Foreign Relations.

Ambassador Frank Wisner, former Ambassador of the US to India, hosted Ambassador Shringla for an interaction with members of the New York business and investment community. At this interaction,



Ambassador Harsh V Shringla (4th from left) at a meeting with CEOs of Mastercard, Bank of America, Squire Patton Boggs, Warburg Pincus, S&P Global, Brunswick Group, HARMAN, EXL Service, Goldman Sachs, Reliance Communications, Amneal Pharmaceuticals



EROS International CFO and President, North America Prem Parameswaran said it was stimulating to be at the Indian Professionals and Investors (PIN) meet. Seen in the picture, from L to R: Prem Parameswaran, Ambassador Shringla, and Consul General Sandeep Chakravorty

Ambassador Shringla spoke about the strong fundamentals of Indian economy and large canvas of mutuality of interests, both economic and geo-political, between India and the U.S.

At Consulate General of India, New York, Ambassador Shringla met with members of the Indian Professionals and Investors Network (iPIN). He commended the dynamism shown by the Indian Business community in the U.S. and called them a

strong pillar of India-US bilateral relationship. He also interacted with representatives of State Bank of India, Bank of Baroda, Air India and other Indian companies.

EROS International CFO and President North America Prem Parameswaran Tweeted: "was stimulating to meet & interact with members of #iPin (INDIAN Professionals & Investors Network)."

Harris Joins Colleagues to Reintroduce Bill to Prevent Distorting Census Count with Citizenship Question



Sen Kamala Harris has joined colleagues for dropping citizenship question in the Census

WASHINGTON (TIP): On Jan 29, Indian American Senator Kamala Harris joined her colleagues to reintroduce Every Person Counts Act, legislation that prohibits the Secretary of Commerce from including any question regarding one's citizenship or immigration status on the U.S. census. The act also amends Title 13 of the United States Code, clarifying that each decennial census shall tabulate the total number of persons in each state.

On January 15th, a U.S. District Judge ordered the administration to abort its plans to add a citizenship question to the 2020 Census. However, with a June deadline to print the final census questionnaire, the administration is now pressuring the Supreme Court to review this case, in hopes of still including a question about citizenship on next year's census survey.

"The United States begins each decade with a census to ensure that every single person-without exception-is accounted for," said Harris. "This Administration's proposed citizenship question is nothing more than an attempt to intimidate immigrant communities, distorting the count and shifting essential health, public safety, and infrastructure resources away from the cities and states with significant immigrant populations. It also would undermine proportional representation in Congress. This legislation would protect the integrity of the Census and ensure that it is conducted in a fair and inclusive manner."

The bill is also co-sponsored by Sens. Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Chuck Schumer (D-NY), Michael Bennet (D-Colo.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-Nev.), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), Patty Murray (D-Wash.), Jack Reed (D-R.I.), Tina Smith (D-Minn.) Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.).

TAX SEASON SCAMS: IRS WARNS AGAINST 'GHOST' TAX RETURN PREPARERS

WASHINGTON(TIP): Towards the end of the second full week of the 2019 tax filing season, on February 7, the Internal Revenue Service warned taxpayers to avoid unethical tax return preparers, known as ghost preparers.

By law, anyone who is paid to prepare or assist in preparing federal tax returns must have a valid 2019 Preparer Tax Identification Number, or PTIN. Paid preparers must sign the return and include their PTIN.

But 'ghost' preparers do not sign the return. Instead, they print the return and tell the taxpayer to sign and mail it to the IRS. Or, for e-filed returns, they prepare but refuse to digitally sign it as the paid preparer.

According to the IRS, similar to other tax preparation schemes, dishonest and unscrupulous ghost tax return preparers look

to make a fast buck by promising a big refund or charging fees based on a percentage of the refund. These scammers hurt honest taxpayers who are simply trying to do the right thing and file a legitimate tax return.

Ghost tax return preparers may also:

Require payment in cash only and not provide a receipt.

Invent income to erroneously qualify their clients for tax credits or claim fake deductions to boost their refunds.

Direct refunds into their own bank account rather than the taxpayer's account.

The IRS urges taxpayers to review their tax return carefully before signing and ask questions if something is not clear. And for any direct deposit refund, taxpayers should

make sure both the routing and bank account number on the completed tax return are correct.

The IRS offers tips to help taxpayers choose a tax return preparer wisely. The Choosing a Tax Professional page has information about tax preparer credentials and qualifications. The IRS Directory of Federal Tax Return Preparers with Credentials and Select Qualifications can help identify many preparers by type of credential or qualification.

Taxpayers can report abusive tax preparers to the IRS. Use Form 14157, Complaint: Tax Return Preparer. If a taxpayer suspects a tax preparer filed or changed their tax return without their consent, they should file Form 14157-A, Tax Return Preparer Fraud or Misconduct Affidavit.

Govt set to penalise top cops seen at Didi sit-in



NEW DELHI (TIP): The Centre is likely to take punitive action against five senior police officers of West Bengal, including DGP Virendra Kumar, for taking part in the dharna of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. This may include stripping them of meritorious awards and removal from seniority list. A similar action is likely against Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar, who will now be quizzed by the CBI on February 9 at Shillong in connection with the Saradha case, for sitting at the CM's dharna.

The four other officers under the radar are ADG-Security Vineet Kumar Goyal, ADG-Law and Order Anuj Sharma, Commissioner of Police (Bidhan Nagar) Gyanwant Singh and Additional Commissioner of Kolkata Police Supratim Sarkar. Source: *The Tribune*

In UP, Rs 600 cr for stray cattle, gaushalas

LUCKNOW (TIP): The Yogi Adityanath government will spend over Rs 600 crore on cattle welfare and construction and maintenance of gaushalas in 2019-20. The announcement comes amid reports of farmers in several districts locking up stray cattle in schools and public health centres after suffering damage to their crops.

An amount of Rs 247.60 crore has been proposed for maintenance and construction of gaushalas in rural areas, state Finance Minister Rajesh Agarwal said in his Budget speech. For "Kanha Gaushala" and cattle shelter scheme in urban areas, Rs 200 crore has been earmarked. A special cess has been imposed on liquor sales in the state. Of the total cess collected, around Rs 165 crore will be used on maintenance of stray cattle. A provision of Rs 64 crore has been made to set up 10,000 units under the Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay Small Dairy Scheme. An amount of Rs 56 crore has been set aside for establishment of a new dairy in Mathura.

'India, Bangla relations on upward trajectory'

NEW DELHI (TIP): Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday met visiting Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Minister A.K. Abdul Momen and said that relations between the two neighbouring countries have been on an upward trajectory and New Delhi will work to build on this momentum.

Modi congratulated Momen on his appointment as Foreign Minister and appreciated his gesture of selecting India as the destination for his first international visit. According to an official statement, Momen briefed Modi on recent developments in the bilateral relationship.

"The Prime Minister said that India-Bangladesh relations have been on an upward trajectory in the last few years. He reaffirmed India's commitment to work with Bangladesh to build on this momentum during the new term in office of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina," it said.

Modi tears into Cong, warns against 'adulterated' govt

Speaking on Feb 7 in what could be his last speech in the 16th Lok Sabha, the PM accused the Congress of bullying the judiciary, compromising with the national interest and humiliating the army

NEW DELHI (TIP): Sharply drawing the battlelines for the Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi slammed the Congress party, framing his government's 55 months against its 55 years in power, and warned against a "mahamilavat" (highly adulterated) government if his party wasn't voted back.

Speaking Thursday in what could be his last speech in the 16th Lok Sabha, Modi accused the Congress of bullying the judiciary, compromising with the national interest and humiliating the Army.

He also presented a report card of his government trying to rebut the criticism on his government on job creation and measures for farmers. Replying to the debate on the motion of thanks to President's address in Lok Sabha, the Prime Minister turned to the BC, AD nomenclature to take a swipe at the Congress and the Gandhi family: "BC stands for Before Congress, AD for After Dynasty."

"I am making a serious charge against the Congress," he said in his 100-minute-long speech. "Congress party does not want the Indian Air Force to be strong. Why do you want the Rafale deal to be cancelled? Who is going to benefit out of it? For which company you are playing this? You played this kind of game with the Army? Why?," he said.

Congress president Rahul Gandhi his target, he went on: "History is witness to the (fact) that Congress and its power hungry allies have never done anything without middlemen? I used to wonder how can he (Rahul Gandhi) say lies with such confidence over Rafale? When I started looking into the details, I realised that in the last 55 years, in the saga of power-hungry rule, no deal was done without middlemen."

To the charge that he and his Government are undermining institutions, Modi said: "Ulta chor chowkidaar ko dante hain". He said: "Congress imposed Emergency but they say Modi is destroying institutions. Congress insults Army, calls the Army chief a 'goonda'



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the Lok Sabha during the Budget Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Feb 7, 2019.

but they say Modi is destroying institutions. It creates stories that Army is doing a coup but Modi is destroying institutions," he said.

The Prime Minister said the Opposition had apprehensions over EVMs because they were "scared." The Congress, he said, questioned the Election Commission and Electronic Voting Machines but is accusing him of destroying institutions. "Congress bullies the judiciary but they say Modi is destroying institutions. Congress calls Planning Commission a bunch of jokers... but Modi is destroying institutions," Modi said.

He also said Indira Gandhi dismissed elected governments "over 50 times", charged Congress with making defence deals with "Chachas and Mamas", and with having "benami properties" abroad, an apparent reference to the ED's allegations against Robert Vadra.

Taking potshots at the Opposition's attempts to cobble up a Mahagathbandan

against BJP, Modi said the voters, who had seen 30 years of coalition governments, would see the danger of a multi-party government. "In 2014, for the first time in 30 years, the people gave India its first full majority government. Now the Mahamilawat is about to come."

As the Opposition benches started protesting, Modi warned: The public knows what happens when there is a milawat ki sarkar (adulterated government)". Then, gesturing to the Treasury benches, he said, "Don't worry, the Grand Adulteration people won't come here... The voters understand how a maha milawat government can be harmful for the country... When the government has majority, the performance is undoubtedly different," he said. Then he added specifically, "The voters do not want a Mahamilawat government of those who assembled in Kolkata," referring to the coming together of 23 parties in Kolkata.

MONETARY POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING

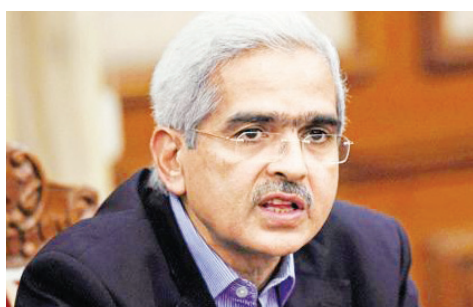
RBI governor, his deputy differ on rate cut decision

While Shaktikanta Das wanted a 25 bps cut, Viral Acharya opted for status quo

NEW DELHI (TIP): Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das and Deputy Governor Viral Acharya differed on the issue of cutting Repo rate in the bi-monthly monetary policy statement for 2018-19, the first time that the central bank head and his deputy in-charge of monetary policy, are on either side of a decision on policy rates since the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) was formed.

While Governor Das wanted a 25 basis points reduction, Acharya, who heads the Monetary Policy Department of the RBI, opted for status quo. The rate cut was decided in a 4:2 majority decision by the RBI's MPC, which finalises the policy rates and the inflation targets.

Of the six members in the MPC, three members are from the RBI and the remaining three are external members. Apart from Das and Acharya, the third member from the RBI is Michael D Patra who also sought a cut in Repo rate. Ravindra H Dholakia and Pami Dua also sought a reduction in Repo rate while Chetan Ghate sided with Acharya for status quo on rates. A clear picture on which issues Acharya differed from Governor and other MPC



Shaktikanta Das



Viral Acharya

members will be known only when the RBI releases the minutes of the MPC meeting later.

"While the MPC was unanimous in voting for the shift in monetary policy stance, there was divergence in the voting pattern. A 4-2 voting outcome is the first in the history of RBI's MPC. The emerging difference in opinion is likely to be evaluated closely by market participants to assess future policy cues," said Shubhada Rao, chief economist and Vivek Kumar, senior economist, Yes

Bank. "If one more member of the MPC had opposed a rate cut, there would have been a tie. In such a scenario, the Governor can exercise his casting vote and the rate cut would have been implemented," said a banking source.

On Thursday, while Das did most of the talking at the press conference to unveil the policy statement, Acharya was asked by the Governor to explain the errors in inflation calculation.

Don't expect a 'miracle' from Priyanka in 2 months: Rahul

NEW DELHI (TIP): In her first official meeting, the Congress's newly appointed general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday told her party colleagues she had vowed to fight the ideology of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The Congress general secretary for Uttar Pradesh east was attending a meeting of general secretaries and state incharges at the party headquarters at 24, Akbar Road.

In her first intervention at the meeting, she said the "ideology and thought process" of the RSS-BJP combine needed to be countered, according to three functionaries present at the meeting. Priyanka Gandhi, 47, also said she is new and inexperienced but asserted that she will give her best.

Congress president Rahul Gandhi, for his part, said he did not expect a "miracle" from Priyanka Gandhi and Jyotiraditya Scindia, party general secretary incharge of Uttar Pradesh west, in two months, and that they should not feel any pressure.

However, he asked them to lay the structure for a Congress revival and make it fighting fit for the 2022 assembly elections in the state.

Congress general secretary incharge of the organisation KC Venugopal said Rahul Gandhi gave a clear direction to general secretaries and state incharges about the preparedness for the 2019 general elections.

"We discussed the process of selection of candidates, campaign strategy and alliances,



All India Congress Committee general secretaries Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Jyotiraditya Scindia during a meeting at Congress headquarters in New Delhi on February 7.

wherever necessary. All our general secretaries and incharges have given their views about their respective states. Finally, we have given an ultimatum that selection of candidates should be completed this month itself," he told reporters.

Venugopal said the Congress president met Priyanka Gandhi and Scindia on Thursday morning, when it was decided that the three will go to Lucknow on February 11 and stay there till February 14. "They will go in a procession from the airport to the party office in Lucknow. The general secretaries will

interact with Congress leaders and workers of Uttar Pradesh from February 12 at the party office in Lucknow," he added.

Rahul Gandhi said the party should not give tickets to sitting Rajya Sabha members and legislators unless unavoidable. In response to a question from Scindia, the Congress president also told the leaders to avoid giving tickets to those who have lost elections more than once. Jharkhand incharge RPN Singh said the party should make realistic promises, rather than "jumlas and false dreams as sold by the BJP".

Source: HT

Kartarpur: Pak team to visit India on March 13



NEW DELHI (TIP): In the first set of bilateral meetings on activating the Kartarpur corridor, a Pakistani delegation will visit India on March 13 to discuss the modalities for the cross-border pilgrimage. Pakistan has also proposed a reciprocal visit by an Indian delegation 15 days later to "finalise the draft agreement". The meetings will be held to facilitate the travel of Sikh pilgrims to Darbar Sahib Kartarpur Gurudwara in Narowal, nearly 4 km from the Gurdaspur border.

"In a spirit of constructive engagement #Pakistan has proposed to India that the Pakistani delegation may visit #India on 13 March followed by the return visit of the Indian delegation to Pakistan on 28 March to finalise the draft agreement for the #kartarpur corridor," Pakistan Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mohammad Faisal posted on Twitter.

Ministry of External Affairs official spokesperson Raveesh Kumar posted on Twitter: "We welcome the visit of #Pakistan team to discuss and finalise modalities for facilitating visit of pilgrims through #Kartarpur Sahib Corridor on 13 March 2019 to India. Follow up meeting can be held in Pakistan, as required."

SIT to probe anti-Sikh riots in Kanpur

KANPUR (TIP): The Uttar Pradesh government has constituted a four-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the circumstances that led to riots in Kanpur in 1984 following the assassination of then prime minister Indira Gandhi.

The SIT, to be headed by retired UP Director General of Police Atul, has been asked to submit its report within six months of tenure.

Other members of the SIT include retired District Judge Subhash Chandra Agarwal and retired Additional Director (Prosecution) Yogeshwar Krishna Srivastava.

The SIT will examine the FIRs lodged during the riots in which the district police had submitted a final report. The team will also examine the cases in which the accused had got relief from court.

Hailstorm: Delhi-NCR streets turn white



Heavy rain and hailstorms lashed several parts of Delhi and NCR on Thursday, covering roads and parks in a white shroud.

Sabarimala board does a U-turn in SC, supports entry of women into temple

NEW DELHI (TIP): The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB), which runs the historic Sabarimala temple in Kerala, took a U-turn in the Supreme Court on Wednesday by supporting its verdict which had allowed women of all age groups to enter the shrine.

The board, which also comprise the state government nominees, told a five-judge constitution bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi that it is high time that a particular class not be discriminated on the ground of "biological attributes".

The board said its decision was not due to any pressure.

In the forenoon, the Kerala government took the stand that it was in agreement with the September 28 verdict and had urged dismissal of petitions seeking review of the



verdict. "Article 25 (1) equally entitles all persons to practice religion," senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, appearing for TDB, told the bench which also comprise Justices R.F. Nariman, A.M. Khanwilkar, D.Y. Chandrachud and Indu Malhotra.

The board had earlier vehemently opposed the PIL by Indian Young Lawyers Association

saying that the celibate character of Lord Ayyappa at Sabarimala temple was a unique religious feature which was protected under the constitution.

"Women cannot be excluded from any walk of life on biological attributes... equality is the dominant theme of the constitution", said Dwivedi adding that people should gracefully accept the apex court verdict.

The apex court is hearing a batch of petitions seeking review of the verdict allowing the entry of women of all ages into the Sabarimala shrine.

On September 28, a five-judge constitution bench, headed by the then CJI Dipak Misra, in a 4:1 verdict had paved the way for entry of women of all ages into the shrine, saying the ban amounted to gender discrimination.

SC holds ex-CBI interim chief guilty of contempt

NEW DELHI (TIP): Nageswara Rao, the former interim chief of the Central Bureau of Investigation, faced the wrath of the Supreme Court today for the transfer of an officer supervising a sensitive case involving the sexual abuse of children at Bihar's government-run shelter homes. Rao, the top court said, was in contempt, since he was responsible for the transfer despite directions to the contrary.

AK Sharma -- the officer supervising the sensitive case -- was shifted out as part of the overnight mass transfer that followed the public feud between the agency's former chief Alok Verma and his deputy Rakesh Asthana.

The court, which wanted the officer to stay in charge of the case, held Mr Rao responsible. Pointing out that the transfer was made despite its "embargo", the court questioned whether its directions were passed on to the appropriate authorities in charge of transfers.



Nageswara Rao

Remarking that Rao and Bhasuran, the prosecution in-charge, have committed contempt, Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi said, "You have played with our orders. God help you".

The Chief Justice had stepped into the

three-judge bench after the recent retirement of Justice Madan Lokur. His first hearing of the case left him upset when the advocate representing the state government had no satisfactory answer to his queries.

Finding out that Sharma, the CBI's joint director in charge of the anti-corruption department, has been transferred, the Chief Justice said, "How can he be transferred by the Centre when the Supreme Court said he must not be shifted?"

The agency was asked to inform the court in writing whether the panel which transfers officers, was aware of the "embargo" by 2 pm.

Later, the court said it appears that its order not to transfer Mr Sharma was not passed on to the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet. Mr Sharma was transferred along with five others, who were investigating six cases against Rakesh Asthana, days after the two top bosses of the agency were sent on leave.

AS I SEE IT

General Election in India likely to result in a hung parliament : Modi may not form government



By Ven Parameswaran

I wrote on December 19, 2018 that the next general election in India may result in a hung parliament. As things stand today, one can predict no party will be able to win a majority. A hung Parliament looks imminent as both the ruling NDA and challenger UPA fail to reach the majority mark of 272 by a distance. The NDA remains the biggest political alliance, with the BJP emerging as the single largest party. This is the stunning conclusion of the India Today Group-Karvy Insights biannual Mood of the Nation (MOTN) survey conducted between December 28, 2018, and January 8, 2019. This MOTN is significant as it comes barely four months before the general election.

It must be pointed out that it is the first time since Modi came to power in May 2014 that an MOTN poll is predicting that the NDA will not cross the majority mark. It confirms the declining trend in its fortunes that these surveys have recorded in the past two years with the NDA and the BJP progressively losing ground.

The January 2019 MOTN predicts that if an election were held now, the NDA tally would drop by 100 seats from the 336 seats it got in the 2014 election. The BJP would be the single largest loser in the alliance with the number of seats dropping as much as 80 from 282 in 2014 to 202 now. In such an eventuality, the NDA would have to scout for other partners to garner a majority and there could also be doubts about Modi emerging as the consensus candidate to head the coalition government.

While the opposition may rejoice at having put the NDA and Modi on the mat, the survey also reveals that neither the Congress-led UPA nor any other Opposition alliance will be in a position to form the government on their own. The UPA is likely to multiply its tally by three times, according to this survey, from 59 in 2014 to 166. That is still 106 shy of a majority. And the rest of the opposition, that includes the Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, the AIDMK (Tamil Nadu) and dozen others, will get the remaining.

For many voters, such a fractured mandate and the political uncertainty it spells is a disconcerting scenario. That is why Modi and the BJP have been hammering home the need for voters to give them a full majority or, as they warn, the country could be plunged into chaos.

The January 2019 MOTN predicts that if an election were held now, the NDA tally would drop by 100 seats from the 336 seats it got in the 2014 election. The BJP would be the single largest loser in the alliance with the number of seats dropping as much as 80 from 282 in 2014 to 202 now.



The duo of Modi and Amit Shah have reasons to worry

THE SINGLE BIGGEST FAILURE OF MODI IS HIS INABILITY TO CREATE ADEQUATE NUMBER OF JOBS.

Lack of jobs rank 34%; Rising prices 20%; Demonetization 14%; Farm Subsidies 7%; Ineffective Implementation of GST 7%; Agrarian distress 5%; and Crisis in the CBI 2%.

THE VOTERS WILL BE ASKING: "Is India better off today than 5 years ago?"

1. Failure of Prime Minister Modi to create 10 million new jobs per year has changed the public opinion against his government. Modi could have done what the Congress failed to do, that is to emulate China. Modi failed to liberalize India's economy to attract sizeable foreign private investment. Modi could have built modern infrastructure and built large scale factories to produce consumer and industrial goods for export. President Trump, after winning the election offered India "closest ally" status on a par with the U.K. India has a comparative advantage over China and if India had the capability and the capacity to produce consumer goods, the US was ready to replace China. Failure of Modi to embrace President Trump's offer may cost him in the coming election.
2. Modi by overemphasizing Hindutva and not being fair to the minorities, has invited severe opposition of Christians, Muslims, Sikhs. In addition, 300 million Dalits are
3. The Demonetization created severe hardships to the vast majority of Indians living from hand to mouth with cash economy.
4. Modi failed to privatize public sector corporations. He has failed even to sell the most inefficient Air India which is running at a heavy loss.
5. On his inauguration, Modi invited the heads of all neighbors, signaling development of better relations. That was just a photo opportunity. His foreign policy towards India's neighbors failed miserably. China capitalized on the opportunity. China has almost taken over Nepal, and its influence in Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh, Sikkim, and Bhutan is a huge setback for India. Modi also failed to deal with Pakistan, which has refused to mete out justice to the terror organizations Lashkar-e-Taiba and its leaders. Though President Trump requested India to influence and help Afghanistan, Modi has nothing new to show.
6. Today, the public opinion is against Modi's government on the administration of coming elections. There have been reports of computer tampering, manipulating

computers to suit the goals of BJP and other irregular methods. The public has lost confidence in Modi government in running a fair and just election.

The Achilles' heel of Modi and the NDA, though, lies in the widespread farmer unrest, rural distress and the perceptible lack of jobs.

The UPA and the other opposition partners, especially BSP (Mayavati) are bound to push the knife deeper in these three big issues. Large sections of people have been pushed to the margins by a series of blows dealt to the economy, including demonetization and GST. This will determine the course of the coming election.

If Rahul Gandhi and his party have surged ahead in the ratings, it is because he has successfully mobilized public opinion on these issues. The recent wins of Congress in the Hindi heartland states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh are an indication of the traction Rahul has been able to get. But the Congress President will not be able to win by just running down Modi's performance. He will also need to come out with a convincing enough vision of how he plans to put the nation on a high growth path, apart from maintaining peace and harmony.

U.P. being the largest State with 80 parliamentary seats, is surely more important than other States. Mayavati has already formed coalition with Samajwadi Party. Thus, this coalition should be able to challenge Modi's B.J.P. The Congress and the Muslims are also challenging Modi. The result may be shocking on for . BJP which may have to accept a very small number of seats from U.P.

I am getting the impression that almost all parties are opposed to Modi except BJP ruled states. West Bengal with the leadership of Mamata Banerjee; Tamil Nadu; Karnataka; Kerala; Andhra Pradesh and other States could mount a formidable opposition to Modi.

In a hung Parliament, the President will be forced to accept any leader who can attract enough coalitions to create a majority. Although Modi may try, he has severe competition from Mayavati and other non-Congress leaders. The big question between now and the general election is : can Modi do anything to turnaround the precarious situation he is in?

(The author is a Senior Adviser to Imaagindia Institute, a think tank in New Delhi. He lives in Scarsdale, New York. He can be reached at vparameswaran@gmail.com)



COMMENT

Prof. I.S. Saluja

Better not defend what is indefensible - On detention of Indian Students in the US

It is really sad that scores of Indian students studying in the US have been detained by ICE on charges of violating Visa laws. One wished it did not happen. But

now that they have been detained, and reports suggest ICE is looking for around 600 students for similar offence, the issue has drawn the attention of the Indian Americans here and of government of India.

Whatever the government of India is doing is appreciable. Contacting students in detention, contacting their parents back home to pledge government's support are all part of the job of the Indian diplomats here, and of the EAM mandarins in New Delhi.

But, can anyone ask a sovereign government to bend rules for a chosen few? If your answer is "NO", you know what is going to happen. Particularly now that the Trump administration has taken a stand that America will not welcome "illegals". See the stand of Trump administration on DREAMERS. More recently, pronouncements

about illegal stay and, of course, illegal entry. It is not a humanitarian issue like we had in Middle East when we evacuated Indians from South Sudan or from Kuwait. It is purely an internal law and order issue of America. India, or for that matter, any country, cannot even make a suggestion to a sovereign nation on this issue. Clearly, law of the land has been knowingly violated by our Indian brethren. Nobody can defend what they have done. It is better not to try to defend what is indefensible. India had better not.

Let me say here. India has denied consular services, passports and visas to a number of Sikhs from Punjab branding them as Khalistanis and separatists, hand in glove with Pakistan and other interest groups against India, bent upon wrecking the Indian nation. Do you think America or Canada, or

Britain can make a suggestion to India to lift the "ban"?

In this election year, Modi government will not like to be criticized for not taking care of Indian citizens abroad. They will not like the opposition to make it an issue in elections, howsoever little the issue may be. So, there may be an extra effort on the part of the government of India to play up its efforts to seek relief for the students facing the difficult situation.

America is not India, where a Prime Minister, or a lesser person, too can bend rules. India is still living in a feudal order. I will rather have my Indian brethren suffer for whatever they did, wittingly or unwittingly, rather than imagine America following Indian style of governance.

Congress Mukht Bharat vs BJP Mukht India



By I S Saluja

The other day, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi had used all weapons in his armory to denounce the opposition during his speech in the Parliament, a friend suggested that India should be BJP Mukht if there is to be peace and prosperity in the nation. I laughed at his mad fancy. What has BJP done to evoke this kind of reaction? I can understand when BJP accuses Congress of having done nothing positive and good for the nation in 70 years, except promoting corruption, and calls for a Congress Mukht Bharat. But what has BJP done that my friend who I know to be a sane guy felt provoked to make a suggestion for a BJP Mukht Bharat.

My friend seemed to be looking far, and without turning to me, said, "I am unhappy that unemployment has touched the highest level in 45 years. This government kept claiming during the last more than 4 years that it had created record employment. And here we are with a record unemployment. Lies, lies, lies. What a joke with countrymen!"

I was thinking what a poor Narendra Modi could do in just 4 years when there was so much to do and so little time to do. Congress had 70 years and yet it could not provide employment to all. Here was a Narendra Modi who at least claimed his government had created record jobs, what if he could not control the skyrocketing unemployment.

My chain of thought was broken when I heard my friend say, "And look at the report of Reserve Bank on demonetization which says India made huge losses as a result of demonetization, debunking all tall claims this government has been making over the years that demonetization had broken the back of black money and had done immense good to the economic health of the country. Data released by the RBI in its annual report stated that out of Rs 15.44 lakh crore worth of currency notes that were taken out of circulation, Rs 15.28 lakh crore have returned to the banking system and around Rs 16,000 crore is yet to be deposited back to banks. Liars. The nation suffered such huge losses and people underwent so much suffering for the mad fancies of a maverick leader."

If the entire opposition, without Congress, comes together, forms a cohesive group, and ensures only one candidate from their group in each constituency, it will win hands down against BJP. Congress party may be a spoil sport in some seats for both the BJP and the Opposition, but it will not hurt much the opposition "mahagatbandhan. In the end, a welded third front can trounce both the Congress and the BJP. Ultimately, it may lead to a Congress mukht Bharat and a BJP mukht India".



Opposition leaders in Kolkata on Saturday, January 19 vowed to oust Modi government

I was wondering how I could calm him. He seemed to be in terrible agony.

I did not utter a word fearing I will provoke him. He appeared to be too filled with lava of annoyance with the BJP government of Bhai Narendra Modi. He exploded again.

What a great secular country India has been. And you have a government here which has assiduously worked to create divisions in the name of religion, culture and history. Today, one comes across an atmosphere of fear because of the terrible communal tension the policies of this government have created. While the job of the good government is to promote amity and peace, you have a government here which makes people suspicious of each other, and all this in the name of religion, culture and history. While a good government should be ridding its people of fear of all kinds, here is a government filling them with fear. Many of the best sons and daughters of India have shown exemplary courage to express their fears. But this government must term them as traitors. Do you do any good to the people, do you solve their problems by changing the name of the

cities, streets, and monuments? Can you erase history by doing so? Modi government has been busy doing it. And, then, this government has been in a hurry to impose a particular brand of culture on all. They were more busy rewriting text books carrying their brand of culture for school children than in planning for providing good education to the poorest of the poor who have remained deprived of it. Congress did not do anything in 70 years. Here they are, the agents of change. And, in order that they can achieve their goals effectively, there has to be no Congress. It has to be a Congress Mukht Bharat. Congress, it must be understood, is a synonym for opposition. The other opposition parties can be dealt with without any problem. Some will merge in to the BJP. Some will join the BJP led government. All will be BJP-may. And BJP will have the satisfaction of having Vipaksha mukht Bharat (India without opposition). A fertile situation for a Hindu Rashtra, and a presidential form of government. It could even be the revival of the Chakravarti Samrat Rajya which may be named, possibly, Ram Rajya".

By now I was quite bored with his longish outbursts. However, I still did not want to provoke him which might have meant another angry outburst.

I put my hand on his shoulder and said cajolingly, "Why not have an India which is free of both the Congress and the BJP?"

He looked at me in disbelief, and quipped, "What a brilliant idea! But how is it possible? Tell me."

I was not prepared for an answer. But they say necessity is the mother of invention. So, I thought hard and blurted out: "Well, you remember the big gathering in Kolkata. If the entire opposition, without Congress, comes together, forms a cohesive group, and ensures only one candidate from their group in each constituency, it will win hands down against BJP. Congress party may be a spoil sport in some seats for both the BJP and the Opposition, but it will not hurt much the opposition "mahagatbandhan. In the end, a welded third front can trounce both the Congress and the BJP. Ultimately, it may lead to a Congress mukht Bharat and a BJP mukht India".



By Jug Suraiya

Perks of being a Sadhu

The Uttar Pradesh Government announces pension scheme for sadhus and seers: News report.

Two unemployed youth in UP discussing career prospects.

FIRST YOUTH: I'm really at my wit's end and don't know what to do. Yesterday I applied for the post of a third-division government babu but was turned down.

SECOND YOUTH: Turned down? Why? Because you didn't have enough educational qualifications required for the job?

FIRST YOUTH: No, because with my triple PhD in astrophysics, bio-engineering and rocket science they said I had too many qualifications for the job.

SECOND YOUTH: Not to worry. Yogi Adityanathji has conferred a great boon on all us jobless guys. All we have to do is enroll ourselves as practicing sadhus and we'll be assured a sarkari pension for life.

FIRST YOUTH: Enroll ourselves as sadhus? But in order to qualify as a genuine, bona fide sadhu, don't you have to do some sort of course in sadhuism, and pass an exam? Like there are all these IITs, and IIMs, is there also an ISI, an Indian Sadhu Institute that trains would-be sadhus?

SECOND YOUTH: There is an ISI. But it's not in India, but in Pakistan, and the people it trains aren't exactly sadhus. But don't worry about training, and passing exams, and qualifications. Because the great thing about being a sadhu is that you don't need all that stuff. You don't even need a Class VII-Failed certificate. Anyone can become a sadhu, and then get a sarkari pension for life, thanks to Yogi Adityanathji.

FIRST YOUTH: That's great. But how can sadhus get a pension, sarkari or otherwise, if sadhus are meant to practice renunciation?

SECOND YOUTH: The new-age sadhus that Yogi Adityanathji's sarkar is enrolling do practice renunciation - by renouncing the

concept of renunciation itself. How much more renunciational can you get?

FIRST YOUTH: Sounds cool. So how much is this sarkari pension anyway?

SECOND YOUTH: It's 500 bucks a month.

FIRST YOUTH: 500 bucks a month? That's not very much of a renunciation to renounce.

SECOND YOUTH: Not to worry. Akhilesh Yadavji has already raised the ante by poo-hooping Yogi Adityanathji's 500-buck pension as being peanuts and has said that it should be raised to at least Rs 20,000 a month.

FIRST YOUTH: Rs 20,000 a month? That's more like it. I could do with renouncing the renunciation of 20,000 bucks a month.

SECOND YOUTH: And that needn't be the end of it. Thanks to the politics of what might be called competitive pensionism, Behenji is quite likely to enter the fray and further raise the stakes for sadhus, and maybe make the pension Rs 50,000 a month.

FIRST YOUTH: Wow! Rs 50,000 is even better to renounce the renunciation.

SECOND YOUTH: And on top of that, there's always the gurudakshina that we as sadhus can go around collecting from all and sundry.

FIRST YOUTH: Collecting gurudakshina?



Illustration / Sandeep Joshi

How do we do that?

SECOND YOUTH: Simple. When we spot a prosperous-looking sethji we tell him we're his gurus and ask for gurudakshina.

FIRST YOUTH: But suppose he doesn't want to give us any gurudakshina, what then?

SECOND YOUTH: Then we motivate him to do.

FIRST YOUTH: How do we motivate him? By showing him the sharpness of our intellect?

SECOND YOUTH: No - by showing him the sharpness of the trishul we'll carry as sadhus.

Arm in arm, the two head off to sign up as sadhus, striding along to the tune of "When the sants go marching in."



VALENTINE'S DAY

Valentine's Day is a time when people show feelings of love, affection and friendship. It is celebrated in many ways worldwide and falls on February 14 each year.

What Do People Do?

Many people around the world celebrate Valentine's Day by showing appreciation for the people they love or adore. Some people take their loved ones for a romantic dinner at a restaurant while others may choose this day to propose or get married. Many people give greeting cards, chocolates, jewelry or flowers, particularly roses, to their partners or admirers on Valentine's Day.

It is also a time to appreciate friends in some social circles and cultures. For example, Valentine's Day in Finland refers to "Friend's day", which is more about remembering all friends rather than focusing solely on romance. Valentine's Day in Guatemala is known as Day of Love and Friendship. It is similar to Valentine's Day customs and traditions countries such as the United States but it is also a time for many to show their appreciation for their friends.

Public Life

Valentine's Day is not a public holiday in many countries, including Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. However, restaurants, hotels and shopping centers may be busy around this time of the year.

Background

The origins of Valentine's Day are not clear but many sources believe that it stems from the story of St Valentine, a Roman priest who was martyred on or around February 14 in the year 270 CE. How he became the patron saint of lovers remains a mystery but one theory is that the church used the day of St Valentine's martyrdom to Christianize the old Roman Lupercalia, a pagan festival held around the middle of February. The ancient ceremony included putting girls' names in a box and letting the boys draw them out. Couples would then be paired off until the following year. The Christian church substituted saints' names for girls' names in hope that the participant would model his life after the saint whose name he drew. However, it was once again girls' names that ended up in the box by the 16th century.

Eventually the custom of sending anonymous cards or messages to those whom one admired became the accepted way of celebrating Valentine's Day. There



WHY DOES VALENTINE'S DAY ATTRACT HATE IN INDIA?

Every year as February 14 approaches, there's a lot of excitement in India, not just among loved-up couples, but also amid right-wing groups like Bajrang Dal, Shiv Sena and Hindu Mahasabha. For these self-proclaimed guardians of Indian society, it's time to get together and come up with a gameplan to protect the country against a western invasion.

So far, they've threatened to solemnise the marriage of couples in full public view at the exact spot where they're caught. If any pair refuses to do so, they're handed over photos of Hindu gods and goddesses to remind the offending couple about their real heritage. In the past, men and women seen dating have been blatantly assaulted by Hindu vigilantes. Some have even roughed up brothers and sisters, mistaking them for a couple. If the boy and girl happen to be of different religions, the radical groups have made it known that they'd go so far as to conduct a purification ceremony for the couple. In a bizarre statement some years ago, a leader of a Hindu outfit, claimed that celebration of Valentine's Day leads to rape, as sales of contraceptives rise on this day in cities. Vandalism is a scare tactic the rightist groups in India seem to enjoy using without restraint. It's the same with Valentine's Day. Any shop selling greeting cards, flowers and gifts are always at risk. So are restaurants and cafes, where couples are found dating.

was an increase in interest in Valentine's Day, first in the United States and then in Canada, in the mid-19th century. Early versions of Valentine cards fashioned of satin and lace and ornamented with flowers, ribbons, and images of cupids or birds appeared in England in the 1880s.

The Legend of St. Valentine

The history of Valentine's Day—and the story of its patron saint—is shrouded in mystery. We do know that February has long been celebrated as a month of romance, and that St. Valentine's Day, as we know it today, contains vestiges of both Christian and ancient Roman tradition. But who was Saint Valentine, and how did

he become associated with this ancient rite?

The Catholic Church recognizes at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentinus, all of whom were martyred. One legend contends that Valentine was a priest who served during the third century in Rome. When Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers than those with wives and families, he outlawed marriage for young men. Valentine, realizing the injustice of the decree, defied Claudius and continued to perform marriages for young lovers in secret. When Valentine's actions were discovered, Claudius ordered that he be put to death.

French, German farmers destroy crops after GMOs found in Bayer seeds

PARIS (TIP): Bayer said on February 6 that farmers in France and Germany were digging up thousands of hectares of rapeseed fields after traces of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) banned for cultivation were found in seeds sold by the company. GMO crops are widely grown across the world, but they remain controversial in Europe, where very few varieties are authorised for growing and some countries like France have completely outlawed their cultivation, citing environmental risks.

Checks by the French authorities during the autumn showed minute quantities of GMO seeds, estimated at less than 0.005 percent of the volume, in three batches of rapeseed seeds sold under the Dekalb brand, Catherine Lamboley, Bayer's chief operating officer for France, said.

Dekalb was previously a Monsanto brand before the U.S. company was taken over by Bayer last year. The GMO found, which is a rapeseed variety grown in Canada, is not authorised for cultivation in Europe, although it is allowed in imports destined for food and animal feed, Lamboley said.

Bayer issued a product recall but some of the seed had already been sown, representing about 8,000 hectares in France and 2,500-3,000 hectares in Germany, which are in the process of being dug up, Bayer said.

It was not yet known what caused the contamination of the rapeseed seeds, produced in Argentina in a GMO-free area,



Lamboley said. "We decided to immediately stop all rapeseed seed production in Argentina," she told Reuters in a phone interview. Bayer's Argentine rapeseed seeds were destined for the European market and represent 12 percent of its rapeseed supply for France, the company added.

Bayer declined to estimate the overall cost of the GMO contamination but said it will offer compensation of 2,000 euros (\$2,277.80) per hectare to affected farmers, suggesting a payout of around 20 million euros in France and Germany.

The compensation reflected the loss of

rapeseed fields this season and the fact farmers would not be able to grow the crop next either as a precaution to avoid re-emergence of the GMO strain, Lamboley added.

The order to destroy some crops is another blow for European rapeseed growers who had already cut sowings sharply due to dry weather. However, the area is small compared to the total French winter rapeseed area, which the farm ministry in December forecast at 1.23 million hectares. The corresponding German crop area is seen at close to 1 million hectares. (Reuters)

Russia: we would be open to US proposals for new nuclear pact

MOSCOW (TIP): Russia would be prepared to consider new proposals from the United States to replace a suspended Cold War-era nuclear pact with a broader treaty that includes more countries, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said on February 7.

Russia suspended the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty at the weekend after Washington announced it would withdraw in six months unless Russia ends what it says are violations of the pact, allegations rejected by Moscow.

The 1987 treaty eliminated the medium-range missile arsenals of the world's two biggest nuclear powers, but leaves other countries free to produce and deploy them.

US President Donald Trump said last week he would like to hold talks aimed at creating a new arms control treaty.

"We, of course, saw the reference in president Trump's statement to the possibility of a new treaty that could be signed in a beautiful room and that this treaty should also include other countries as its participants," Ryabkov said.

"We look forward to this proposal being made concrete and put on paper or by other means..." Ryabkov said at a news conference in Moscow.

Ryabkov said the United States had not sent Moscow any concrete proposals for a new pact. (Reuters)

Bank of England set to hold rates as it seeks Brexit clarity

LONDON (TIP): With 50 days to go until Britain leaves the European Union, the Bank of England is awaiting clarity over Brexit before deciding what to do next on interest rates.

On February 7, the bank is expected to announce that its nine-member rate-setting body has kept its main interest rate unchanged at 0.75 percent.

Whether the next move is up or down hinges on Brexit.

Should the country crash out of the bloc with no deal on future relations, many economists think the bank could slash its main rate to zero as it deals with the economic fallout.

By contrast, a smooth Brexit could see the bank raise interest rates as it responds to rising wages. The views of Governor Mark Carney will be of interest after the rate decision. (AP)

China says tests on plasma products negative for HIV

Beijing (TIP): Chinese investigators said Thursday tests on a batch of a plasma product feared to have been contaminated with HIV have turned up negative for the virus that causes AIDS.

The result appears to have headed off the possibility of yet another scandal involving medical products in the country. Incidents include the falsifying of production records for rabies vaccines that prompted a nationwide crackdown on the industry and the injecting of other faulty vaccines.

Public outrage over such scandals has alarmed the leadership of the ruling Communist Party, moving it to respond more quickly and firmly than in the past, including bringing criminal charges and billion dollar fines. (AP)

Venezuela's Guaido asks Italy's leaders to meet his envoys

ROME (TIP): Venezuela's opposition leader Juan Guaido has asked Italy's ruling coalition leaders to meet with representatives as he seeks their explicit backing as interim president alongside almost all other European countries. The hard-right League has expressed strong support for Guaido, but coalition partner the 5-Star Movement has not, making Italy the only major European Union nation not to recognise him as Venezuela's temporary head of state.

In a Feb. 5 letter distributed by League leader and deputy prime minister Matteo Salvini's office on February 6, Guaido asks if he can send a delegation "to illustrate the plan of action to renew democracy in Venezuela" through fair elections.

"The current humanitarian crisis is hitting all Venezuelans, including the more than 100,000 Italians who live in Venezuela," it said. A 5-Star government source said its leader Luigi Di Maio had received a similar letter.

"Maduro is a criminal, Maduro is an outlaw, Maduro is an abusive, fallen and expired president," Salvini said on Tuesday. "There is an illegal president who is torturing, arresting, starving and massacring (people) and there is a community that has the right to vote freely."



Alessandro Di Battista, a prominent 5-Star figure, has said overt support for Guaido would be meddling and could open the way for military intervention.

Italy on February 3 blocked a joint EU position to recognise Guaido as interim president, diplomatic sources said. Venezuelans of Italian origin, many arriving in the first half of the 20th century when

southern Europe was in economic doldrums from the two World Wars, are a large and influential group in the South American country.

Italian President Sergio Mattarella, who plays a mainly ceremonial role and usually stays out of day-to-day politics, urged the government to overcome differences and back Guaido. (Reuters)

Former Brazilian president Da Silva convicted in second corruption case

SAO PAULO (TIP): Former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva was convicted Wednesday

for a second time on charges of corruption and money laundering and sentenced to 12 years in prison.

Judge Gabriela Hardt said she agreed with prosecutors that a country house was renovated for da Silva by construction companies involved in the mammoth corruption scandal centered on Brazil's state-run oil company, Petrobras.

Last April, da Silva began serving a

sentence of 12 years and 11 months after being convicted on the same charges involving renovations at a beach-front apartment also allegedly paid for by construction companies.

Prosecutors argued that both cases involved the companies giving benefits to da Silva in return for political favors.

Da Silva has denied guilt in both cases and is expected to appeal the latest sentence, as he did the first. (AP)



KAREENA KAPOOR LIKELY TO STAR IN 'DABANGG 3'

Kareena Kapoor Khan who was last seen in 'Veere Di Wedding' has given hit dance numbers in the past. 'Fevicol Se' from 'Dabangg 2', 'Chamma Challo' from 'Ra-One' and 'Mera Naam Mary' from 'Brothers' are the recent examples.

Now, it is being reported that the actress has been approached for another dance number. Reportedly, Arbaaz Khan who will be directing Salman Khan's 'Dabangg 3' is in talks with Bebo for a special song sequence. And, we hear that Kareena has given her nod for the same.

According to the reports, the previous two installments of the film had a chartbuster dance number in each and to keep the trend alive, it was important to include in the third installment.

MY CONTEMPORARIES DO NOT SUPPORT MY WORK, SAYS KANGANA RANAUT

Actor Kangana Ranaut has said that Bollywood does not stand up for her, calling it a 'racket'. The Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi actor said in a recent interview that when it comes to promoting their own films, several people would call her 'shamelessly' but they would 'not come' to support her work.

Kangana told Pinkvilla, "In 2014, I don't think all the accolades were for me, it was for Phantom who was coming up and there were having screenings after screenings for people of Vikas and Anurag Kashyap. They had a lot of friends, so they used to come. I have always been absolutely ignored. After Tanu Weds Manu also I have had so many trials, they would just not come. But when it comes to them, they call me shamelessly, I even sort of cancel my shoots and make sure I attend them. Now, I have stopped because it's getting too much."

By trials, Kangana is referring to preview screenings held for industry members ahead of a film's release.

She gave the example of how after the release of Raazi, she spoke to Alia Bhatt and Meghna Gulzar 'for half-an-hour'. Kangana said that Alia had even sent her the trailer of the film. "These girls send me their trailers like Alia (Bhatt) sent me the trailer of Raazi and said, 'Please watch it'. For me, it was not a Karan Johar film or Alia film, for me, it was a film on Sehmata Khan, the girl who has given her everything to the country," Kangana said, adding that when it was their turn, 'there was no response from anyone.'

Kangana has spoken about this incident before. In that interview, she also mentioned Deepika Padukone, Anushka Sharma and Sonakshi Sinha. "I don't feel so threatened by anyone around. You know like you see I will praise Alia or I would praise Anushka



or I would praise everyone. I never shied away from going to Deepika's Piku trial. Everyone I have praised in my capacity. Sonakshi's Lootera I saw and the whole year I praised her. I don't get threatened," she told News18.

The Queen star also said that she went all the way to the Ambanis' house to talk to Aamir Khan about doing Dhangal, but 'they

don't come for my trials'. She said that she doesn't expect any of them to write about her 'two-three films' that are coming up.

Manikarnika has received positive reviews, and has made Rs 76 crore at the domestic box office. Kangana will next be seen opposite Rajkumar Rao in Mental Hai Kya, and then in director Ashwiny Iyer Tiwary's next.

Sidharth on his relationships with Jacqueline Fernandez, Kiara Advani

Sidharth Malhotra's appearance on the most recent episode of Koffee with Karan was all about his rumoured relationships. Not only did host Karan Johar extract information about Sidharth's ex, Alia Bhatt, but he also got him to talk about Jacqueline Fernandez and Kiara Advani, the two actors he's been rumoured to have dated.

Sidharth starred with Jacqueline in the box office flop, A Gentleman. About their rumoured relationship, the actor told Karan, "Jacqueline is wonderful. I always have fun when I am hanging out with her. Jackie and I really bonded when we were doing A Gentleman. But we were never dating. We just enjoy being friends and hanging out. We have lots in common. She's crazy, she's always happy."

It was rumoured that the growing closeness between the two actors was what led to his and Alia's breakup. Sidharth dated Alia for about a year after making their Bollywood debuts in Student of the Year, and starring in Kapoor & Sons.

He said about his equation with Alia, who is

now dating Ranbir Kapoor: "We haven't met after it. Our relationship is civil... I don't think it's bitter. It's been a while. I have known her for much longer even before we dated. I gave my first ever shot with her in SOTY so there is so much history."

When she appeared on Koffee with Karan, Karan asked Alia which actor she'd like to set Sidharth up with, and she replied, 'Kiara'. When she was asked whom she'd want to set Jacqueline up with, Alia said, 'Sid, if the one with Kiara doesn't work out.'

It has been rumoured that Sidharth and Kiara hit it off at a party thrown by Karan. When he asked Sidharth about his equation with Kiara, Sidharth said, "The amount of rumours I have had in the tabloids, I'm having lesser fun in real life. I wish they were true. Kiara is lovely. We are going to work together in future. But I'm single."

Sidharth will next be seen in Jabariya Jodi, with Parineeti Chopra. Alia will star in Ranveer Singh's Gully Boy. Kiara will be seen in Good News, opposite Akshay Kumar and Kareena Kapoor Khan.





BRITNEY SPEARS TO MAKE CAMEO IN 'CORPORATE ANIMALS'

Pop star Britney Spears is returning to the big screen one more time with a cameo in horror comedy 'Corporate Animals'. According to source, the singer will feature as herself in the film, featuring Demi Moore and Ed Helms.

The film's director Patrick Brice made the revelation at the 2019 Film Festival on Monday.

"One of our characters Calum Worthy's character, Aidan is obsessed with Britney Spears, and there's a runner of him as he's going crazy thinking that he is hearing Britney speaking to him from the walls.

"Through a series of connections we were able to get 10 minutes of her time to record this, which was so awesome," Brice said.

The film premiered at the festival on Tuesday. Previously, Spears has made a series of cameos in films such as 'Fahrenheit 9/11' and 'Austin Powers in Goldmember'.

BRAD PITT, ANGELINA JOLIE SPOTTED TOGETHER FOR FIRST TIME SINCE DIVORCE

Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, who separated in 2016, were spotted together for the first time since then recently. The former couple met on multiple occasions last week to iron out custody details around their children. Pictures of Brad and Angelina were snapped by the paparazzi, and have since been shared online.

A source told US Weekly about the meeting, "They've had other meetings in person; this is not the first. This is part of their ongoing process to work through things regarding the kids and the divorce."

Jolie filed for divorce from Pitt in September 2016 after two years of marriage and a total of 12 years together. The separation was widely publicised for its animosity, which saw Pitt being investigated and subsequently cleared of child abuse. They have been involved in a custody dispute over their six children - Maddox, 17, Pax, 15, Zahara, 14, Shiloh, 12, and twins Knox and Vivienne, 10 - since then. It was recently reported that the two had arrived at mutually agreeable terms. A detailed custody plan was obtained by several outlets, which specified the



conditions of the agreement, including the number of hours the children would have with Pitt. A source told People.com that Pitt is "hopeful that at the conclusion, he'll have joint custody of the children. All Brad wants is to be a present dad and coparent

with Angelina."

In August 2018, Jolie claimed in court that Pitt had neglected to provide sufficient child support, a claim which his representatives denied, adding that he had loaned her \$8 million.

Lily James wants to shed her Cinderella image

Actress Lily James loved the experience of portraying Cinderella in the live action version of the Disney film, but now wants to shed that image.

In an interview, the actress said that she wants to shed the image of herself as a 'blonde, sweet thing', because it is 'so not her', as reported.

She admitted that she is "actively seeking" different characters as she looks forward to turning 30 in April.

James said: "Cinderella was a gift, and I will treasure it for the rest of my life. But I wore a dress for the 'Mamma Mia!' premiere that was blue and white, and when I got out on the red carpet, all anyone said was 'Oh it's Cinderella!'"

"It's a happy association, but also something that you want to shed at some point

The blonde, sweet thing is so not me. I'm actively seeking characters from now on that are different, who don't rely on charm or the qualities that I think I've explored quite a lot."

The actress has enchanted viewers with her performances in 'Cinderella', 'Downton Abbey', 'Baby Driver' and 'Mamma Mia!'.

James, who is in a relationship with Matt Smith since 2014, also opened up about turning 30 later this year.

She said: "It is a real turning point. My twenties have been so chaotic, and I've always looked forward to 30 as being an anchor point. You stop caring so much about what other people think, and become more secure in your own life.



'Alita: Battle Angel' to release in India before US

One of the most acclaimed and celebrated Hollywood filmmakers of all time, James Cameron has always created world-class action and sci-fi movies like 'The Terminator', 'Aliens' and 'Avatar'. His latest offering as producer, 'Alita: Battle Angel', based on Yukito Kishiro's classic manga series, is slated to hit screens in India on February 8, a week before its worldwide release.

The story of a young female cyborg discovered and rebuilt by the scientist who becomes her father figure is set in an unique and futuristic world. Cameron spent years developing the technology to be able to bring the film's complicated visuals to life.

Director Robert Rodriguez says, "We designed a set that could work as the entire city, but by connecting some streets and being clever on how you shoot with angles, we could make it look much bigger. When I did 'El Mariachi', I only had two streets, and everybody would be running in circles! I had a lot more to work with here. But I never thought I would see something with that detail and scale in Texas. I am sure that this is the biggest set that we've ever had."



Prachanda's Venezuela remarks trigger rift within Nepal ruling party

KATHMANDU (TIP): Comments regarding Venezuela by the Nepal Communist Party's co-chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', and an apparent reprimand of the remarks by his fellow party leader, and Prime Minister, K P Sharma Oli appear set to snowball into a major feud within the Nepal's ruling party.

On Feb 6 evening, Oli told government-controlled Nepal Television that there was no urgency for Prachanda to make such a statement when "I was abroad, and going to return within hours". "Such a statement would not have come if I were here," he added.

On January 25, Prachanda had issued a statement saying the "intrusion" into the internal affairs of Venezuela by the "imperialist US" were not acceptable. Within hours, the US made its objection to the comments clear, forcing Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to distance itself from what Prachanda, one of the two chairpersons of the ruling party, said. The ministry said Nepal was in favour of the internal affairs of Venezuela being sorted out by the people of the country without outside interference. After returning to Nepal, Oli purportedly told US Ambassador Randy Berry that Prachanda's remarks were a "slip of tongue". However, Prachanda responded to the PM's remarks, saying that what one person says after the party had collectively responded to the Venezuela situation in one voice carried no meaning. (PTI)

Former Maldives president to be charged with money laundering

MALDIVES (TIP): Police in the Maldives have asked the country's prosecutor general to charge a former president with money laundering and his former Cabinet minister with aiding him.

A police statement says investigators have found grounds to charge Yameen Abdul Gayoom and his former Legal Affairs Minister Azima Shakoor.

The case stems from an allegedly shady deal to lease islands for tourist resort development and the discovery of USD 1 million in Yameen's bank account.

Police also say they asked the prosecutor general to charge Yameen and Shakoor with providing false information to investigators. Yameen lost the presidential election last year after a five-year strongman rule. (AP)

Indonesia finds 193 Bangladeshis locked up in shop house

MEDAN, INDONESIA (TIP): Indonesian police found 193 Bangladeshis locked up in a shop house after human traffickers had lured them with the promise of getting them to Malaysia, an immigration official said on February 7. The men entered Indonesia as tourists via Bali and the city of Yogyakarta with the intention of going to Malaysia for work, North Sumatra's immigration chief said. "They are victims of human trafficking and were lured here," Fery Monang Sihite said by telephone, adding that the men had been locked up in Medan on the island of Sumatra. (Reuters)

Pakistan turns to ally China for \$2.5 b Loan

ISLAMABAD (TIP): Pakistan's financial woes are far from over despite support from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, forcing Islamabad to turn to its all-weather ally China for a loan of \$2.5 billion (nearly Rs 18,000 crore).

China has agreed to provide the money to help Pakistan boost its official foreign exchange reserves, which are not sufficient to provide cover for even two months of imports despite receiving \$4 billion of loans from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, ET has learnt.

China has emerged as Pakistan's largest saviour in times of economic crisis in the past five years. With the latest tranche, China's support to Pakistan in this fiscal year alone would surge to \$4.5 billion. Last July, China had lent \$2 billion to the State Bank of Pakistan, which is that country's central bank.

In the last fiscal year (2017-18), Pakistan had obtained \$2.2 billion from three Chinese commercial banks — China Development Bank, ICBC China and Bank of China — apart from getting \$1.8 billion from Beijing on a bilateral basis.

The Chinese money is coming as part of the government's strategy to have support till the time its macroeconomic situation stabilises, people tracking the financing deals told ET.

After coming into power, Prime Minister Imran Khan had visited China, Saudi Arabia and the UAE to arrange emergency loans to avoid a default. Pakistan has secured \$14.5 billion of commitments from these three countries that have largely helped bridge its external financing gap in the ongoing fiscal year.

Saudi Arabia has agreed to provide a \$6-



billion financial assistance package, which includes \$3 billion in short-term loans at an interest rate of 3.18%. The UAE has agreed to provide \$3 billion at an interest rate of around 3% and has already disbursed \$1 billion. A \$3.2 billion of oil facility on deferred payment is also being awaited.

But despite \$4 billion inflows from Riyadh and the UAE in past two months, the gross official foreign currency reserves stayed at only \$8.12 billion as of December 25, according to the State Bank of Pakistan. This is sufficient to cover just seven weeks of imports and is below the minimum level that the International Monetary Fund and World Bank prescribe. Due to this, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank are not providing loans for budget financing.

Pakistan has also borrowed heavily from China for various projects under the China-Pak-Economic Corridor (CPEC), the flagship project under BRI.

China has become the biggest lender to Pakistan after surpassing Japan. Pakistan owes \$19 billion (a fifth of its total debt) to China. The CPEC loans will add \$14 billion to Pakistan's total public debt, raising it to \$90 billion by June 2019, abating its economic ability to service huge amount of debt, said experts.

According to experts' calculation, Pakistan will have to payback \$100 billion to China by 2024 of total investment of \$18.5 billion, which China has provided as bank loans for 19 early-harvest projects, mostly relating to the energy sector under the CPEC. (ET)

Bangladesh seals off border with Myanmar amid fresh influx of refugees

DHAKA (TIP): Bangladesh has sealed off its border with Myanmar amid fresh influx of refugees fleeing troubled Rakhine state following reported military clampdown, this time against the ethnic majority Buddhists and Hindus being the victims, Foreign Minister A K Abdul Momen said Wednesday.

Over 700,000 Rohingya Muslims have taken refuge in Bangladesh after fleeing from Rakhine state in neighbouring Myanmar to evade atrocities, which the UN called "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing", following the action by the military in August 2017.

"We can't take any more of them (Myanmar refugees). The border with Myanmar is almost sealed off," he told reporters before departing for New Delhi.

Momen is visiting India on his maiden overseas tour since Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina formed the government for the third consecutive terms after winning the December 30 general elections.

He said that Bangladesh has opened its border and allowed enough of the influx of refugees opening the border "now it is better if others (other countries) open their frontiers for them (refugees)".

Meanwhile, paramilitary Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) said they sent a detachment to enforce a vigil in its remote frontiers with Myanmar in bordering Bandndarban's Ruma area.

Police said about 150 Myanmar nationals, including 38 Buddhist families, crossed the border.



"We have sent a detachment to Ruma frontiers to enforce a stringent vigil against fresh influx. The borders with Myanmar remained sealed off while only legal movement is underway through the Ukhia and Teknaf frontiers," BGB's region commander Brigadier General Ainul Morshed Khan said.

Police chief of the bordering Bandarban district Mohammad Kamruzzaman said 38, mostly Buddhist, families sneaked into Bangladesh overnight in view of the "internal conflict" in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

Reports suggest fighting between the Myanmar military and the rebel Arakan Army forced hundreds to flee their home to

take refuge in Bangladesh and India.

Acknowledging the report, the foreign minister said, "We have heard that different ethnic and religious groups including Buddhists and Hindus, this time apart from (Rohingya) Muslims, are trying to enter Bangladesh amid fresh violence in Myanmar."

Earlier in the day, Momen met with special UN envoy on Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener and Hollywood superstar and a special UNHCR envoy Angelina Jolie who spent as a special UNHCR envoy two days in Bangladesh's southeastern Cox's Bazar where over a million Rohingya Muslims have been taking refuge after fleeing a brutal military crackdown at their homeland. (PTI)

THE ASTONISHING AND ALLURING ANDAMANS

The most classical crystal clear blue glassy waters that you have ever seen, defines Andamans. Andamans can easily be described as “Man’s own heaven of blue.”

The reef is popularly rated by the locals and Andaman admirers to be the third most beautiful and populated coral reef in the world. The temperature and the ocean currents along with various other geographical factors have over centuries built this beautiful and secret underwater world.

Why Andamans?

The famed beauty of Andamans will keep you awestruck and speechless. It is proven that Andamans is much more magnificent and alluring than what we watch in movies or television, or in discovery channel programs and tourism videos. The feel, the touch, the variety of flora and fauna in Havelock is truly incomparable. The matchless beauty has been ardently guarded and ferociously protected for ages.

The Indian archipelago consist of more than 300 Islands in Andaman alone and the remaining 272 Islands constitute the Nicobar Islands. The Indigenous tribes have been living in some parts of these Islands since 2000 years. The travellers are restricted to visit these places from a culture preservation point of view, but you can learn a lot about them at the Samudrika Marine Museum. The museum also hosts many exotic marine species and skeleton of the blue whale. If you want to go on a budget exotic tropical holiday, Andaman is the place to be.

With its sparkling blue water, colourful coral reefs and white sand beaches, you get the best of views. Water sports is something you cannot miss on these Islands. North Bay Island is the best spot for snorkelling, deep diving and underwater sea-walking. A common misconception amongst people is that they should have prior swimming or diving experience for them to enjoy these water sports which is far from the truth.

If still, you are not confident enough to try the mentioned water sports, you can try the Banana Boat, which is thrilling and much safer. For kids and older adults, there is glass bottom boat ride, and Cellular Jail light show is a must for all ages.

CORBYN'S COVE BEACH

Corbyn’s cove doesn’t really qualify as a lazy enticing beach amidst the many that you will find in the Andamans, but it does offer a welcome relief from Port Blair’s city life. If you have a day’s stop in Port Blair, this could be a small induction into the sandy stretches that await you on your trip.

RADHANAGAR BEACH

Radhanagar beach is one of the most romantic destinations that cater to couple who come for their honeymoon. It is a well-known picnic spot where families also visit to enjoy their vacations. Nature and adventure lovers visit this island to enjoy the pristine landscape. In recent time, this island has encouraged tourist to visit in large numbers.

It is surrounded by pristine water where you can find turtles, large fishes and dolphins. At the first glance, from about 500 meters from the beach, all one can see is a hint of water and towering trees all around the shoreline. As you get closer to it, the stretch of the Radhanagar beach takes your breath away and leaves you in total awe!



ELEPHANT BEACH

One of the most coveted and isolated sandy spots, Elephant beach is a pit stop for snorkellers. You’ll need to take a boat to get here, but once you arrive, expect pristine water and untouched white sand. There is a bit of infrastructure here too, so carry food and water if you are planning on spending the day. Boats are available from Havelock Island.

LONG ISLAND BEACH

An unspoiled magical island in the Andamans, Long Island beach is strictly for the intrepid. A couple of restaurants and a paltry local population make this island less touristy, which is good news if you’re looking for some isolated spots to yourself. Long island is 82 km from Port Blair, and a boat service to and fro runs only four times a week.

ROSS AND SMITH ISLAND

A boat ride of 25 minutes off Diglipur gets you to the serene twin islands called Ross and Smith. The beaches here promise uncluttered vistas and soft waves sweep up along the shore. The islands are actually separated by a narrow stretch of sand, technically making it a single beach.

WANDOOR BEACH

Wandoor is one of the closest beaches with tourist access, since it lies in Port Blair. Expect a splash of colour during high season, with tourists dotting the pale sand. Boats to Jolly Buoy Island leave from here.

MAYABUNDER

Avis and Karmatung beaches in Mayabunder are situated in the north part of Middle Andaman. Relatively quiet, you will not find the buzz of Havelock here—which is a blessing if you want to avoid the tourist clutter.

CASURINA BEACH

Diglipur is the main base camp for those who want to hike up to Saddle Peak in the Andaman Islands. An added advantage of this long trip from Port Blair (300 km by road), is that you can relax by the Casurina beach here. It can be hours before you will bump into anyone.



NATURAL EXFOLIANTS IN YOUR KITCHEN

Skincare is a major component to looking and feeling wonderful, so if you want healthy skin, exfoliants are a great place to start. Old, dead skin cells can migrate from the deep layers of our skin to the epidermis, the skin's top layer. While our skin typically sheds dead skin cells, a new skin cell remains part of our skin before being removed. Unfortunately, if it doesn't naturally remove itself, what remains on our skin can make our complexion dull and rough — and in some cases, can interfere with oil secretion from our pores, which can cause unwanted blemishes.

Read on to discover the top natural exfoliants in your very own kitchen.

HONEY. A healthy and sweet addition to your skin care routine, unprocessed honey is a superb antiseptic. This is because it has anti-bacterial, anti-fungal and anti-viral benefits. Loaded with antioxidants, honey helps in protecting and repairing the skin, by reducing skin inflammation too. Mix it in your hydrating facial scrub and it acts as a great moisturiser too.

YOGURT. An excellent staple food in your kitchen and healthy diet regimen, yogurt is full of lactic acid, which contains alpha hydroxyl acid (an acid present in prescription skin care treatments). Combine it with milk, and yogurt works as an excellent skin-smoothing exfoliant. All you have to do is apply yogurt on any part of your body, let it stay for 20 minutes and then rinse.

Baking soda. A must-use in baking and odor control procedures, baking soda is used extensively in high-end spa treatments. Now they may not leak it to you, but baking soda is used extensively in microdermabrasion treatments, which contains sodium bicarbonate.



However, do note that the amount of baking soda you should be using on your skin should be quite moderate, as sensitive or mature skin can suffer from its harsh effects. Best would be to add a pinch of it to your facial cleanser in the morning and enjoy a spa-worthy treatment at home.

GROUND FRUIT SEEDS AND NUTS. Go for blackberry seeds or raspberry or ground almonds mixture and exfoliate your skin with these easily available ingredients. These ingredients help in removing dead cells, when massaged onto the skin in a smooth, circular motion. Avoid using sharp edged

ingredients. Infact, make a puree of the nuts, almonds and readily available fruit seeds and then apply them to your skin for a softer, smoother skin.

SEA SALT. If you are looking for a facial scrub that really helps in opening your pores, then mixing sea salt with water is a great idea. Scrubbing your face with it in the morning is a great homemade exfoliation procedure. An inexpensive and quite popular body treatment at spas, sea salt scrubs help in detoxifying the body by stimulating blood circulation through vasodilation of blood capillaries inside the skin.

Keratin hair treatments: What to expect

Longing for smoother, straighter hair? Keratin hair-straightening treatments are a popular option at salons.

If you're thinking about trying it, you should know this:

What Is Keratin? It's a protein that's naturally in your hair.

How It Works: A stylist applies a keratin hair-straightening product to your hair and then uses the heat of a flat iron to seal it in. The process takes about 90 minutes or longer, depending on your hair's length. Salon keratin products include Keratin Complex Smoothing Therapy by Coppola, Global Keratin Complex, the La-Brasiliana treatment, Brazilian Keratin Treatment, the Brazilian Blowout, and Brazilian Hair Straightening.

Time-Saving Tresses

If you usually style your hair straight, a keratin hair-straightening treatment could shorten your blow-dry time by 40% to 60%, says hair stylist Henri Borday of New York's Mizu salon and corporate educator for Global Keratin.

Farewell Frizz

You can forget about frizzy hair after



treatment. "You could walk out in moist or light rain and your hair won't change," Borday says.

Wait Before You Wash

You shouldn't wash your hair for three or four days after getting the treatment. That's because the solution takes time to work, he says.

Upkeep

After you get a keratin hair treatment, and after the don't-wash waiting period, you should use sodium-sulfate-free shampoo to help maintain the treatment.

How Long It Lasts

Expect the results to last two to 2 1/2 months.

FOOD CORNER



Chhola Bhatura

Ingredients

- 1 cup Chola
- Salt to taste
- 1 packet Tea leaves
- 1/2 tsp Zeera
- 2 piece Kadi Patta
- 1 Onion (1/2 thinly sliced and 1/2 to make paste)
- 1/8 piece of Ginger, 3 cloves of Garlic (add more or less to your taste, mince them)
- 1 tsp Garam Masala
- 1/2 big size Tomato and
- 2 tbsp Tomato Puree (or, 3/4 tomato)
- 1/4 tsp each Haldi, Mirchi, Dhaniya powder
- 1 tsp Chola Masala (if not doesn't matter)

For Onion Paste

- 1/2 Onion
- 2 Red Chillies
- Small piece of Cinnamon
- 3/4 piece Cloves
- 2 piece Elaichi

Method

- Let chola soak in water overnight.
- Next day pressure cook with salt to taste and 1 packet of tea or put little tea leaves, we get in India and wrap it in a cloth.
- This will change the color of chola to black. In a pan, in little oil, add Zeera, Kadi Patta.
- Then add 1/2 thinly sliced onion.
- Fry till golden brown.
- Then add minced garlic and ginger paste. Then add onion paste.
- Fry till oil comes out. Then add tomato and tomato puree.
- Add haldi, mirchi, dhaniya and chola masala.
- When masala is done, add chola and little water. Check salt.
- Let cook for few minutes.
- Garnish with chopped onion.

For Batura

- 1 cup Maida
- 1/4 cup Atta
- Salt to taste (1/4 tsp)
- 2 tsp Oil
- 3 tbs Curd

Method

- Add maida and atta. Add salt and the add oil.
- Mix with hand, till you can make balls from atta. Mix dahi. Mix very well.
- Add enough water to make atta dough.
- Put the dough in a plastic bag.
- Roll the bag to remove any air and tie it.
- Let stand atleast for 6 hours.(You can do it when you put chola in water, previous night).
- Heat the oil and make big size poories (batura).
- Eat with chola. Enjoy with Imli Chutney.

MAINTAIN THE SAME BODY WEIGHT AFTER QUITTING SMOKING

Gaining weight after quitting smoking is a serious concern for some people. While most people do put on some weight when they quit, it is usually only a modest amount.

The average amount of weight that people gain after stopping smoking is about four to five kilograms over five years. Most of the weight gain occurs in the year after quitting, particularly in the first three months.

People who quit smoking can have very different experiences with weight change, ranging from those who lose weight to a minority of people who gain over ten kilograms. Research shows that in the long term, the average body weight of people who have quit smoking is similar to people who have never smoked. If weight gain due to smoking cessation is something you fear, use the tips below to help you control your weight:

- Drink plenty of fluids including raw vegetable juices. It helps provide antioxidants to reduce free radical irritation during the detox period. Basil juice is beneficial for lung health. Also, keep sipping on warm water throughout the day.
- Follow a regular physical activity routine to boost your metabolism, burn calories and release the feel good hormone, dopamine. Exercise also breaks down fats, releasing it into the blood stream. Besides walking, other common aerobic exercises include cycling, swimming, playing squash, tennis, climbing stairs, spot marching, etc.
- Switch to complex carbs from refined and processed ones (maida and products). Include adequate



amounts of vegetables, whole pulses, nuts and lean meats (chicken) while having small and fibre-dense foods at regular intervals. This will prevent hunger pangs, provide consistent energy, and maintain metabolism.

- Set a regular meal pattern and avoid skipping meals. Feeling hungry may make you feel like reaching for a cigarette, but if you stick to a healthy pattern of three meals and two or three small snacks, you can avoid that feeling.

Smoking is an appetite suppressant

When you quit you may notice that, after a meal, you're not as full as you would have been had you lit up afterwards.

As a result, you could end up going back for seconds or raiding the snack cupboard between meals.

Nicotine has effect on metabolism

Nicotine raises resting metabolic rate by up to around 10%, meaning smokers burn calories at a slightly faster rate than non-smokers (unfair, I know). Don't panic though, once your body adjusts to your smoke-free lifestyle, your metabolic rate will begin to stabilise.

Cigarettes mess with your senses

You may not realise it but smoking can dull your taste buds. Once you kick the habit, your food might taste so damn good that you're tempted to load your plate in order to make the most of your new-found flavour-sensing skills.



EXERCISING MAY IMPROVE YOUR EATING HABITS

Exercising regularly may not only keep you in shape, but also improve your eating habits, a study has found.

The study, published in the International Journal of Obesity, looked at 2,680 young adults who were not exercising regularly or dieting.

Scientists found that after exercising for several weeks, formerly sedentary study participants were more likely to choose foods like lean meats, fruits and vegetables, while preferences for fried foods, sodas and other unhealthy options decreased.

Participants were instructed not to change their diets in any significant way, but it happened anyway.

Although this study did not examine the mechanism at work behind the changes, previous research has found that moderate exercise can reduce a preference for high-fat foods in animals through changes in dopamine levels.

Several studies also have shown a relationship between the intensity of exercise and the amount of appetite-regulating hormones in the body.

"The process of becoming physically active can influence dietary behaviour," said Molly Bray, of University of Texas at Austin in the US.

"One of the reasons that we need to promote exercise is for the healthy habits it can create in other areas. That combination is very powerful," said Bray.

What drives food-preference changes when people exercise would probably be consistent across a wide span of ages.

The study examined people between the ages of 18 and 35, a period of young adulthood critical for forming healthy habits.

Previous studies have found that considerable weight gain occurs during the college years and that being mildly to moderately overweight at age 20-22 increases the risk of obesity later in life.

"Many people in the study didn't know they had this active, healthy person inside them," Bray said.

"Some of them thought their size was inevitable. For many of these young people, they are choosing what to eat and when to exercise for the first time in their lives," she said.

Participants who said they exercised less than 30 minutes a week at the beginning of the study started 30-minute aerobic workouts three times a week for 15 weeks, with instructions not to change their diet in any significant way.

The exercise sessions consisted of 30 minutes of aerobic exercise at 65-85 per cent of the person's age- and gender-specific maximum heart rate, along with a 5-minute warmup and a 5-minute cool down.

Anti-depressants raise risk of intestinal bleeding

Those who are on anti-depressant pills to treat anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder, could be at a risk of intestinal bleeding, ranging from mild to severe, which can be fatal. Gastrointestinal bleeding or haemorrhage is all forms of bleeding in the gastrointestinal tract from the mouth to the rectum.

Patients taking anti-depressant drugs classified as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are 40 per cent more likely to develop severe gastrointestinal bleeding, according to a study in the Journal of the American Osteopathic Association. The SSRIs are most frequently prescribed as they are relatively low-cost, effective and safe, but they carry risks for gastrointestinal and intracranial bleeding — particularly when patients also use common over-the-counter pain relievers.

The most common and concerning



interactions occur with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), including ibuprofen and naproxen, anti-coagulants like warfarin or anti-platelet drugs such as aspirin and clopidogrel, the study said. An expert recommended doctors to ask about all medications their patients take, including over-the-

counter NSAIDs. The expert recommended doctors to monitor patients closely for symptoms of gastrointestinal bleeding during the first 30 days of SSRI therapy, especially if patients are taking concurrent medications that may increase bleeding risk.

PAGE SPONSORED BY

DR. SATISH AND GITANJLI ANAND



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

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



WHATSAPP ENABLES TOUCH ID AND FACE ID FOR IPHONES

Aiming to keep its messages on iPhones safe from prying eyes, Facebook-owned messaging app WhatsApp on Tuesday introduced Touch ID and Face ID functionality on the devices.

"At WhatsApp, we care deeply about private messaging and today, we're excited to introduce Touch ID and Face ID on iPhone to help prevent someone from taking your phone and reading your messages," the company said in a statement.

To enable the feature in WhatsApp, iPhone users need to go to the settings, account, privacy and then screen lock and turn on Touch ID or Face ID.

You have the option to select the amount of time before Touch ID or Face ID is prompted after WhatsApp is closed, the company added.

The privacy feature has been rolled out for users of iPhone 5s and later models and on iOS 9 OS and above. *Source: IANS*

NOW STREAM LIVE TOGETHER ON TWITTER'S PERISCOPE

Micro-blogging site Twitter on Tuesday globally rolled out the "Go Live Together" feature to its live-streaming app, Periscope, allowing users to go live and even add people from the audiences to the chat.

The chosen guests could be heard by everyone and can drop off at any time and broadcasters would be able to read and respond to chats, the company said in a statement.

"With this launch, we're enabling richer conversations by allowing viewers to call in, like a talk show, and join with their voice.

"This makes live conversations even more fluid, and allows for new possibilities and ways people can have conversations," said Kayvon Beykpour, Head of Product, Twitter. The feature is available for both, iOS and Android users. The micro-blogging site has been testing several new features including putting news stories top on the timeline.

Source: IANS

Mozilla Firefox 66 will block auto-play videos on desktop

Mozilla, the maker of the Open Source browser Firefox, is adding a new "auto-play blocking" feature to the search engine for desktop and Android users to block audible audio and video playbacks by default.

The feature would come as part of "Firefox 66" which is scheduled for general release on March 19.

"Any playback that happens before the user has interacted with a page via a mouse click, printable key press, or touch event, is deemed to be autoplay and will be blocked if it is potentially audible," Chris Pearce, Engineer, Mozilla wrote in a blog post on Monday.

However, Firefox would allow users to opt-in for the "autoplay sound" permission from the default setting of "Block" to "Allow" for certain websites where users prefer the audible autoplay of audio and video to be allowed.



MILKY WAY GALAXY IS 'WARPED, TWISTED' NOT FLAT, SAYS STUDY

The Milky Way's disk of stars is not stable or flat but instead becomes increasingly "warped" and twisted far away from the galaxy's centre, according to astronomers.

"We usually think of spiral galaxies as being quite flat, like Andromeda which you can easily see through a telescope," said Professor Richard de Grijs from Macquarie University in Australia.

To understand, the team used 1,339 "standard" stars, each up to 100,000 brighter than our sun, to map the real shape of our home galaxy.

The new 3D map of our galaxy showed that the warped Milky Way disc also contains young stars and confirmed that the warped spiral pattern is caused by torque from the spinning of the Milky Way's massive inner disc of stars, according to the study published in the *Nature Astronomy* journal.

From a great distance, our galaxy would look like a thin disk of stars that orbit once every few hundred million years around its central region, where hundreds of billions of stars, together with a huge mass of dark matter, provide the gravitational "glue" to hold it all together.



But the pull of gravity becomes weaker far away from the Milky Way's inner regions. In the galaxy's far outer disk, the hydrogen atoms making up most of the Milky Way's gas disk are no longer confined to a thin plane, but they give the disk an S-like warped appearance. "It is notoriously difficult to determine distances from the Sun to parts of the Milky Way's outer gas disc

without having a clear idea of what that disc actually looks like," said Xiaodian Chen from the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing.

"This research provides a crucial updated map for studies of our galaxy's stellar motions and the origins of the Milky Way's disk," added Licai Deng, also from the Chinese Academy of Sciences. *Source: IANS*

Take control of your data to stay safe online: Google



Securing the phone screen with a unique password and keeping a tab on the permissions given to apps are some steps smartphone users can take to keep themselves safe online, tech giant Google said on Monday.

These recommendations are part of Google's latest campaign '#SecurityCheckKiya' that urges users to take control of their data. The campaign is being initiated ahead of Safer Internet Day on February 5.

"As technology continues to change the way we live, work, and play, users want to know how best to ensure their safety on the web. Helping people manage their privacy and security is integral to everything we do," Google India Director, Trust and Safety Sunita Mohanty said.

She said Google builds products with strong security protections at their core to continuously and automatically detect and protect users' data.

"...we notify you when you've granted

access to third-party sites or apps, but it's really important for you to understand the information that you share with these apps or sites," Mohanty said in a blog.

She explained that it is important that users also conduct a health checkup of their Google Account to ensure safety of their data.

"Overall there is growing interest among users to understand how they can make their online experience safer... while this is good, we believe there is still a need to improve user awareness, on how to stay safe online and protect their data," she said.

Mohanty said providing simple actionable steps work best with users - especially young and those coming online for the first time.

"This year, we will continue to educate users on the safety they can do, so they can take more control of their online security and privacy," she added.

Source: PTI

Hubble finds dwarf galaxy in our cosmic neighbourhood

Using the Hubble Space Telescope, astronomers have discovered a dwarf galaxy in a globular cluster which is only 30 million light-years away.

The team used the NASA/ESA (European Space Agency) telescope to study white dwarf stars within the globular cluster NGC 6752.

The aim of their observations was to use these stars to measure the age of the globular cluster, but in the process they made an unexpected discovery, according to the study published in the journal *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society: Letters*.

In the outer fringes of the area observed with Hubble's camera, a compact collection of stars was visible. After a careful analysis of their brightnesses and temperatures, the astronomers concluded that these stars did not belong to the cluster—which is part of the Milky Way—but rather they are millions of light-years more distant.



NEW E-COMMERCE RULES

Headache for Flipkart, Amazon; mixed bag for customers

NEW DELHI (TIP): While the government's tighter FDI rules for selling products online may help domestic retailers at the cost of Walmart and Amazon's India e-commerce ambitions, eventually, customers may be in for some benefit and some loss. The government announced new rules late in December 2018, acting upon complaints from domestic retailers that e-tailers such as Flipkart and Amazon were eating up their market.

While the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) welcomed the move, industry bodies US India Chambers of Commerce (USAIC) and US India Strategic and Partnership Forum (USISPF) said that it will adversely affect FDI in India. The move might be a big headache to foreign companies in India as this would necessitate a restructuring of operations by Amazon India and Flipkart, experts said.

Walmart hit

The new rules may mean a setback to Walmart, which just put in \$16 billion into acquiring Flipkart, ostensibly to leverage Flipkart's huge online presence to sell its products. L. Badri Narayanan, Partner, Lakshmikumaran & Sridharan Attorneys, said to FE Online. This would leave the Flipkart acquisition as only a strategic investment for Walmart to counter the dominance of Amazon and others in this space, Narayanan added.

Further, "the investors will either have to restructure themselves or will not be able to use the platform of such e-commerce entity for their inventory," Daizy Chawla, Senior Partner, Singh & Associates, told FE Online, without specifically referring to Walmart's acquisition of Flipkart. Big companies made huge investments in Indian e-commerce in the absence of clarity about the definition of 'control' over the vendor, Daizy Chawla said, adding that now the clarification have put these companies in a fix.

However, since Walmart's cash and carry business is not affected by this



change, the company is still free to wholesale, and its products will continue to come into the Indian market through this route, Badri Narayanan said.

In-house brands

The new rules effectively seek to make products available to a wider customer base on equal terms, rather than on a particular platform on preferential basis. Under the new rules, Amazon's and Flipkart's own vendors Cloudtail and Retailnet will not be allowed to sell their products on their respective marketplace at all, the Kotak note said.

This would mean that such sellers will have to make their products available on other platforms too, on an arm's length basis, eventually offering more choice to consumers. E-commerce giants use own platforms to push their in-house products such as Amazon Echo and Solimo, often over other brands, with better placement, exclusive deals, and push notifications. Now, no product can be Amazon or Flipkart exclusive.

Customers: Win some, lose some

The impact of this policy may not be as much on the ultimate customers as long as the retail platform continues to ensure the quality and choice of products from independent suppliers that they will now need to source more from, Reeba Chacko, Partner & Head, Corporate, Cyril

Amarchand Mangaldas, said to FE Online.

Given that this space is still growing and even traditional retailers are entering the online space, the ultimate consumer could even benefit, she said.

Also, cashback services, which were once exclusive to certain vendors will now have to be rendered to all the vendors in a non-discriminatory way, according to the new rules.

However, Daizy Chawla of Singh & Associates disagrees. "The major loss for the customers will be the non availability discounts/cash back/exclusivity the e-retailers were offering with regard to particular vendor's product as the press note provides for 'fair and non-discriminatory' selling," she said.

What this means for FDI in India

USAIC and USISPF have flagged the new policy saying that it is quite restrictive. However, Daizy Chawla of Singh & Associates said she doesn't think the new rules will curb the influence of foreign retailers/corporations in the Indian market. "The press note no-where restricts the entry of foreign retailers/corporations and have only defined the extent of the involvement/participation of e-commerce entity in any B2B e-commerce activities performed by the Vendor registered with such e-commerce platform," she said.

Source: Financial Express



MICROSOFT INVESTS IN 'BORING AI' STARTUP VALUED AT \$2.75 BILLION

Databricks, which says it makes software to help companies satisfy their "boring AI" needs, raised a new round of funding that values the business at \$2.75 billion. Microsoft was among the investors in the \$250 million financing, the company said on Tuesday. Venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz led the deal, with contributions from Coatue Management and New Enterprise Associates. The investment brings Databricks' total fundraising haul to almost \$500 million since the company was founded in 2013.

Databricks sells tools that pool a company's databases and apply a form of artificial intelligence to search for meaningful information. The San Francisco-based startup notched \$100 million in annual recurring revenue last year and said its subscription sales tripled last quarter from a year earlier. Viacom Inc., HP Inc. and Cisco Systems Inc. are among more than 2,000 customers of the service. Microsoft promotes a version of the software as part of its cloud product, Azure.

Ali Ghodsi, chief executive officer of Databricks, said he plans to use the new capital to hire, open new offices and make headway into other industries, such as media, retail and government. Part of his pitch: Databricks "satisfies the needs of big enterprise customers that want to do boring AI use cases."

Apple Augmented-Reality headset exec leaves company

Avi Bar-Zeev, a manager on Apple's secret augmented-reality headset team, said on Monday that he left the company.

Bar-Zeev joined the company in 2016 as Apple ramped up its hiring to build an AR headset and served as a senior manager on the team, Bloomberg News reported last year. On his LinkedIn profile, which disclosed his departure, Bar-Zeev said he led 'experience prototyping for a new effort' and 'developed key prototypes to rapidly prove concepts.'

The former Google, Amazon.com and Microsoft manager said on Twitter that he 'had the best exit one can imagine' and 'won't comment on any specific product plans.' Former Dolby executive Mike Rockwell runs Apple's AR team as vice president of augmented and virtual reality.

Apple has been working on a headset that would handle some iPhone functions, including messaging, calling, watching video and maps navigation, Bloomberg News has reported.

Reliance Communications goes to bankruptcy court

Reliance Communications Ltd (RCom) on Friday said it will seek fast track resolution through National Company Law Tribunal, the court that deals with bankruptcy cases, to resolve its debt position.

The company said lenders had not received any proceeds from its asset monetization plans, and that its overall debt resolution process had not made any progress. Over twelve months, talks with forty lenders to reach a consensus has been impossible and has driven them to the bankruptcy court, the debt-laden telecom company said.

RCom, controlled by businessman Anil Ambani, owed banks \$7 billion as of March 2017 when it last made public its debt level, and more to vendors.

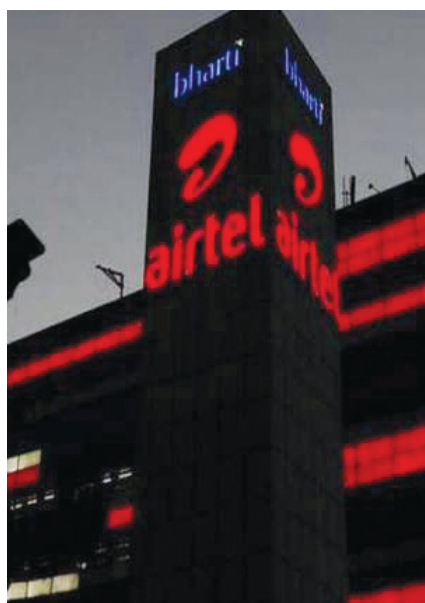
The company has struggled under heavy debt and reported a string of losses during a price war, triggered by the market entry of Reliance Industries' telecoms venture Jio Infocomm, owned by Mukesh Ambani - Asia's richest person and Anil Ambani's older brother.

Telecom trouble: Moody's downgrades Bharti to junk Ba1

Moody's Investors Service on Tuesday cut the country's second largest telecom company by subscribers from Baa3 to junk Ba1, the lowest investment-grade, after placing its credit ratings of review for downgrade in November 2018.

This is for the first time that Bharti's credit rating has been downgraded to below investment grade by an international agency. This means that if Bharti chooses to raise funds overseas it will have to pay more. The downgrade is also a commentary on the country's telecom sector and incumbent operators, including Bharti Airtel which are faced with declining tariffs leading to lower realisations as they fight a tariff war with Reliance Jio.

"The downgrade reflects uncertainty as to whether or not the company's



profitability, cash flow situation and debt levels can improve sustainably and materially, given the competitive dynamics in the Indian telecom market," Annalisa DiChiara, Moody's vice president and senior credit officer, said. Bharti reported Ebitda of Rs 26,500 crore for the 12 months ending December 31, representing a 15.5% year-over-year contraction. Moreover, the profitability of its core Indian mobile segment — which contributes around 37% of Ebitda — remained low, generating just Rs 9,800 crore over the same period.

"A significant recovery in cash flow from the core Indian mobile segment is needed to strengthen the company's credit quality and support greater financial flexibility," DiChiara, who's also Moody's lead analyst for Bharti, added.

contd from Page 1

Trump Speaks of conciliation...

cooperation, compromise, and the common good." However, he quickly swiveled to the migrant caravan - a concept Mr. Trump has often used to fire up his voter base and back his claims for a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

"The lawless state of our southern border is a threat to the safety, security, and financial well-being of all America," Mr. Trump said. This is a statement not substantiated by the facts of immigration and crime at the border.

Mr. Trump called on his audience to "defend our very dangerous southern border" and portrayed the issue in class terms. "No issue better illustrated the divide between America's working class and America's political class than illegal immigration."

Among the guests at Tuesday's show were the family of a couple who had been killed allegedly by an "illegal alien".

Mr. Trump has frequently demonized illegal migrants to get support for his hardline on illegal immigration and his demand for a border wall, this despite data showing that more crimes are committed by native-born citizens than by undocumented migrants in the U.S.

SMART BARRIER: Of the border wall, Mr. Trump said: "I'll get it built". His demand for a wall and the Democrats' refusal to allow a physical structure across the 2,000-mile border had shut the government down for a record 35 days over December and January. The President and Congressional Republicans - not all of whom support his wall idea - will have to come up with a deal by February 15 when key parts of the federal government will run out of budgetary authorization again.

"This is a smart, strategic see-through steel barrier... deployed in the areas... having the greatest need," Mr. Trump said of his proposal, suggesting that there may be scope for an agreement with Democrats who have showed a willingness to consider a "smart wall" and increased money for border security.

In what appeared to be a thinly veiled threat to the ongoing Mueller investigation and Democrats who now chair powerful House oversight committees, Mr. Trump said: "An economic miracle is taking place in the United States - and the only thing that can stop it are foolish wars, politics or ridiculous partisan investigations."

"If there is going to be peace and legislation, there cannot be war and investigation," he added.

At least one part of Mr. Trump's speech had unintended consequences for him. Taking credit for the economy, the President said: "No one has benefited more from our thriving economy than women, who have filled 58% of the newly created jobs last year;" a comment that resulted in a standing ovation, which was joined by Democratic women dressed in white for the evening to mark 100 years of the women's right to vote. They were elected to the House after November's midterms, a reaction to Mr. Trump's first two years in office.

The guests for the evening included two individuals, both African Americans - one a first-time non-violent drug offender pardoned by Mr. Trump and the other, the first person to be released by the First Step Act, a criminal reform Bill passed in 2018 with bipartisan support.

BIPARTISAN THEMES: In terms of other bipartisan themes, Mr. Trump offered to work together on infrastructure, push to lower prescription drug prices, increase paid parental leave and said he would increase funding for childhood cancer research.

The President also said he would ask Democrats and Republicans for more funding for the eradication of HIV in America within a decade.

LATE-TERM ABORTION: Mr. Trump - in a policy that will particularly hold special appeal to his evangelical base - said he would ask Congress to prohibit the late-term abortion of children. In terms of foreign policy, there were no major surprises or deviations from his themes: China and trade, Iran being the leading sponsor of terror and condemnation of the Maduro regime in Venezuela.

In terms of foreign policy, there were no major surprises or deviations from his themes: China and trade and Iran being the leading sponsor of terror. The U.S. President announced that he would meet North Korean leader Kim Jong-un at the end of February in Vietnam.

"If I had not been elected President of the U.S., we would right now, in my opinion, be in a major war with North Korea with

potentially millions of people killed," Mr. Trump said. On Afghanistan, Mr. Trump said of U.S. negotiations with stakeholders including the Taliban, "We do not know whether we will achieve an agreement...the hour has come to at least try for peace."

Mr. Trump's speech dwelt on military themes both at the start and as it wound down. He introduced among his guests, a former American soldier, Herman Zeitchik, who had helped liberate the Dachau concentration camp and sitting next to Mr. Zeitchik, Joshua Kaufman, who had been a child inmate of Dachau at the time of the liberation.

Talking of the sacrifices Americans had made in this past, towards the end of his speech, Mr. Trump said, "I am asking you to choose greatness."

President Trump was originally scheduled to deliver the SOTU on January 25, but Speaker Nancy Pelosi withdrew invitation to the President, saying it could not take place while the government is shut down. It was only after the reopening of the government that Nancy Pelosi relented and the SOTU was scheduled for February 5. *(With inputs from agencies)*

Indian Students' Future in...

not ready to give them clean chit for taking part in the 'Pay to Stay' scheme despite India's demand that they "may have been duped" and to release them "at the earliest."

The Department of Homeland Security set up the fake university in Farmington Hills, Michigan to target foreign students who wanted to stay in the U.S. without proper authorization. In a separate criminal case, eight people of Indian origin, almost all of them from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, were charged with being recruiters, taking kickbacks and cash in exchange for referring students to the University of Farmington.

HOW WERE STUDENTS LURED?: The fake university was set up in 2015 to try to catch foreign nationals who had initially travelled to the US on student visas and wanted to stay in the country, US media reported.

A website for the University of Farmington showed pictures of students in classes and libraries or relaxing around a grassy campus. The website used stock images of students working.

It advertised tuition for undergraduates at \$8,500 (£6,500) a year and \$11,000 a year for graduate students. It also had a fake Facebook page with a calendar of events.

But court papers released last week showed that the employees of the University of Farmington were undercover agents for the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE). The "campus" was an office at a business park in a Detroit suburb.

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA PLEA: Government of India has continued to closely monitor and take proactive measures to deal with the detention. A demarche was made to the Embassy of the United States in New Delhi by the Ministry of External Affairs, expressing concern over the dignity and well being of the detained students. "We underlined that students, who may have been duped into enrolling in the 'University' should be treated differently from those recruiters who have duped them. We have urged the U.S. side to share full details and regular updates of the students with the Government, to release them from detention at the earliest and not to resort to deportation against their will", the MEA said in a statement. Once deported under court orders, the students may be banned from reentry to the U.S.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY STAND: But the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) says that the students were aware of their crime to fraudulently remain in the country. "All participants in this scheme knew that the University of Farmington had no instructors or classes and were aware they were committing a crime in an attempt to fraudulently remain in the United States", a State Department spokesperson said in a statement on February 4. However, US immigration and customs enforcement (ICE) has said that the students are not in custody - it is an "administrative arrest" - and who have not been served with "Notice to Appear" before an immigration court do not have court proceedings.

EMBASSY OF INDIA REACHES OUT TO STUDENTS IN DETENTION: Meanwhile, the Indian Embassy in Washington has made all efforts to reach out to those students and is providing them with legal help. The Embassy has opened a 24/7 hotline to assist the students. Indian Ambassador to the US, Harsh Vardhan Shringla, assured that the embassy officials have been travelling across the US and meeting students at the detention centres. Speaking to ANI the envoy said, "Each of our five Consulates in the

country has identified a nodal officer who could be contacted for any issue in this situation. We have been given instructions from the foreign secretary that this should be handled with the highest priority, to be proactive in helping our students and we have been doing that. The students can be assured that they are not alone, the weight of the Government of India is behind them."

As on Feb 5, Indian Embassy and Consulates have obtained consular access to the 117 of them, by proactively visiting 36 different detention sites through the length and breadth of the country. Consular access to the remaining students, estimated at about a dozen, are continuing. The MEA said that they remain in touch with the U.S. authorities, both at the federal and local level, 'to ensure and satisfy ourselves about humane and dignified treatment of the Indian students and custom-sensitive dietary and living arrangement for them during the period of their detention.'

Though Government of India continues to attach high priority to the well being of the detained students, a sense of fear is already well spread among other Indian students here.

THE FALLOUT : According to a report by The Hindustan Times, many Indian students from Farmington have been leaving the country. "The number of those who have left the United States on their own could not be immediately ascertained but Indian officials monitoring the situation said they have heard credibly from the Indian American community that students not in custody have been leaving, sometimes in groups", says the report.

An annual survey by the Institute of International Education showed last year that China, India and South Korea together sent 56.1 percent of all international students in the United States in 2017-18. There is an apprehension that this incident could impact future enrollment of aspiring Indians of fulfilling their American dream. *(TIP Bureau / Bidisha Roy)*

House Launches New...

Schiff said the investigation will include "the scope and scale" of Russian intervention in the 2016 presidential election, the "extent of any links and/or coordination" between Russians and Trump's associates, whether foreign actors have sought to hold leverage over Trump or his family and associates, and whether anyone has sought to obstruct any of the relevant investigations.

The announcement came one day after Trump criticized "ridiculous partisan investigations" in his State of the Union speech. Schiff dismissed those comments Wednesday.

"We're going to do our jobs and the president needs to do his," Schiff said. "Our job involves making sure that the policy of the United States is being driven by the national interest, not by any financial entanglement, financial leverage or other form of compromise." The California Democrat also announced a delay in an upcoming closed-door interview with Trump's former fixer and personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, "in the interests of the investigation." The interview was originally scheduled for Friday. It will now be held on Feb. 28, Schiff said.

Schiff said he could not speak about the reason for the delay. Hours after the meeting was pushed back, a document was filed under seal in the criminal case against Cohen brought by special counsel Robert Mueller's office. The court's docket did not contain any details about the nature of the document.

Special counsel spokesman Peter Carr declined comment, as did Lanny Davis, an attorney for Cohen. The intelligence committee also voted Wednesday to send Mueller the transcripts from the panel's earlier Russia investigation. Republicans ended that probe in March, concluding there was no evidence of conspiracy or collusion between Russia and Trump's presidential campaign. Democrats strongly objected at the time, saying the move was premature.

Since then, both Cohen and Trump's longtime adviser Roger Stone have been charged with lying to the panel. Cohen pleaded guilty in November to lying to the House and Senate intelligence committees about his role in a Trump business proposal in Moscow. He acknowledged that he misled lawmakers by saying he had abandoned the project in January 2016 when he actually continued pursuing it for months after that.

Stone pleaded not guilty to charges last month that he lied to the House panel about his discussions during the 2016 election about WikiLeaks, the anti-secrecy group that released thousands of emails stolen from Democrats. Stone is also charged with obstructing the House probe by encouraging one of his associates, New York radio host Randy Credico, to refuse to testify before the House panel in an effort to conceal Stone's false statements.

(Read full story on www.theindianpanorama.news)

THE INDIAN PANORAMA

PRESIDENT/PUBLISHER: Prof. Indrajit S. Saluja
VICE PRESIDENT: Chitagam Saluja
CHIEF EDITOR: Prof Indrajit S. Saluja
ASSISTANT EDITOR: Bidisha Roy
GRAPHICS DIRECTOR: Om Parkash Malik
DIRECTOR ADMINISTRATION: Gauri Beri
CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS:
Baldev Singh / BJ Videos
Gunjesh Desai / Masala Junction
Jay Mandal,
Mohammad Jaffer/ SnapIndia

Mohammad Shahzad, Zia Khan
Nisha Rani
Vaaho Photographers
Vijay Shah -Photo Journalist.
DISTRIBUTOR : Sukhwinder Singh
CORRESPONDENTS :
SACRAMENTO: Parminder S. Aujla
NEW YORK : Chitagam
FRESNO: Tarlochan Singh
DALLAS: Harjit Dhesi, Amarjit Dhillon
OVERSEAS CORRESPONDENTS

DELHI BUREAU CHIEF: Ashishpal Singh
CHANDIGARH: Manjit Sidhu
LUDHIANA: A.S. Arora, R.P.Sharma

The Indian Panorama
P.O. Box No. 190067, South Richmond Hill, NY 11419,
Tel: 646-247-9458
Email: editor@theindianpanorama.com
DALLAS EDITION
P.O. BOX 121695, ARLINGTON, TX 76012
Lovlien Kaurr, VP & Bureau Chief

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

DISCLAIMER

The Indian Panorama assumes no responsibility for the claims made in advertisements. We only sell space. Views published in the newspaper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the newspaper. All rights are reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission in writing from The Indian Panorama is prohibited.

VASANT PANCHAMI

THE FESTIVAL THIS YEAR FALLS ON SATURDAY, 9TH FEB

Vasant Panchami is an important Indian festival celebrated every year in the month of Magh according to the Hindu calendar. Celebrated on the fifth day of Magh, the day falls somewhere in the months of February or March according to the Gregorian calendar. The significance of the day lies in the worship of Goddess Saraswati, symbol of wisdom and also the onset of spring season.

According to the popular belief, the origins of this festival lie in Aryan period. Aryans came and settled in India through Khyber Pass, crossing the Saraswati River among many others. Being a primitive civilization, most of their development took place along the banks of the River Saraswati. Thus, River Saraswati began to be associated with fertility and knowledge. It is then that the day began to be celebrated.

Also known as Saraswati Puja, it is considered to be the birthday of goddess Saraswati. She is the deity of wisdom and learning. Along with goddess Parvati and Laxmi, she is one of the three most important deities in Hindu culture. She represents all kinds of knowledge including science, arts, crafts and other skills. Known for her calmness and serenity, she is often shown seated on a white lotus with four hands and wearing a pure silk white sari.

The four hands of the deity symbolize the different sides of human personality in learning. When seated on a peacock, she signifies that wisdom suppresses ego. On this day people observe various kinds of religious activities and large numbers of Hindus visit temples. Goddess Saraswati is dressed in yellow garments, yellow being the symbol of spiritual knowledge. People also dress up in yellow clothes and offer yellow flowers to deities in the temples. At homes people prepare yellow sweets and dishes such as Kesar Halwa and distribute among relatives and friends. Being an auspicious occasion, children are taught their first words, hence, marking the beginning of their learning period. Schools and colleges organize special pujas to worship goddess Saraswati. Students place their books at the deity's feet and seek her blessing for better learning. Other religious activities of the day include feeding Brahmans and performing the traditional ritual of ancestral worshipping known as Pitr-Tarpan. On this day, people also perform pujas to worship the God of Love, Kamadeva. Children fly kites on this day and a famous kite festival is observed in Ferozepur, Punjab. Basant Panchami symbolizes the beginning of spring, denoted by flowering and blooming of trees and crops. Signs of new and fresh life on trees and crops indicate the end of winter and beginning of happiness and joy.

The festival of Basant Panchami is a widely celebrated festival which marks the end of the winter season and the beginning of spring. Goddess Saraswati, the goddess of arts and knowledge, is the presiding deity of the festival.

The festival falls on the fifth day of the Indian month of Magh and in the months of January-February according to the Gregorian calendar. The color which denotes the celebration of this festival is yellow and during the entire season, the whole atmosphere is filled with this vibrant color. People wear yellow clothes and prepare yellow sweets which are distributed among their loved ones. The goddess of knowledge is worshipped especially by students and academicians. Though it is celebrated primarily by the Hindus, Jains and Buddhists worship her too as she is the benefactor of all written and performed arts.

Rituals & Tradition

The festival is celebrated with great pomp and show in all parts of India. On this auspicious day, the Hindus get up early in the morning and worship the Sun God after taking bath, if possible, in the sacred river



Ganges. Then they clad themselves in yellow, as it signifies spirituality and prosperity. The color yellow also signifies the color of the ripened spring crop. Festive sweets are prepared at home using saffron, as it helps in deriving the color yellow. The goddess is dressed in yellow and the deity is worshipped by the worshippers who are dressed in yellow too. Later, swings are tied to the trees and women have fun singing traditional folk songs to greet the beautiful season of spring. After these rituals, sweets are distributed among the loved ones. The traditional sweet which goes along with the spirit of the festival is 'Kesar Halwa' and 'Sweet Rice' which are prepared with saffron to add yellow color to the preparation.

Schools and other teaching institutions organize cultural programs on this day, including the worshipping of goddess

Saraswati. Along with these rituals, another important part of this festival is introducing children to the world of knowledge, hence marking a beginning to their learning phase. Floral designs are made in front porch of houses to signify the arrival of spring. Colorful kites are arranged by children and the sky gets filled with numerous kites on this auspicious day.

Kite Festival

The festival of Vasant Panchami is celebrated to welcome the season of spring, a season when the earth replenishes itself. Spring also denotes pleasant weather, during which calm wind whistles in your ear and caresses your face with its light cool touch. It is the season when the weather is neither hot nor cold, when the wind has a cooling effect but not the kind to chill your bones. This kind of weather reminds you of a number of things including Basant Panchami, the primary festival of this season. It is one of the most colorful and wonderful festivals of this effervescent nation. The festival brings in a number of colors in the form of colorful attires. Being the color of spring, yellow gets into vogue as it also denotes prosperity, happiness, intellect and energy.

Flying kites is a sport much popular in India. In a clear and pleasant weather, you will see plenty of kites in the sky. Being a part of Vasant Panchami, kite flying competitions take place during this festival. Fighter kites were designed in India and Pakistan for decades. Ferozepur, a small town in Punjab, is famous for this sport and a number of children including both girls and boys purchase kites and fly them. Popular among adults too, they get on to their building's terrace along with the children, play songs at high volume and dance with the rhythm while flying kites.

The event of kite flying is filled with a lot of enthusiasm and thrill. Both skilled and unskilled participants bring in their fancy colorful kites and the joy they receive when they cut their opponent's kite is a sight to cherish. With pomp and show the kites are flown and interesting kite fights take place thereafter. Children learn to fly kites from their elders, who themselves like flying them a lot.

Kite fighting being the main attraction, people from around the world come to this place to experience the fun involved with this colorful festival. The kites are flown with the help of a string called 'Manjha'. There are a number of such competitions which are organized during the festival. The competition is always there to rule the sky and one has to keep his kite flying till the end to be the winner. There are judges too, some of whom decides which the most beautiful kite is while others decide which is the biggest. The festival brings with it colors in form of greenery and colorful kites.

PAGE SPONSORED BY

ARISH K. SAHANI

Serving Since 1972

Please Call or Write for Your Insurance Needs

Arish K Sahani (Father)

Shiv Sahani (Son)

Priya Sahani Sood (Daughter)

718 - 271 - 1906

arish.sahani@gmail.com



"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."

2ND WOMEN'S T20I

New Zealand beat India in last-ball thriller

AUCKLAND (TIP): It could have gone either way, but New Zealand made the most of a few Indian lapses on the field and held their nerve just a shade better than their opponents to clinch a last-ball win in the second T20I.

The four-wicket win, achieved with a quick single, gave New Zealand a 2-0 lead in the three-match series, after they had won the first convincingly by 23 runs.

Batting first after losing the toss, India put up 135 for six, lower than they had within their range when Smriti Mandhana and Jemimah Rodrigues were stroking the ball freely early on.

After pulling things back nicely, New Zealand had Suzie Bates leading a strong top-order show before a clutch of wickets brought India back into the match. But a series of misses on the field, especially from wicketkeeper Taniya Bhatia, allowed New Zealand to stay in the hunt, keeping the target within their grasp, and pull off victory despite a good last over from Mansi Joshi.

Chasing 136, the old firm of Bates and Sophie Devine gave New Zealand a 33-run opening-wicket stand in just 4.4 overs before Devine was sent back by Radha Yadav, bowled off her inside edge. Caitlin Gurrey fell soon after, but Bates and captain Amy Satterthwaite put the chase back on the rails with a stroke-filled 61-run stand for the third wicket.

Both of them found the boundary often enough, and with the 100 of the innings coming up in 11.2 overs, it looked like a stroll to the finish line for New Zealand. But Poonam Yadav first accounted for Satterthwaite, and a double-wicket over from Arundhati



Suzie Bates led the New Zealand batting effort.

Reddy - including the scalp of Bates, for a 52-ball 62 - changed the script completely.

It came down to 15 needed from two overs and, then, nine from six balls, which became five from five after Katey Martin smashed Joshi's first ball through the covers for four. But Joshi hit Martin's stumps with the very next ball, and then there was a lot of scrambling, an overthrow, shies at the stumps that just went wide, and Hannah Rowe finished it off with a quick single after playing the last ball to the backward point region.

The first half of the match belonged to Rodrigues and, to a lesser extent, Mandhana. New opening bat Priya Punia had another disappointing outing, but Mandhana, in the form of her life, got together

with Rodrigues to put together 63 quick runs in just over seven overs. When she fell, becoming Rosemary Mair's first victim of the day, India were at a solid 71 for two in the tenth over.

But with no batter giving Rodrigues the support she needed - none of the others got into double figures - India couldn't quite build on the platform Mandhana and Rodrigues had provided. Rodrigues, on 31 when Mandhana fell, went on to score her fifth T20I half-century and batted till the penultimate over, ending with 72 in 53 balls, with six fours and a six.

But with just 63 runs coming after the halfway mark compared to 72 in the first ten overs, India might have finished around ten runs short, which made the difference in the end.

Hardik Pandya a match-winner, happy to see him back soon: Ravi Shastri

India chief coach Ravi Shastri is known as much for his cricketing skills as he is for being one of the best man managers in world cricket at the moment. And with Hardik Pandya under the scanner after the recent controversy in the chat show Koffee With Karan, there was no better person than the chief coach to guide the all-rounder and show him the way forward. After all, Shastri is someone who is known to play hard and party harder, but within limits.

Speaking to Cricbuzz, Shastri said that he did have a chat with the talented all-rounder and is happy to see him back on the field rather than spending time off it due to the suspension that he was handed by the BCCI.

"He is a match-winner. As a coach, I was just happy to see him back as soon as possible after the suspension was lifted. The whole team was happy to see him back rather than farting around in India and waiting for things to happen. I am glad things were fast tracked and he is back where he belongs on the cricket field," he said.

Asked about his chat with the all-rounder, Shastri said: "I have told him brush it off (the repercussions following his comments on the chat show 'Koffee with Karan'). Consider it a rap on the knuckles, a hard rap on the knuckles, and now move on. I have told him, 'You are born for better stuff'."

"Who doesn't make mistakes? He has not made a mistake where you can book him for anything. I think the BCCI handled it well with a proper rap on his knuckles (for whatever was said). I don't want to comment on the BCCI process, though. Only, that they brought him back to where he belongs. I am happy to see him where he belongs, on the cricket field."

Pandya joined the team during the ODI series against New Zealand and has been a constant contributor since with both bat and ball.



Ricky Ponting named Australia's assistant coach for World Cup

MELBOURNE (TIP): Former captain Ricky Ponting has been appointed as an assistant coach of Australia's men's team for the 50-over World Cup in England later this year, the country's cricket board said on Friday.

The 44-year-old Ponting will work with Australia's batsmen for the May 30-July 14 tournament, with current batting coach Graeme Hick focussing on preparing the side for the Ashes tour in England, starting in August.

Ponting's appointment is the second major shakeup in Australia's backroom staff in as many days, with bowling coach David Saker resigning "effective immediately" on Thursday. Saker has been replaced temporarily by Troy Cooley.

Australia won their fifth World Cup title on home soil four years ago and head coach Justin Langer said that Ponting's experience in leading the team to two of those victories would be invaluable in England.

"Ricky knows what's required to win World Cups, and I know he will be a valuable mentor to not just the batting group, but the broader squad as we focus our attention on defending our World Cup title," Langer said.

"Ricky and I have worked together with the Australian men's team in the past, he is an extremely driven coach who is fully invested in the players development and improving Australian cricket." *Source: Reuters*

Chris Gayle back in West Indies team for England ODI series

Opening batsman Chris Gayle has been recalled to the West Indies one-day international (ODI) squad for the first two games of this month's five-match series against England.

Gayle has not played for West Indies since he scored 73 in an 18-run ODI defeat against Bangladesh last July and opted out of the tour to India and Bangladesh in October and November.

The 39-year-old, who has scored 9,727 runs and racked up 23 centuries in 284 ODIs, was recalled by the West Indies cricket board as it fine-tunes the squad ahead of the World Cup in England next May.

Gayle was West Indies' highest run scorer in the previous World Cup in 2015, making 340 runs at an average of 56.66.

Spin bowler Ashley Nurse has returned from injury while 23-year-old wicketkeeper Nicholas Pooran earns his first call-up to the national side.

"He (Pooran) is clearly a young player with undoubted talent and we believe he can add value to our middle order," chairman of selectors Courtney Browne said in a statement.

"As we continue our Cricket World Cup preparations, the upcoming series against the top-ranked ODI side is a great opportunity to gauge where we are as a team."

The one-day international series begins in Barbados on Feb. 20 with the first two matches to be played at the Kensington Oval in Bridgetown.

West Indies are 2-0 up in the test series, with the third and final test starting on Saturday in St Lucia.



United Nations urges Japan to let children be children

GENEVA (TIP): The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on Thursday urged Japan to do more to let children be children, free of excessive pressures or corporal punishment in school or at home. The human rights watchdog also urged Japanese authorities to look into the root causes of rising adolescent suicide rates, now at a 30-year high.

A total of 250 children took their own lives in the year to last March, according to authorities, while overall suicide numbers are in steady decline.

"We urged (Japan) to take measures to ensure that children enjoy their childhood, without their childhood and development being harmed by the competitive nature of society," Kirsten Sandberg, one of a panel of 18 independent experts, told a briefing.

Japanese law prohibits corporal punishment in schools but the ban is "not effectively implemented", while many children also endure it at home, the UN panel said.

Japan was shocked last March by the death of 5-year-old Yua Funato, who left handwritten notes seeking forgiveness from her abusive parents. The UN panel said children should have access to a 24/7 helpline.

It also criticised Japan for having lowered



the minimum age for criminal punishment from 16 to 14 years, and said children were often removed from families and placed in institutions without a court order for being "likely to commit a crime".

Masato Ohtaka, of Japan's foreign ministry, told the panel that Japanese children faced challenges such as bullying, abuse, sexual exploitation and poverty, and that Japan

aimed to establish a robust social system in which all generations could enjoy peace of mind.

In July, the Japanese government promised emergency steps to boost the number of child welfare workers by 60 percent within five years. The Committee carries out a two-day review of countries' records every five years. (Reuters)

Zimbabwe churches try to broker dialogue after opposition snubs Mnangagwa talks

HARARE (TIP): Zimbabwe's churches on February 7 sought to broker talks between the government and its opponents over a political and economic crisis they said had left the country "angry and traumatised", after the main opposition snubbed a meeting with the president.

The southern African nation had hoped to shake off its divided past after a 2017 coup forced long time leader Robert Mugabe from power, but last year's disputed election won by President Emmerson Mnangagwa only deepened political rifts.

A security crackdown on post-election bloodshed in August and another one last month against violent protests has critics saying that under Mnangagwa, Zimbabwe is revisiting the authoritarianism that was the hallmark of Mugabe's regime.

Mnangagwa skipped Thursday's meeting after initially indicating he would attend. He was represented by Defence Minister Oppah Muchinguri-Kashiri.

Main opposition leader Nelson Chamisa, politicians from smaller parties, diplomats, business leaders and several cabinet ministers attended Thursday's meeting, the first such gathering since Mnangagwa first came to power in November 2017.

Church leaders said they had stepped forward to mediate and reconcile political parties, which would lay the basis for the recovery of an economy battling a severe dollar shortage that has sapped supplies of fuel and medicines.

"Zimbabwe is clearly hurting, angry and traumatised nation," Bishop Ambrose Moyo, who heads the Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum, said during a prayer meeting with politicians.

"Such a dialogue as initiated by the churches will help us to do some serious introspection as we speak to one another. We stand committed to this process, set up by the united church to build peace, unity and prosperity."



Opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leader Nelson Chamisa attends a media briefing in Harare, Zimbabwe, January 29, 2019. (Reuters)

Church leaders said they had stepped forward to mediate and reconcile political parties, which would lay the basis for the recovery of an economy battling a severe dollar shortage that has sapped supplies of fuel and medicines.

Some ruling party officials have accused Chamisa and his Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) of only seeking talks to be accommodated in government, which the opposition denies.

The last time the MDC held talks with the ruling ZANU-PF in 2008 resulted in the formation of a unity government that ushered a period of political and economic stability.

Striking a defiant tone, Chamisa said Zimbabwe's political and economic problems

would not be fixed until the issue of Mnangagwa's legitimacy was resolved. He backed the church initiative, saying the clergy were independent mediators.

Chamisa said any dialogue that did not involve Mnangagwa and himself would not succeed. He repeated demands for the removal of the military from the streets and release of hundreds of people jailed during the mid-January protests.

"We can't have dialogue while other people are in prison on account of politics. As I come to you I am a leader to members of parliament who cannot even sleep in their houses on account of politics, on account of accusations," said Chamisa.

Chamisa, who sat with two cabinet ministers, snubbed Wednesday's talks with Mnangagwa, saying the dialogue must be brokered by an independent outside mediator.

In a speech read for him by Muchinguri-Kashiri, Mnangagwa said his doors would remain open for dialogue. (Reuters)

Booming Edinburgh will be first UK city to introduce a tourist tax

LONDON (TIP): Scotland's capital Edinburgh is to become the first British city to introduce a tourist tax to try to better manage the impact of swelling visitor numbers and booming hotel occupancy, its council said on February 7.

One of Britain's most picturesque cities, Edinburgh had 1.75 million foreign visitors on average annually between 2015 and 2017, making it the second most-visited in Britain after London.

Hotel occupancy was the highest among all UK cities in 2017, at an average of 83.7 percent.

The council said it would use funds raised by the 2-pound (\$2.60) per room per night tax "to improve facilities and better manage the city", as other European cities such as Barcelona and Rome have done.

The tourist tax has been unpopular with some businesses, however. A survey conducted by the council found only a narrow 51 per cent of accommodation-providers supported the idea, which needs a final sign-off by Scotland's devolved parliament.

"This isn't the right time for a new tax and more bureaucracy for small businesses," Garry Clark, the head of the Federation of Small Businesses, said on Twitter. Hotel associations have also expressed concerns about an extra tax on tourists at an economically sensitive time. Edinburgh is a craggy World Heritage site with a city-centre castle perched on a dormant volcano. A city of half a million inhabitants, it hosts a 60-year old international arts festival in August which attracts a huge number of visitors. (Reuters)

Death toll rises to six at South Africa coal mine gas explosion

MPUMALANGA (TIP): The number of people killed by a gas explosion in an unused coal mine in South Africa's eastern province of Mpumalanga has risen to six, and several others remain trapped, an official at the mine said on Thursday.

The representative of the creditor protection team at the mine, Michael Elliot, said more than 20 people were still stuck underground at the mine in Middelburg and are presumed dead.

"As I've been informed, there are six deceased people in this point in time that have been taken to the mortuary," Elliot told Reuters over the phone. Rescue efforts were hampered by dangerously high levels of toxic gas underground, Elliot said.

"We first have to restore power to the mine and we have to restore the ventilation to make it safe and once it's safe... then we will go and recover these people that are missing," he said.

The mine is owned by Tegeta Resources and Exploration, which is undergoing creditor protection after its owners, the Gupta brothers, found it difficult to continue doing business in South Africa following corruption allegations against them.

Several people had entered the mine on Wednesday afternoon to steal copper wires that supply electricity for lighting and ventilation when a gas pipe exploded, police spokesman Leonard Hlati said. "The mine is wired with copper. They were going for copper," Hlati said. Copper is often stolen from disused mines in South Africa and sold for scrap. (Reuters)

Get
to the
Point



The **INDIAN**  **PANORAMA**

EVER TRUTHFUL

A DELIGHTFUL READING EVERY WEEK

Widest Coverage

Your Trusted Partner in Business

The Indian Panorama

P.O. Box No. 190067, South Richmond Hill, NY 11419, Tel: 646-247-9458
Dallas Edition - P.O. Box 121695, Arlington, TX 76012

www.theindianpanorama.news