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Indian American Gitanjali Rao is the first ever TIME "Kid of the Year"



NEW YORK (TIP): 15-year-old Indian American Gitanjali Rao, a "brilliant" young scientist and inventor, has been named by TIME magazine as the first-ever 'Kid of the Year' for her "astounding work" using technology to tackle issues ranging from

contd on page 2

Parkash Singh Badal, Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa return Padma awards in protest against farm laws

"Most painful and embarrassing moment in my long political career": Prakash Singh Badal

NEW DELHI / NEW YORK (TIP): Former Union Minister and five-time Chief Minister of Punjab Parkash Badal on Thursday, December 3, returned the Padma Vibhushan award in protest against "the betrayal of the farmers by the Government of India." In a letter to President Ram Nath Kovind, Badal said he was returning the award due to "the shocking indifference and contempt with which the government was treating the ongoing peaceful and democratic agitation of the farmers against the three farm Acts".

Incidentally, SAD (Democratic) chief and rebel Rajya Sabha member Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa has also announced that he would be returning his Padma Bhushan award. Dhindsa was presented the Padma Bhushan-third highest civilian award -by President Kovind last year for his contribution in the field of public affairs. Welcoming the decision of the Akali stalwart, Congress leader Sunil Jakhar said it was the outcome of the growing public pressure and mass movement against the farm bills.

contd on page 2



Prakash Singh Badal and Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa, once allies of BJP, have returned their Padma awards in protest against "the betrayal of the farmers by the Government of India."

The agitating farmers in India get huge support from Indian Americans



A section of protesters on 5th Avenue in front of the Indian Consulate in New York on December 5

Photo / Courtesy Gurinder Hothi

I.S. SALUJA

The first week of December witnessed in New York and New Jersey enthusiastic support for agitating farmers in India, and a damning condemnation of Modi government's anti-farm sector policies.

States of New York and New Jersey on the East Coast have a sizeable population of Indian Americans, many of whom come from farming families.

contd on page 6

Moratorium on federal student loan payments extended through end of January

WASHINGTON (TIP): Education Secretary Betsy DeVos on Friday, December 4, extended the suspension of federal student loan payments through the end of January, giving Congress and the incoming Biden administration time to impose a longer moratorium, The Washington Post reported.

contd on page 2



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CONTD FROM PAGE 1**Parkash Singh Badal, Sukhdev...**

"The BJP leadership should be gracious enough to respect the larger sentiments and call up the Akali stalwart to find a way forward in solving the farmers' agitation".

He also welcomed the announcement by Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa to return the Padma Bhushan.

The full text of Parkash Singh Badal's letter:

Honorable Rashtarpati ji,

I write this letter to return the Padma Vibhushan award in protest against the betrayal of the farmers by the Government of India and against the shocking indifference and contempt with which the Govt is treating the ongoing peaceful and democratic agitation of the farmers against the Farm Acts.

When the Government of India had brought the Ordinances, assurances were given that the farmers' apprehensions on these Ordinances would be addressed to their satisfaction while bringing the relevant Bills and subsequently the Acts. Trusting these assurances, I even appealed to the farmers to believe the Government's word. But I was shocked when the Government simply went back on its word.

That was the most painful and embarrassing moment in my long political career. I just cannot put in words the emotional stress which I have been going through since then. I have truly begun to wonder why has the Government of the country become so heartless, so cynical and so ungrateful towards the farmers.

While writing this letter to you, I am conscious that I address myself to a President who presides over the destiny of a population 70% of whom are farmers. For over 70 years, these farmers have been serving the country as its "Annadata" with the most selfless and self-effacing humility.

I hardly need repeat that the country owes a huge and almost irreparable debt to them. When the country faced hunger and humiliation in the sixties, having to beg for food in world capitals, the Government turned to the farmers to pull it out of starvation. The farmer responded so heartily that in a matter of three years, he turned the country from a food-begging to a food exporting country.

The tide was turned principally by Punjab with Green Revolution. But in the process, he sacrificed the only two natural assets he had: soil fertility and water.

Today however, the same farmer finds himself forced to wage bitter struggles just to secure his fundamental right to live. The three Acts fell as bolts from the blue on the already beleaguered peasantry of the country.

Now, the spectacle of hundreds of thousands of farmers crying out for justice in one voice in the national capital would have moved any other nation or its government. Tragically, no such sensitivity towards the farmers' pain and anger is visible here. I am sure that as the first Citizen of our great country and a conscientious public figure, you would be fully aware and perhaps as deeply concerned about these developments as I have been.

Even before these Acts were passed, the poor farmers had already been in the grip of sever crisis throughout the country. Agriculture was never a lucrative profession in our country as the costs of agricultural inputs had been rising steeply with while there has been just meager hike or no hike on the prices of agricultural produce. But in recent years, the crisis deepened with farmers unable to meet the rising costs of inputs and were driven to draw unbearable loans just to be able to keep feeding their families. When farm friendly parties like the Shiromani Akali Dal pleaded for debt relief to farmers in overall national interest, they were mocked. It was cynically suggested that farmers take loans just for ostentatious lifestyle. This cruel cynicism and malice against the farmers did not stop even when thousands of farmers in this country were and are being driven to take their own lives in a phenomenon called farmer suicides.

Isn't it amazing and unjust that lakhs of crores of corporate loans are waived off with just a single thoughtless stroke of the governmental pen? But no one has ever thought of even subsidising the farm debts, forget a complete waiver. Instead, the country chose to let its Annadata die.

Against this background, the Black Laws now implemented by the Govt have come as the proverbial last nail in the coffin of the country's annadata. The farmers are out on the streets battling police batons, tear gas shells and water cannons even as their sources of livelihood dry up. They have come to the

national Capital from all over the country, leaving their fields, crops and even their families and travelled long distances - thousands of kilometers in some cases - to get the attention of their own government.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

Indian American Gitanjali Rao is the...

contaminated drinking water to opioid addiction and cyberbullying.

"The world belongs to those who shape it. And however uncertain that world may feel at a given moment, the reassuring reality seems to be that each new generation produces more of what these kids have already achieved: positive impact, in all sizes," Time said.

Ms Rao was selected from a field of more than 5,000 nominees as TIME's first-ever 'Kid of the Year'. She was interviewed by actor and activist Angelina Jolie for the TIME special.

"Observe, brainstorm, research, build and communicate," Ms Rao told about her process during a virtual talk with Ms Jolie from her home in Colorado.

She spoke about her "astonishing work using technology to tackle issues ranging from contaminated drinking water to opioid addiction and cyberbullying, and about her mission to create a global community of young innovators to solve problems the world over.

"Even over video chat, her brilliant mind and generous spirit shone through, along with her inspiring message to other young people: don't try to fix every problem, just focus on one that excites you," Time said.

"If I can do it," she said in the interview, "anybody can do it."

Ms Rao said her generation is facing many problems that they have never seen before.

"But then at the same time, we're facing old problems that still exist. Like, we're sitting here in the middle of a new global pandemic, and we're also like still facing human-rights issues. There are problems that we did not create but that we now have to solve, like climate change and cyberbullying with the introduction of technology," she said.

"I think more than anything right now, we just need to find that one thing we're passionate about and solve it. Even if it's something as small as, I want to find an easy way to pick up litter. Everything makes a difference. Don't feel pressured to come up with something big," she said.

When asked when she knew that science was her passion, Ms Rao said, she always wanted to put a smile on someone's face. "That was my everyday goal, just to make someone happy. And it soon turned into, how can we bring positivity and community to the place we live?" she added.

Ms Rao said that she doesn't look like "your typical scientist. Everything I see on TV is that it's an older, usually white man as a scientist. It's weird to me that it was almost like people had assigned roles, regarding like their gender, their age, the color of their skin."

"My goal has really shifted not only from creating my own devices to solve the world's problems, but inspiring others to do the same as well. Because, from personal experience, it's not easy when you don't see anyone else like you. So I really want to put out that message: If I can do it, you can do it, and anyone can do it," she said.

She said when she was in second or third grade, she started thinking about how she can use science and technology to create social change. She said she was 10 when she told her parents that she wanted to research carbon nanotube sensor technology at the Denver Water Quality Research Lab.

When asked by Ms Jolie if she does things that kids her age do, she said, "Actually I spend more time doing 15-year-old things during the quarantine. I bake an ungodly amount. It's not good, but it's baking. And, like, it's science too."

Moratorium on federal student loan...

"The coronavirus pandemic has presented challenges for many students and borrowers, and this temporary pause in payments will help those who have been impacted," DeVos said in a statement Friday. "The added time also allows Congress to do its job and determine what measures it believes are necessary and appropriate. The Congress, not the executive branch, is in charge of student loan policy."

The payment freeze, which was first introduced in March and later extended, had been set to expire Dec. 31.

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MAYOR SAYS VACCINES ARE ARRIVING IN LESS THAN TWO WEEKS

NEW YORK CITY, NY (TIP): The first of the COVID-19 vaccines will arrive in New York City as early as December 15 with high-risk health care workers and nursing home residents and staff to receive the first doses, said Mayor de Blasio at his daily press briefing on Thursday, December 3.

Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines will be rolled out this month, with Pfizer's arriving on December 15 and Moderna's on December 22, Mayor announced.

The city is working with Gov. Cuomo's office on a distribution plan, which will include over 400,000 doses in the month of the December.

The mayor said it will take at least a few months before the vaccine can be widely distributed to all New Yorkers, with priority going to those in need, including those living in the neighborhoods most deeply affected by the coronavirus.

"But we're going to, throughout this process, work on the fastest and most effective distribution because the faster we can move and the more we can educate people and the more we can get people involved, the more people who will be safe," the mayor said.

The announcement comes as the city's coronavirus indicators continue to move in the wrong direction, according to the mayor. As of Thursday, the daily positivity rate stood at 3.9%, the seven-day average was at 5.19% and daily hospital admissions for suspected coronavirus was at 174, just below the 200 threshold.



New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced December 3 that City will be getting in two weeks the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines - File photo



"It's quite clear at this point that the this second wave is unfortunately right upon us," Mayor de Blasio said.

The mayor said the one promising sign is that city ICUs are not seeing the stress they did back in the spring.

As for the vaccine, the health department has the ability to receive, store and ship up to 320,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine as well as millions of doses of the Moderna one, according to the city's health commissioner, Dr. Dave Chokshi.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

National Indo-American Association For Seniors Inc. elects officers for 2021



2021 Officers. Gunjan Rastogi (President); Dr. Bhavani Srinivasan (Vice President); Harbachan Singh (Secretary); EM Stephen (Treasurer)

HICKSVILLE, NY (TIP): Gunjan Rastogi, a well-known community leader in the New York region has been elected as the new President of the National Indo-American Association for Senior Citizens (NIAASC). Rajeshwar Prasad, the founder and the outgoing President of NIAASC, made the announcement at the organization's 22nd annual meeting and Board of Directors Meeting (held virtually) on November 8, 2020.

Mr. Prasad elaborated on the process of NIAASC Board elections: one-third Board members retire every year; however they are eligible for reelection if they are recommended by the Nominating Committee and approved by the General Body at its annual meeting. Of the five retiring members, three would continue as Board members for a period of three years ending December 31, 2023.

Two members of NIAASC were also recommended by the Nominating Committee to serve on the Board of

Directors and approved by the general body: They are Baldev Seekri, from Rhode Island and Santosh Kumar from Chicago area. Both Seekri and Kumar, life members of NIAASC, were speakers at NIAASC's annual meeting in 2019 held at Shantiniketan, Tavares, Florida.

The officers were elected for two-year terms:

- Gunjan P. Rastogi, currently the NIAASC Secretary, was elected as President
- Dr. Bhavani Srinivasan, currently Vice President, was reelected as Vice President for the second full term.
- Harbachan Singh, currently a Board member, was elected as Secretary, and
- E M Stephen, who has been associated with NIAASC since its inception, was elected as Treasurer.

To learn more about NIAASC or to become a member, please visit www.niaasc.org.

HOUSE OF SPICES, THE OLDEST SOUTH ASIAN FOOD COMPANY SET TO EXPAND IN THE US

2nd Generation Family Owners Share Company's New Vision FOR THE U.S. Market



NEW YORK (TIP): House of Spices is the oldest South Asian food company in the USA and is widely known by its brand "Laxmi". It has evolved over the years as a business leader in the South Asian food space with multiple leading South Asian food brands under its umbrella offering condiments, pantry items, snacks, candy, spices and frozen foods representing all regions of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Born out of the absolute need of a young family to be able to enjoy cuisines from their homeland while being away from home, it was founded in 1972 by Indian Immigrant G.L Soni who longed to enjoy authentic cuisine from India. As a South Asian immigrant couple living in New York, the Sonis, particularly Mrs. Shobhana Soni, faced challenges daily to find Indian ingredients for home cooking. This inspired Mr. Soni to start importing Indian cooking ingredients and founding the 'LAXMI' brand. Mr. Soni fittingly named it

Laxmi in honor of his parents, Mr. Laxmidas and Mrs. Laxmibai. Also, since Goddess Laxmi embodies abundance, the name perfectly fits the company's vision of providing authentic cooking ingredients in abundance to South Asian families living in the USA and helping them stay connected with their cultures through food.



Neil & Amarpali Soni have taken over the company with their sights set on aggressive business expansion, new branding, marketing and distribution, while maintaining the family and company values.



Today, 48 years later the next generation of the family carries the torch and enhanced vision into the expanding marketplace. The children of the founder, Neil & Amarpali Soni have taken over the company with their sights set on aggressive business expansion, new branding, marketing and distribution, while maintaining the family and company values.

The South Asian Market is the fastest growing population in the U.S. since 2000 with a total population of 6 million and growing - a 81% growth over the last 10 years! Furthermore, the Asian Indians have a combined disposable income of \$88 billion and an estimated annual buying power of \$20 billion and these numbers are growing. The brother and sister duo know that the time is now to leverage this strong growth of the South Asian segment and do so by delivering authentic ethnic South Asian cuisines and ingredients. They strive hard to ensure that every item with their brand name is delivered with purity, quality and value. The recent rebrand of their logo also demonstrates an effort from the young leaders of the company, to be more inclusive towards the overall South Asian diaspora and representative of the hospitality and abundance that are trademarks of their culture. The new Laxmi logo is contemporary, universal and visually appealing and the icon represents a modernized red and gold Lotus with auspicious royal overtones. But despite the changes and the new vision of the co-presidents, the signature product line encompassing the 'Laxmi' Brand stays true to its authentic Indian roots providing the community a way to stay connected to their culture and cuisine. With aspirations to take their product line to the mainstream market, House of Spices is poised to bring the Indian grocery store items into our neighborhood big box grocery retailers and give a new spin to cooking with healthy, authentic and fresh Indian ingredients.

(Based on a press release)

Indian American Vivek Murthy to lead COVID-19 fight

WASHINGTON (TIP): US President-elect Joe Biden has selected two former Obama administration officials for senior roles to help fight COVID-19, including the appointment of Jeff Zients as White House coronavirus coordinator, media reported on Thursday, December 3.

Biden adviser Vivek Murthy will return to his role as Surgeon General but with a broader portfolio as the pandemic rages through the country, Politico said, citing two people familiar with the decision.

Dealing with the virus that has killed more than 274,000 Americans as well as the economic fallout from the crisis is one of Biden's top priorities once he takes office on Jan. 20.

Politico also said Marcella Nunez-Smith, a co-chair of Biden's COVID-19 advisory board, will play a key role in the incoming administration's pandemic response, focused on disparities.

Current White House coronavirus task force member Anthony Fauci, the top US government infectious diseases expert, was scheduled to have his first substantive talks with the new

administration on Thursday.

Fauci told media he expected to have a comprehensive discussion with members of Biden's team working to establish priorities and ensure a smooth transition on Inauguration Day.

He said that although he had spoken with both Zients and Biden's White House Chief of Staff Ron Klain in the past, this would be his first "substantive discussions" with the Biden team.

"I'm looking forward to it. It likely will be the first of a series of normal type of transition undertaking," Fauci told MSNBC. A Biden transition official confirmed the meeting.

Fauci told CBS he wished the process had begun sooner. The administration of outgoing President Donald Trump only gave the green light for the transition to begin on Nov. 23. Trump, a Republican, is contesting the Nov. 3 election, alleging electoral fraud but offering no evidence. Numerous legal challenges being pursued around the country have failed to bear fruit, most recently on Thursday when Wisconsin's Supreme Court declined to take up a case filed against election officials in the battleground

state.

SECOND SURGE

As director of the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases, Fauci has been the most high-profile member of the White House task force since the pandemic began, often disagreeing with Trump on how to combat the virus.

Fauci told MSNBC he expected to stay on in his current role under the Biden administration. U.S. deaths from the coronavirus pandemic have surged past 2,000 for two days in a row as the most dangerous season of the year approaches. Nearly 200,000 new U.S. cases were reported on Wednesday, with hospitalizations approaching 100,000 patients. With Pfizer's vaccine already approved by regulatory authorities in Britain, hopes of a respite are resting on the start of widespread vaccinations as early as this month.

Zients, a wealthy businessman who has moved between the public sector and corporate America, will oversee the mammoth and unprecedented operation to distribute hundreds of millions of doses of the new vaccine in the United



Vivek Murthy will return to his role as Surgeon General with a broader portfolio as the pandemic rages through the country

States, coordinating efforts across multiple federal agencies.

In recent weeks, Zients has served as a pandemic liaison of sorts with governors and state officials, frequently joining calls to share data and discuss concerns, according to two sources familiar with the calls.

Biden announced that Brian Deese, who helped lead then-President Barack Obama's efforts to bail out the automotive industry during the 2009 financial crisis, will head the National Economic Council. "I'm asking Brian Deese to do this job because he's someone who looks at hard problems and finds solutions that help make life better for American families," Biden said in a video posted by his transition team. "He'll be the first who is a true expert on climate policy."

Indian American Maju Varghese to plan Biden-Harris inauguration

WASHINGTON (TIP): President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris have formed a Presidential Inaugural Committee with Indian-American Maju Varghese as executive director to plan the festivities surrounding their swearing-in on Jan. 20.

Varghese, who played a key role in the duo's campaign as its chief operating officer and senior adviser, will be joined by CEO Tony Allen, president of Delaware State University.

Nevada state Sen. Yvanna Cancela and Erin Wilson, the Biden-Harris campaign's national political director, will both serve as deputy executive directors on the inaugural committee.

Accompanying Biden and Harris' announcement on Monday was the committee's digital rollout, including a new website featuring an online store "with exclusive inaugural merchandise and collectables."

Articles on sale include Kamala Black T-Shirt for \$30.00, Biden/Harris Navy T-Shirt for \$30.00 and Biden/Harris Water Bottle for \$25.00.

A lawyer by training Varghese is the son of immigrant parents from Thiruvalla, Kerala. He ran the logistics for the nationwide, multi-million-dollar effort to elect Biden and Harris, mobilizing tens of thousands of staff and volunteers.

Varghese had worked for former President Barack Obama as his special assistant and deputy director of advance, a position in which he worked on organizing his travel in the US and abroad.

One of those assignments was organizing Obama's January 2015 historic trip to India



Indian-American Maju Varghese has been tasked with planning the festivities surrounding Biden-Harris swearing-in on Jan. 20

where he was the chief guest at the annual Republic Day parade. Varghese later became assistant to the President for administration and management and oversaw the White House complex.

It remains unclear how the ongoing coronavirus pandemic will affect planning for the 59th presidential inauguration in less than two months, as public health experts warn of surging caseloads during the holiday season.

Allen, the committee's CEO, acknowledged in a statement that "this year's inauguration will look different amid the pandemic, but we will honor the American inaugural traditions and engage Americans across the country while keeping everybody healthy and safe."

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

Indian Origin former US Ambassador to India, Richard Verma joins Mastercard as Executive Vice President

WASHINGTON (TIP): Former US Ambassador to India Richard Verma has joined leading financial services company Mastercard as its executive vice-president for global public policy and regulatory affairs.

In this capacity, Richard Verma will oversee the company's public policy, regulatory affairs and litigation teams around the world, Mastercard said in a statement.

Mr Verma joins Mastercard from capital advisory firm The Asia Group, where he served as vice-chair and partner. He was US Ambassador to India from 2014 to 2017. In addition, Mr Verma was the Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs, where he led the department's efforts on Capitol Hill, and was the former National Security Advisor to the Senate Majority Leader for many years.

Rich (Verma) is a proven leader with extensive experience in public policy, geopolitics, trade and international law, said Ajay Banga, Chief Executive Officer, Mastercard.

"In his role as US Ambassador to India, Rich oversaw one of the largest US diplomatic missions in the world and took integral steps to deepen bilateral ties," Mr Banga said.

With his expertise and strong relationships worldwide, Rich will be a key counselor to industry leaders and governments on the global move to a digital economy. We look forward to working closely with Rich to build on our strong foundation, Mastercard said in its statement.

Richard Verma is a veteran of the US Air Force, and a recipient of multiple awards and decorations, including the State Department's Distinguished Service Award.

He is currently a Senior Fellow at Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs and he serves on several boards and commissions, including the National Endowment for Democracy and Lehigh University.

He holds degrees from Georgetown University (Ph.D.), the Georgetown University Law Center (LLM), the American University's Washington College of Law (JD), and Lehigh University (BS).



Former US Ambassador to India Richard Verma has joined Mastercard as its executive vice-president for global public policy and regulatory affairs

Indian American Neera Tanden nominated to lead White House Office of Management and Budget



Indian American Neera Tanden has been named by President-elect Biden to head the powerful White House Office of Management and Budget

WASHINGTON (TIP): President elect Joe Biden has named Indian American Neera Tanden to head the powerful White House Office of Management and Budget.

Tanden, 50, who currently heads left leaning think tank Centre for American Progress, will be the first Indian American to get a cabinet level position in a Democratic administration.

But overall it will be the second such position for the community as Republican Nikki Haley held cabinet-rank as President Donald Trump's US ambassador to the UN.

Besides Tanden, key members of Biden's economic team include Janet Yellen as Secretary of the Treasury, Wally Adeyemo as her deputy, Cecilia Rouse, as Chair of the Council of Economic Advisers with Jared Bernstein and Heather Boushey as members.

"This crisis-tested team will help President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris lift America out of the current economic downturn and build back better," an announcement from Biden transition said.

"These choices reflect the president-elect's commitment to building an administration that looks like America, drawing on the diverse backgrounds and lived experiences of some of our nation's foremost economic experts," it added.

"As we get to work to control the virus, this is the team that will deliver immediate economic relief for the American people during this economic crisis and help us build our economy back better than ever," he said.

Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news

Indian origin Republican Nikki Haley slams Biden's immigration policies

WASHINGTON (TIP): Indian origin Republican politician Nikki Haley has slammed President-elect Joe Biden's immigration policy as an "insult" to legal immigrants and called his choice of Neera Tanden as budget director "deeply concerning."

"Biden's immigration policies will create another border crisis that will undermine the rule of law, hurt American workers, and insult the legal immigrants who did the right thing," she said in a series of tweets Tuesday, December 1.

"It's one more reason why America needs a conservative-led Senate to stop Biden's plan in its tracks," said the former US ambassador to the UN campaigning for two Republican Senators in the Georgia runoff election next month.

The control of the powerful 100-member Senate hangs in the balance with the Republican Party currently having 50 seats to Democrats' 48 after losing the White House. Democrats have retained their majority in the House of Representatives.

"Biden has promised to reverse the Trump admin's immigration policies, halt all deportations, & introduce amnesty legislation for illegal immigrants on day 1," Haley said.

"The amnesty bill would send a clear signal to people across the world: Come to America illegally & get rewarded for it," said the former two-term Governor of South Carolina.

In another tweet, Haley criticized Neera Tanden's nomination as the Director of Office of Management and Budget saying she has shown "bad judgment" in the past.

"Tanden has shown bad judgment in the past. She said that @realDonaldTrump is 'part of conspiracy against US' & has a track record of disparaging Rep Senators," she wrote.

"There's a saying that 'personnel is policy,' which is why Biden's nomination of Tanden is deeply concerning," Haley added.

"Biden's pick for budget chief is Neera Tanden. Tanden is one of the architects of ObamaCare, has been described as a Clinton loyalist for her years of service to Hillary Clinton & spent years leading a liberal think tank where she oversaw proposals like "Medicare Extra for All.," Haley said in another tweet.

Several other Republican politicians have also criticized Tanden's nomination with Senator



"Biden's immigration policies will create another border crisis that will undermine the rule of law, hurt American workers, and insult the legal immigrants who did the right thing," Nikki Haley said in a series of tweets Tuesday, December 1..

John Cornyn calling her "radioactive" and perhaps the "worst nominee so far".

Another, Tom Cotton tweeted that she was "filled with hate & guided by the woke left" and cited one of her tweets in which she said she loved Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell being called "Moscow Mitch".

However, Biden has defended Tanden as "battle-tested" who will fight for your family as if it were her own.

"Neera is battle-tested and ready to get the job done as our next Director of Office of Management and Budget. She has been at the forefront in creating policies designed to support America's working families," he told his supporters in an email.

"She'll fight for your family as if it were her own, because her experience as a child relying on food stamps and Section 8 housing instilled in her a belief that our economy must serve the dignity and humanity of all people," he wrote.

"If confirmed, she'll be the first woman of color and the first South Asian American to lead the OMB, and I'm excited to watch her make history," Biden added.

Meanwhile, South Asians for Biden's National Director Neha Dewan said it was "thrilled" at the selection of Tanden as it "represents Biden's commitment to pick qualified appointees who reflect the diversity of America."

Biden and Harris "expressed the importance of having every American's voice heard and represented in the administration, and Tanden's selection to serve in such a high-profile role confirms this commitment," she said.

Indian-American Ajit Pai announces his intent to leave as FCC chair on January 20

WASHINGTON (TIP): Indian-American Ajit Pai has announced his intent to leave Federal Communications Commission on January 20, the day Joe Biden takes oath as the 46th President of the US.

As Chairman of FCC, Pai is the highest ranking Indian-American official in the Trump Administration.

"It has been the honor of a lifetime to serve at the Federal Communications Commission, including as Chairman of the FCC over the past four years," 47-year-old Pai said in a statement on Monday.

Pai thanked President Donald Trump for giving him the opportunity to lead the agency in 2017, to President Barack Obama for appointing him as a Commissioner in 2012, and to Senate Majority Leader McConnell and the Senate for twice confirming him.

"To be the first Asian-American to chair the FCC has been a particular privilege. As I often say: only in America," he said.

During his term as FCC Chairman, the federal commission over the past four years closed the digital divide; promoted innovation and competition, from 5G on the ground to broadband from space; protected consumers; and advanced public safety.

"And this FCC has not shied away from making tough choices. As a result, our nation's communications networks are now faster, stronger, and more widely deployed than ever before," he said.

He was designated FCC Chairman by Trump in January 2017. He had previously served as Commissioner at the FCC, appointed by then-President Obama and confirmed unanimously by the United States Senate in May 2012.

Pai's regulatory philosophy is informed by a few simple principles. Rules that reflect these principles will result in more innovation, more investment, better products and services, lower prices, more job creation, and faster economic growth, according to his profile on the FCC website.

He believes that consumers benefit most from competition, not preemptive regulation. Free markets have delivered more value to American consumers than highly regulated ones.

He believes that no regulatory system should indulge arbitrage; regulators should be skeptical of pleas to regulate rivals, dispense favors, or otherwise afford special treatment. Pai believes that particularly given how rapidly the communications sector is changing, the FCC should do everything it can to ensure that its rules reflect the realities of the current marketplace and basic principles of economics.

Pai was born in the US after his parents moved from India to the US in 1971. His mother grew up in Bangalore, and father was raised in Hyderabad. (Source: PTI)



Trump appointee Ajit Pai has announced his intent to leave Federal Communications Commission on January 20 - Photo / @AjitPaiFCC- Twitter

COUNCIL MEMBER ADRIENNE ADAMS UNVEILS GURDWARA STREET

RICHMOND HILL, NEW YORK (TIP): On November 30, 2020 Council Member Adrienne Adams joined Assembly Member David Weprin, and members of the community to celebrate the co-naming ceremony of Gurdwara Street. The co-naming ceremony celebrated the contributions of the Sikh community that remains a part of the fabric of Richmond Hill, Queens and New York City as a whole. Gurdwara Street is located on 97th Avenue between 117th Street and Lefferts Boulevard.

"It is important that New York City's diverse communities see themselves and their varying cultures represented in the historical landscape," said Council Member Adrienne Adams. "There was no better day to celebrate the co-naming of Gurdwara Street than on the birthday of Guru Baba Nanak, one of the most celebrated Sikh gurus. This is a long overdue recognition for the contributions of the Sikh community and I am so proud to bring Gurdwara Street to our city."

"Our city thrives from the cultural, civic, and

business enterprises that the Sikh community has established in Richmond Hill and beyond," said Assemblyman David I. Weprin. "I am thrilled that 97th Avenue between Lefferts Boulevard and 117th Street is now formally recognized as Gurdwara Avenue and thank Council Member Adrienne Adams for her efforts in reaching this significant milestone."

"The co-naming of Gurdwara Street was held within the most auspicious timing," said Harpreet Singh Toor, Former President of the Sikh Cultural Society. "This acknowledgement of the historic inception of the first and largest Gurdwara on the east coast which established the first place of worship for the Sikh community is a welcomed inclusion to our celebration of the birthday of Baba Nanak, the founder of Sikhism."

"Gurdwara no doubt belongs to the Sikh religion however today was a spiritual one," said Rajwinder Kaur, District 28 Community Education Committee Member. "Today we celebrate Guru Baba Nanak's birthday. The basic motives of Guru Baba Nanak were



Council Member Adrienne Adams joined Assembly Member David Weprin, and members of the community to celebrate the co-naming ceremony of Gurdwara Street. Seen among other community leaders are Master Mohinder, founder President of Gurdwara Baba Makhan Shah Lobana Sikh Center (second from left) and Harpreet Singh Toor, a former chairman of Sikh Cultural Society which manages Gurdwara Richmond Hill (third from right).

to shine and rise and give the light of hope. A ray of hope to the whole world conveying that we are one and we are equal. As the co-naming was bestowed upon our community on this significant day, we've expressed to the people the belief of oneness, despite our color, race, class and creed."

(Based on a Press Release)

The agitating farmers in India get huge support from Indian Americans

contd from page 1

The ones from Indian States of Punjab and Haryana, where the major chunk of population depends on agriculture, have been fuming at the Modi government policies recently announce in the form of three ordinances which are the reason why the farmers from all over India have come together to demand repeal of the anti-farmer ordinances.

It is a decisive battle the farming community is fighting against an insensitive to farmers government of India which seems more inclined to kill them rather than protect their interests. The protests which had started some four months ago immediately after the promulgation of the ordinances -The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion & Facilitation) Ordinance 2020 and The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance 2020, on June 5, 2020, remained confined to Punjab chiefly, but when the government of India turned a deaf ear to their protests and demand for repeal of ordinances, Punjab farmers marched towards Delhi. They were later joined by farmers from Haryana Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and other states.

The protest has turned into a movement, the like of which Modi government has never faced.

The overseas Indians coming from families of agriculturists, and justice loving Indians abroad have lent their support to agitating farmers.

Even leaders of other countries have supported the agitating farmers in India and condemned violence against the peaceful protesters.

Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau took the lead in suggesting to government of India to be civil to peaceful protesters. It is another matter that government of India did not approve of foreign interference in "domestic policies".

In New York, groups of demonstrators have held rallies in front of the Indian Consulate. The one on December 1 is being followed by a larger group with participation from all gurdwaras in the two States.

A protest march was held on Long Island on December 3 in which 300 vehicles and around 500 protesters participated.

Reports of protests against government of India and support for the agitating farmers in India are coming from different parts of USA, particularly from California where there is a large population of Sikh agriculturists.

The coming days will see a more vigorous response even as the agitating farmers in India have decided to

burn the effigies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi all across the country on December 5, followed by a call for BHARAT BANDH (total closure of India)

The Indian Panorama reporters spoke to a cross section of the Sikh community in New York to know what exactly, according to them is the solution. Without exception, all wanted immediate repeal of the anti-farmer ordinances, in the first place.

Here are pictures of protests in New York on December 1, and Long Island, on December 3.



The Indian Panorama will bring to readers next week a report on the protest on December 5 in front of the Indian Consulate in New York City.

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AS I SEE IT

Trump shows that we need to reform U.S. democracy



By Fareed Zakaria



:"...it is not too soon to begin thinking about a post-Trump democracy - a political system that learns from the challenges and threats it has endured over the past four years.

It is much too soon to be thinking about a post-Trump America. President Trump remains the most popular figure among Republicans, and he will continue to play a huge role in U.S. politics in the years to come. But it is not too soon to begin thinking about a post-Trump democracy - a political system that learns from the challenges and threats it has endured over the past four years.

To those who think this concern is overblown, that America has proved resilient, I would simply say, "Look out the window." Even now, the president of the United States is attempting to use the powers of his office and public platform to overturn the results of an election. Happily, Trump's efforts have not borne fruit. The courts have refused to bend the rules; even Republican-appointed judges have followed the law rather than their political party of choice. Local officials did their job.

All of this is encouraging. Even so, this past month has exposed fundamental weaknesses in America's electoral system.

American elections are mostly run not by apolitical federal officials but rather by local politicians. Elected or appointed representatives of both parties monitor elections and must collectively sign off on them. The system has worked because both sides have upheld their duty to certify election results that were free and fair; no matter the winner.

But in this election, the Republican Party - the president, the party's national chair, key senators and state party bosses - put unrelenting pressure on these local officials to delay or reject the routine certification of results. In Georgia, the state's two current Republican senators called on Secretary of State Brad

Raffensperger to resign because he affirmed that the state's vote was free and fair. In Michigan, party officials hounded the two Republicans on the four-person Board of State Canvassers that certifies the state's results. In the face of this assault, one of the two folded. It was only because the other Republican, 40-year-old Aaron Van Langevelde, stood his ground that Michigan's results were certified. (President-elect Joe Biden won by more than 150,000 votes.)

And remember, the story is not over yet. In all likelihood, Trump will keep up his attacks on those Republican officials in the key swing states who refuse to do his bidding. If Raffensperger and Van Langevelde are drummed out of politics, the message to Republican officials in the next close election will be clear: Put party over country or you can say goodbye to your career. The next set of local officials might prove to be less honorable. So might a younger and more partisan batch of judges.

America's election arrangements are rooted in a venerable Anglo-Saxon system in which citizens or private

We need a set of post-Trump reforms to bolster U.S. democracy. Independent, nonpartisan boards should be established to manage elections rather than partisan officials. Standardized rules should be set about voter registration, mail-in voting, ballot challenges and the reporting of results.

groups are periodically called upon to perform official functions. The Anglo-Saxon approach contrasts with the French continental system in which the state has more control. But the Anglo-American system depends on the idea that these citizens will place the public interest ahead of their private interest. Trump has put that assumption to the test, plunging our democracy into crisis.

We need a set of post-Trump reforms to bolster U.S. democracy. Independent, nonpartisan boards should be established to manage elections rather than partisan officials. Standardized rules should be set about voter registration, mail-in voting,

By assaulting U.S. democracy in so many ways, Trump has shone a light on its weaknesses. We should seize this moment to strengthen our institutions. That way, if another Trump-like politician (or Trump himself in four years) tries to pervert the system again, American democracy will be better equipped to withstand it.

ballot challenges and the reporting of results.

We also need a broader set of reforms that draw on the experience of the Trump years, ones that codify into law what have been traditions and practices. Candidates should have to disclose their tax returns so that the public can be aware of any potential conflicts of interest. Winners must be required to place any of their businesses or assets into genuine blind trusts.

Additionally, we can now see that the lag between the election and inauguration is much too long - far longer than most other countries - and that the incumbent enjoys far too much power during this period. The Trump administration has made the dangers clear by initially withholding funds for the transition and refusing to provide intelligence briefings to Biden. Laws should be written to ensure a smooth transition and minimize the possibility that the outgoing president can act to enhance his personal fortunes and cripple his successor.

By assaulting U.S. democracy in so many ways, Trump has shone a light on its weaknesses. We should seize this moment to strengthen our institutions. That way, if another Trump-like politician (or Trump himself in four years) tries to pervert the system again, American democracy will be better equipped to withstand it.

(Fareed Zakaria is a columnist)

(Source: The Washington Post)

GUEST COMMENT

Trust deficit: On MSP and the need for a legal guarantee

Apart from the fresh amendments, the Centre must consider a legal guarantee for MSP

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha, a federation of around 500 farmer organizations, has resolved to intensify its agitation against three farm laws hurriedly enacted by the Centre. After dismissing the protests as ill-informed and motivated initially, the Centre has offered to make some changes to the laws, but the farmers have now called for a Bharat Bandh on December 8. Thousands of farmers camping on the outskirts of the national capital are skeptical of the government claim that these laws would make agriculture more lucrative and secure by allowing market forces to play. The fear that the new regime will dismantle the system of procurement under Minimum Support Price (MSP) and leave farmers at the mercy of corporations is real. Responding to concerns, the Centre has suggested safeguards to prevent land

alienation via contract farming; strengthening the State-run mandi system and ensuring its equal footing with private buyers through equalizing taxes; allowing grievance redress in civil courts rather than just in the offices of Sub-Divisional Magistrates; and ensuring proper verification of private traders. It has not, however, offered a legal guarantee of MSP and the question of power subsidies also remains contentious.

The Narendra Modi government has a declared policy of ensuring farm prices that are at least 50% more than the input costs. This has remained more an intent than reality, and the discussion has also been muddled by the government's refusal to include rental value of the land in input costs. Agriculture has to remain environmentally sustainable and remunerative for farmers. Significant challenges have emerged with regard to these benchmarks, though India has ensured substantial food stock and a robust distribution

mechanism that covers the entire country. There is a strong case for reworking the incentive structures and cropping pattern in order to account for changes in water availability and changing dietary requirements. The problems faced by farmers are by no means the same across India. But a sense of hostility from the state and market is now pervasive. Changes in land acquisition laws and the general thrust towards industrialization together with the pressure on agriculture subsidies have increased the feeling of vulnerability of farmers in recent years.

The abrupt changes in the sector brought in through the three laws have aggravated the trust deficit of the government. The combative attitude of the government and the Bharatiya Janata Party towards criticism worsened it further. Food security is considered a component of national security by all countries. The Union Agriculture Minister has said the government has no ego. The Centre must strive for reaching an agreement with the farmers that addresses their concerns. - (The Hindu)

Kerala: It is time to demand clean governance



By George Abraham

"Keralites cannot be fooled any longer by these frequent denunciations of corruption and graft by one party and presenting themselves as righteous. They see through most of these characters, except a few with integrity, for their hypocrisy decrying corruption at high places. They have been witnessing these shenanigans for the past several decades. It is no longer an occasional revelation of wrongdoing but has become a way of life."

If one follows the political dynamics in Kerala, the recent events surpass any drama on Broadway in terms of creativity, intrigue, and investigations. At the core of any storytelling lies a compelling array of character types. Unlike many novels, here, we have many three-dimensional characters with great backgrounds and experiences. Daily, the protagonists, antagonists, and all the supporting characters present Kerala as a little theatre where the audiences are condemned to watch this unfolding drama at a high cost to themselves in terms of resources, serious mental



Kerala gold smuggling case accused Swapna Suresh was arrested in Bengaluru by the National Investigation Agency.

Photo / Courtesy PTI

stress, and physical agony.

There must be a woman as one of the main characters in the story, and Swapna Suresh is playing that role with passion, and the former Chief Secretary M. Sivashankar is already branding himself as a dynamic man of mysteries. The Chief Minister of the State, Pinarai Vijayan, appears to be twisting in the wind unsure of his own destiny. The Communist Party that came to power attacking corruption seems to swallow their own words uttered against a former Chief Minister.

As this drama plays out in the open, one thing is sure. Keralites cannot be fooled any longer by these frequent denunciations of corruption and graft by one party and presenting themselves as righteous. They see through most of these characters, except a few with integrity, for their hypocrisy decrying corruption at high places. They have been witnessing these shenanigans for the past several decades. It is no longer an occasional revelation of wrongdoing but has become a way of life.

Kunhalikutty, a rising star of the emerging political reality in Kerala, revealed as much when he said at a press conference that during their time in power, many charges of corruption by the opposition were brought to their attention. However, they glossed over or did nothing about it. He appeared to have taken pride in their inaction about corruption, fraudulent conduct by those in power. It is quite amusing how our politicians view bribery, extortion, influence peddling, graft, and embezzlement with such a tongue-in-cheek attitude. In other words, Kunhalikutty is almost telling us that we not only protected our own corrupted souls but even the ones who belonged to the opposition! What a sorry state of affairs Keralites are in!

What has changed in the body politic of Kerala? Please take a close look at many of our leaders in the public arena today. Most of them came from humble or moderate backgrounds. Some of them might have come from comfortable settings but were not wealthy or big landlords. However, today, scores of them are said to be filthy rich, with most of their assets hidden under some Binami somewhere in India or abroad! Some of their submissions with the election commission may be characterized as an affidavit of avoiding the truth.

Keralites, to their credit, tend to topple

corrupt governments. However, more and more, they look like facilitators of equal opportunity corruption schemes. They are sick to the stomach of games these career politicians are playing at their expense and are utterly helpless and unable to do anything about it. The swamp that includes these politicians, Administrators, and crony capitalists have been plundering the Treasury and dividing up the government lands for so long that it has become business as usual regardless of who is at the wheels of power. In all of Kerala's history, only one politician has gone to prison for corruption, and then Chief Minister could not wait to get him out of jail so fast.

In the past, Kerala was blessed with great leaders who ruled the states with high integrity and honor. Having roots in Chengannur, I could still recollect the story of late R. Sankara Narayanan Thampy, a communist leader who could have chosen to live his life in luxury and comfort but decided to give it up to fight for the rights of the poor and the disadvantaged from an entrenched caste system. He was harassed by the powerful, repeatedly threatened by law enforcement, and constantly on the run, often saving himself hiding in mud huts with those who were the victims of oppression. He was frequently arrested and detained for his powerful speeches aimed at Sir C P Ramaswamy Iyer, defending freedom, and promoting social justice.

In an interview with Times of India on the 23rd anniversary of Thampy's death in 2012, P.L. Thankamma, his wife, reminisced her husband, saying he was an image of honesty, courage, and dedication. Thampy, who was part of the freedom struggle at a young age married Thankamma when she was 20 years old. She recalled when she had to bring their youngest newborn daughter to the Poojapura jail in Thiruvananthapuram as he was serving prison time at the time of her birth. Foregoing the little pleasures any married woman would desire and letting go of all dreams that a woman has for married life, she wholeheartedly supported his endeavors in the public arena. His hard work and dedication to the cause did not go unnoticed as he was selected as the first speaker of the Kerala Legislative Assembly in 1957.

As the saying goes, this is not your grandfather's Communist Party anymore. It is a party in decline with its failed ideology becoming increasingly obsolete. It has survived so far in Kerala primarily due to its commitment to the Backward and Scheduled castes who truly attribute their improved lot to the decade-old reforms the party has championed. Another more recent phenomena for their success has been due to the growing perception among some quarters that they are more reliable to defend secular nationalism and protect the rights of the religious minorities. In the last election, scores of Christians, Muslims, and secular Hindus voted for the Hammer and Sickle against their own age-old aversion towards a

It is time to end this ongoing heist and grand larceny while exposing the nexus of corruption and criminality that has gone behind the scenes unchecked for decades as both fronts have covered up for each other

totalitarian ideology.

However, today, the belly of the beast is cut open, baring the ugly secrets of a party that has sold out its soul for greed and obscene profits. The ruling hierarchy's hypocrisy is wide open, having a lavish lifestyle with estates and posh homes with spoiled children creating a ruckus across the globe and engaging in criminal behavior. In the meantime, the young people at the cadre level are being asked to sacrifice their lives for the party, often engaging in riots and killings allegedly ordered from the top.

While the public witnesses the heated rhetoric, the parties hurl at each other, questioning each other's integrity and motives; bear in mind that it is part of a grand deception, and their only goal is to snatch the power from each other, especially close to an election date. Behind the scenes, they are all close buddies, often engaging in joint ventures that bring in hefty profits. One of the IT companies involved in recent scandals alleged to have vital links with family members of both political fronts with strong financial support from prominent NRIs in the Gulf.

It is time to end this ongoing heist and grand larceny while exposing the nexus of corruption and criminality that has gone behind the scenes unchecked for decades as both fronts have covered up for each other. Keralites have been taken for a ride for so long, and their patience is wearing thin. They deserve a government that reflects their character and traditions and willing to serve the people with clean governance. An honest government will never shy away from exposing the wolves in the sheep's clothing who have violated their oath engaging in corruption and graft. Poojapura Jail still has a lot of room, and honorable R. Sankara Narayanan Thampy never belonged there!

(The author is a former Chief Technology Officer of the United Nations)

Jail for 3 more Hafiz aides

LAHORE (TIP): A Pakistani anti-terrorism court has sentenced three more leaders of Mumbai terror attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed's Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD) to 15-year imprisonment each in two more terror financing cases. Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Lahore Judge Ijaz Ahmad Buttar handed down the sentence to Abdul Salam bin Muhammad, Zafar Iqbal and Muhammad Ashraf on Thursday.

JuD chief Saeed's brother-in-law Prof Hafiz Abdul Rehman Makki was sentenced to six months imprisonment in each case. — PTI

PoK govt signs agreements with Chinese firm to build 700MW hydropower project

ISLAMABAD (TIP): The government in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir has signed agreements with a Chinese company and a local renewable energy firm for the construction of 700MW hydropower project at an estimated cost of USD 1.35 billion in the region as part of the ambitious China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a media report said on Wednesday.

China Gezhouba Group and its local partner Laraib Group Pakistan are the shareholders of the 'Azad Pattan Hydropower Project', which is located on Jhelum river in Sadhanoti district of PoK, Dawn newspaper reported.

The consortium of lenders consists of China Development Bank, China Construction Bank, Industrial and Commercial Bank of China and Bank of China, the paper said.

The implementation agreement and water use charges agreement for construction of the project were signed by PoK Electricity Secretary Zafar Mahmood Khan and Azad Pattan Power Private Limited CEO Li Xiaota on Tuesday, the paper said.

The CPEC, which connects Gwadar Port in Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, is the flagship project of Chinese President Xi Jinping's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Originally valued at USD 46 billion, the CPEC projects were worth USD 62 billion as of 2017.

India has protested to China over the CPEC as it is being laid through PoK.

The Ministry of External Affairs early this year said that Pakistan was told that the entire Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, including areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, are an integral part of India and that Islamabad should immediately vacate the areas under its illegal occupation. The government of Pakistan implementation agreement, Punjab water use agreement and tripartite power purchase agreements of the project had already been signed in the presence of Prime Minister Imran Khan. - PTI

Afghan government, Taliban announce breakthrough deal to press on with peace talks

KABUL (TIP): Afghan government and Taliban representatives said on Wednesday they had reached a preliminary deal to press on with peace talks, their first written agreement in 19 years of war.

The agreement lays out the way forward for further discussion but is considered a breakthrough because it will allow negotiators to move on to more substantive issues, including talks on a ceasefire.

"The procedure including its preamble of the negotiation has been finalised and from now on, the negotiation will begin on the agenda," Nader Nadery, a member of the Afghan government's negotiating team, told Reuters.

The Taliban spokesman confirmed the same on Twitter.

The agreement comes after months of discussions in Doha, the capital of Qatar, in negotiations encouraged by the United States. In Afghanistan, the two sides are still at war, with Taliban attacks on government forces continuing unabated.

Taliban insurgents have refused to agree to a ceasefire during the preliminary stages of talks, despite calls from Western capitals and global bodies, saying that that would be taken up only



when the way forward for talks was agreed upon.

UN envoy for Afghanistan Deborah Lyons welcomed the "positive development" on Twitter, adding that "this breakthrough should be a springboard to reach the peace wanted by all Afghans".

Last month, an agreement reached between Taliban and government negotiators was held up at the last

minute after the insurgents balked at the document's preamble because it mentioned the Afghan government by name.

The Taliban refused to refer to the Afghan negotiating team as representatives of the Afghan government, as they contest the legitimacy of the administration led by President Ashraf Ghani. --- Reuters

Muslims in Sri Lanka 'denied justice' over forced cremations of Covid victims

COLOMBO (TIP): Muslim and Christian families in Sri Lanka whose relatives were cremated during the coronavirus pandemic in violation of their religious beliefs say they have been denied justice after the supreme court threw out their case.

Sri Lanka's mandatory cremation policy for all bodies suspected to be infected with Covid-19 has been the cause of outrage and trauma for the majority-Buddhist country's Muslim and Christian minorities, whose beliefs stipulate bodies should be buried. In Islam, to cremate bodies is to condemn them to hell.

Several of the Muslims whose bodies were cremated by the authorities had not been tested for coronavirus, or had even tested negative. Sri Lanka has had more than 25,000 cases of Covid-19 and 124 deaths, including more than 50 Muslims who were cremated.

In May, one Muslim man found that his mother had been wrongfully cremated. "The day my mother died at hospital, they took her body away and then handed me a pot of her ashes. But the next day they told me that my mother's test was negative and it was a mistake cremating her. Every night I wake up and think of mother's fate. We are poor and we do not have the means to demand

justice or fight the authorities," he said.

Eleven affected families, both Muslim and Christian, took up a legal battle against the cremations, accusing the government of violating their freedom of religion and fundamental rights under the constitution. However, this week the supreme court refused to hear the appeal and dismissed the case, dashing their final hopes of justice and a halt to the mandatory cremations, which are still going on.

Some Muslim families have begun disowning their dead because they do not want to be complicit in the cremations, which they see as a sin for their loved ones. Many have also refused to pay the fees of 48,000 rupees (£192) that are demanded by the state to cover the costs of cremation, meaning bodies of Muslim Covid-19 victims have begun to pile up in hospital morgues.

Among them was Mohammad Ashraff, 49, whose uncle Mohammad Jeffrey, 76, died on 26 November of coronavirus. His body was compulsorily brought to a hospital in Colombo. "They demanded payment for the coffin but I refused because I told them it is against our religion to burn bodies. We have to obey the law but we would not participate, we would make no payments, we would have no part and no complicity in this."

'There will be no hope': Muslims fear Rajapaksa win in Sri Lanka election

Human rights activists say the policy is part of an ongoing attack on Sri Lanka's Muslim community, who make up 9% of the population, by the Sinhala Buddhist majority government, led by the president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Rajapaksa was elected last year on a wave of anti-Muslim, hardline Buddhist sentiment, following the Easter suicide bombings by Islamist militants in churches and luxury hotels last April which left 267 dead.

Shreen Saroor, a human rights activist, said: "The way they are treating the Muslim community during this pandemic is clear-cut racism. The community is being forced to abandon their own dead in order to protect their beliefs and traditions. There is not even a scientific justification for them being denied dignity in death."

Sri Lanka is the only country aside from China which has mandated cremations for suspected coronavirus fatalities, with the government justifying it on the basis of concerns of the virus contaminating groundwater, and that Covid-19 victims' bodies could be used as "biological weapons ... by certain groups".

Theguardian.com

Michael Flynn wants Trump to declare Martial Law and redo the Election

WASHINGTON (TIP): Michael Flynn, President Donald Trump's former national security adviser who was pardoned by the president last week for lying during the Russia investigation, wants Trump to declare martial law and "temporarily suspend the Constitution" until a new election is held.

Flynn, who had been awaiting sentencing for lying to the FBI about his Russian contacts before Trump's pardon, on Tuesday retweeted a news release from a right-wing Ohio group called We The People Convention asking the president to declare martial law so troops can supervise a do-over of the 2020 election.

Flynn tagged many conservative celebs in his post and added: "Freedom never kneels except for God."

The news release cites "massive,



The president's freshly pardoned ex-national security adviser retweeted a statement advocating suspending the Constitution.

planned, illegal election fraud" carried out by Democrats. Trump lost the election handily to President-elect Joe Biden and no widespread fraud has been found.

If the president doesn't declare martial law, the statement retweeted by Flynn warns, "we will also have no other choice but to take matters into our own hands and defend our rights on our own."

A retired Army general's support for the military takeover of U.S. government shocked many people on Twitter.

Rep. Eric Swalwell of California wondered if elected Republicans would condemn the call for martial law.

Some people pointed out that Flynn's suggestion could be considered sedition.

Others called out the right wing's hypocritical notions of personal freedom.

One person tried to see the bright side, saying the tweet shows it's good Flynn didn't last long as national security adviser.

(Source: The Washington Post)

Renew Your Driver License online



Photo for Representational purpose only

NEW YORK (TIP): New York State has made it easier to renew Driver License online. Almost anyone whose license expired or will expire March through December can renew online and submit their vision test up to one year later. It takes just a few simple steps to complete the process.

For more information, visit <https://dmv.ny.gov/how-renew-license>

Beyond Covid-19, a book by Dr. Chalil & Ambassador Kapur is now on "Amazon Best Sellers List"

BY AJAY GHOSH

NEW YORK (TIP): Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic: Envisioning a Better World by Transforming the Future of Healthcare, authored by Ambassador Pradeep Kapur, a practitioner of Public Policy, and Dr. Joseph Chalil, an expert in healthcare policy, is now on Amazon's Best Sellers List.

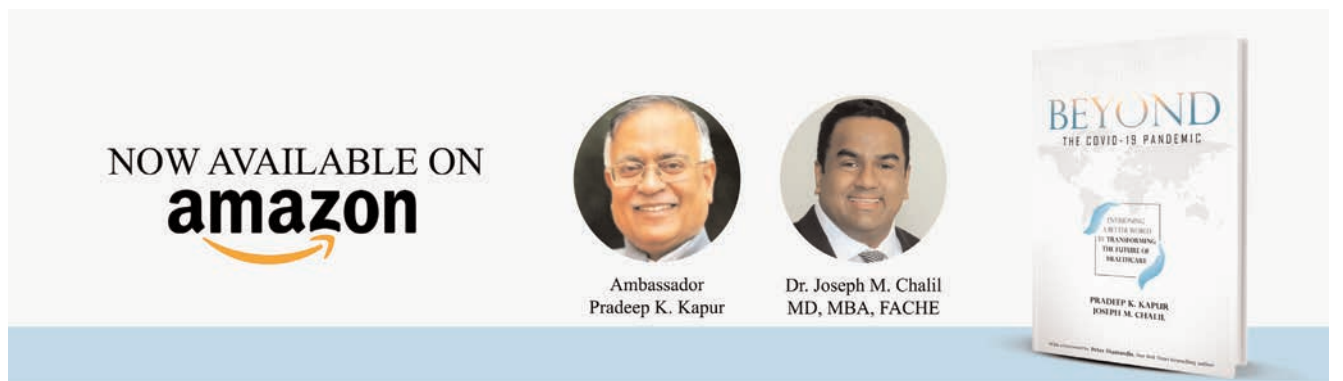
Around the world, providing quality and affordable healthcare remains a challenge. As the COVID-19 pandemic began, it quickly became apparent that public policy and current healthcare systems were ill-prepared to deal with the challenges. Ambassador Kapur and Dr. Chalil discuss the lessons learned and the way ahead in the book, Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic: Envisioning a Better World by Transforming the Future of Healthcare.

The authors offer sustainable and revolutionary solutions to change healthcare delivery in the United States and a model for other countries. With a combination of a public SafetyNet and free-market competition, they offer their "Grand Plan." The advances and adoption of current and new technology will revolutionize the field of healthcare. They offer critical strategies that countries can adopt during natural disasters, wars, or a pandemic.

The authors focus on breaking the chain of employer-based health insurance, where your health insurance is not tied to your employment. Too often, the benefits of providing healthcare for all is lost in discussions about health insurance. Yet, this book does not allow these issues to control the analysis of healthcare delivery.

This book offers practical solutions, addressing citizens' needs now and into the future while empowering them to be more responsible for their health. As envisioned by the authors, the emerging global scenarios address healthcare needs, education, and sustainable lifestyle choices, reducing the need for more intensive and costly interventions to improve the overall quality of life. There is a roadmap for U.N. and WHO, which are not living up to their initial promise, beyond just reform. They challenge the world to have the political consensus to create meaningful change for all, both in the United States, the United Nations, and around the globe.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that ensuring affordable and timely access to health care is a priority for all. It has shown us the limitations of each country in combating a healthcare crisis like the one we



are experiencing today. As the pandemic began, it quickly became apparent that public policy and current healthcare systems were ill-prepared to deal with a pandemic's challenges. Providing quality and affordable healthcare remains a challenge.

Esteemed personalities worldwide have much acclaimed the timely and insightful edition of the book released in October this year. Gurudev Sri Ravi Shankar, a globally revered spiritual and humanitarian leader, wrote: "Ambassador Pradeep Kapur and Dr. Joseph Chalil discuss the lessons learned in the book, Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic: Envisioning a Better World by Transforming the Future of Healthcare. The authors offer sustainable and revolutionary solutions to change healthcare delivery in the United States and a model for other countries. With a combination of a public SafetyNet and free-market competition, they offer their "Grand Plan." The advances and adoption of current and new technology will revolutionize the field of healthcare. They offer critical strategies that countries can adopt during natural disasters, wars, or a pandemic."

The authors are donating the profits from the sale of their book to AAPI Charitable Foundation and WHEELS!

Ambassador Pradeep Kapur is an acknowledged "luminary diplomat," with a distinguished career working with leaders and policymakers in different continents of the world: Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, and South America. He was the author and editor of many books. Kapur was Ambassador of India to Chile and Cambodia and Secretary at the Indian Ministry of External Affairs before joining as an academic in reputed universities in the USA and India. A graduate of the globally acclaimed Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi (IIT-D), he is Executive Director of Smart Village Development Fund (SVDF); International

Economic Strategic Advisor, Intellect Design Arena; and Chairman, Advisory Council, DiplomacyIndia.com. His healthcare contributions include setting up of BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences in Eastern Nepal, which is acclaimed as an exemplary bilateral India Nepal initiative.

Dr. Joseph Chalil, an author of several scientific and research papers in international publications, is the Chairman of the Complex Health Systems Advisory Board, H. Wayne Huizenga College of Business and Entrepreneurship at Nova Southeastern University in Florida and a member of Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Allopathic Medicine (NSU MD) Executive Leadership Council. A veteran of the U.S. Navy Medical Corps, he is board certified in healthcare management. He has been awarded a Fellowship by the American College of Healthcare Executives, an international professional society of more than 40,000 healthcare executives who lead hospitals, healthcare systems, and other healthcare organizations. Dr. Chalil is the Chairman of the Indo American Press Club (IAPC). He is an expert in U.S. healthcare policy and a strong advocate for patient-centered care. With years of experience working in the U.S. healthcare system, he discusses healthcare delivery challenges, including providing quality, affordable patient care to all and alternate templates for health insurance.

The authors challenge the world to have the political consensus to create meaningful change for all, both in the United States, the United Nations, and around the globe.

For more information, please visit <https://beyondcovidbook.com>.

Interest rates remain the same for the first quarter of 2021



WASHINGTON (TIP): The Internal Revenue Service today, December 2, announced that interest rates will remain the same for the calendar quarter beginning Jan. 1, 2021.

The rates will be:

Three (3) percent for overpayments [two (2) percent in the case of a corporation]; one-half (0.5) percent for the portion of a corporate overpayment exceeding \$10,000; three (3) percent for underpayments; and five (5) percent for large corporate underpayments.

Under the Internal Revenue Code, the rate of interest is determined on a quarterly basis. For taxpayers other than corporations, the overpayment and underpayment rate is the federal short-term rate plus 3 percentage points.

Generally, in the case of a corporation, the underpayment rate is the federal short-term rate plus 3 percentage points and the overpayment rate is the federal short-term rate plus 2 percentage points. The rate for large corporate underpayments is the federal short-term rate plus 5 percentage points. The rate on the portion of a corporate overpayment of tax exceeding \$10,000 for a taxable period is the federal short-term rate plus one-half (0.5) of a percentage point.

The interest rates announced today are computed from the federal short-term rate determined during Oct. 2020 to take effect Nov. 1, 2020, based on daily compounding.

Revenue Ruling 2020-28, announcing the rates of interest, is attached and will appear in Internal Revenue Bulletin 2020-52, dated Dec. 21, 2020.

(Press Release)

UN says 2020 set to be one of three warmest years on record

NEW YORK (TIP): The United Nation's World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said on Wednesday, December 2, that 2020 is set to enter the record books as one of the top three hottest years, and has the potential to surpass 2016's distinction as the warmest year on record.

According to the U.N.'s provisional report, the 2020 State of the Global Climate, the past decade will be the hottest on record, with the past consecutive six years, 2015 through 2020, being the planet's warmest.

"2020 has, unfortunately, been yet another extraordinary year for our climate, WMO Secretary-General Prof. Petteri Taalas said in a press release.

"We saw new extreme temperatures on land, sea and especially in the Arctic. Wildfires consumed vast areas in Australia, Siberia, the US West Coast and South America, sending plumes of smoke circumnavigating the globe," he said.

"We saw a record number of hurricanes in the Atlantic, including unprecedented back-to-back category 4 hurricanes in Central America in November," Taalas continued. "Flooding in parts of Africa and South East Asia led to massive population displacement and undermined food security for millions."

In a speech at Columbia University, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, "Humanity is waging war on nature." "This is suicidal. Nature always strikes back - and it is



Wildfire in California

already doing so with growing force and fury."

When U.S. President Donald Trump attended a briefing on wildfires in California in September, a state official spoke of the science that could explain climate change. The president responded by saying, "I don't think science knows, actually."

"Biodiversity is collapsing," Guterres said. "One million species are at risk of extinction. Ecosystems are disappearing before our eyes. Deserts are spreading. Wetlands are being lost."

(Source: Knowhere)

More than half of emergency small-business funds went to larger businesses, new data shows

Much of the funds were used for purposes other than PPP was meant for, which calls for investigation

WASHINGTON (TIP): The Trump administration has emphasized PPP loans to small firms, but most of the \$522 billion went to a tiny slice of borrowers

More than half of the money from the Treasury Department's coronavirus emergency fund for small businesses went to just 5 percent of the recipients, according to data on more than 5 million loans that was released by the government Tuesday evening in response to a Freedom of Information Act request and lawsuit.

According to data on the government's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), about 600 mostly larger companies, including dozens of national chains, received the maximum amount allowed under the program of \$10 million.

Officials from the Treasury Department and the Small Business Administration (SBA) have argued the program primarily benefited smaller businesses because a vast majority of the loans - more than 87 percent - were for less than \$150,000, as of August. But the new data shows more than half of the \$522 billion in the same time frame went to bigger businesses, and only 28 percent of the money was distributed in amounts less than \$150,000.

Liz Hempowicz, director of public policy for the nonprofit Project on Government Oversight, said the new data shows how the Trump administration chose to focus its coronavirus relief efforts on helping wealthy organizations at the expense of truly small firms.

"The data shows that this program primarily benefited the well-banked and well-lawyered at the expense of the small businesses it was supposed to



benefit," Hempowicz said.

The newly released data comes after a federal lawsuit filed by The Washington Post and 10 other news organizations under the Freedom of Information Act challenging the SBA's refusal to release records on borrowers and loan amounts. A federal judge ordered the release of the data by Tuesday and the agency did not appeal.

Devised as a way to temporarily pay small companies to keep their employees on staff for eight weeks, the Paycheck Protection Program is widely credited with helping millions of businesses make payroll during the early months of the coronavirus pandemic, benefiting tens of millions of employees. A bipartisan group of senators unveiled plans Tuesday for another \$908 billion in stimulus, including nearly \$300 billion in new funding for the Paycheck Protection Program and other SBA programs. The data released Tuesday disclosed for

the first time the exact dollar figures received by some of the top recipients, showing that a number of restaurant chains received the maximum \$10 million, among them the parent companies of Uno Pizzeria & Grill, Legal Sea Foods, Boston Market and Cava Mezze Grill. Law firms, churches and professional staffing services were also among recipients of \$10 million loans.

The SBA calculated loan amounts based on monthly payroll figures and capped loans at a maximum of \$10 million. Businesses with up to 500 employees were eligible, though that limit was relaxed for restaurant and hotel companies. Hempowicz said that because the first round of PPP funding favored those with established banking connections, smaller operations lost out on funding at a critical time.

"Businesses in that top 5 percent likely have access to other capital," she said. "These are not the ones you would traditionally think of as a small business. It really raises questions about what the priorities of this SBA are. ... Is it to help small business, or is it to return money to the top segment of the economy?"

Amanda Ballantyne, executive director of the advocacy group Main Street Alliance, said the data shows the impact of relying on banks to distribute the funds.

"This new data verifies what we have heard directly from our small-business members - that the PPP program advantaged big businesses over small and exacerbated long-standing disparities in access to credit and capital for underbanked communities," Ballantyne said.

US Senate passes bill eliminating per-country cap for employment-based immigrant visas

The legislation eliminates the 7 pc cap for employment-based immigrant visas, a provision that will facilitate removal of the massive backlog of Indian IT professionals in the US

WASHINGTON (TIP): The US Senate has unanimously passed a bill that eliminates the per-country numerical limitation for employment-based immigrant visas and raises it for family-based visas, a legislation that will hugely benefit hundreds of thousands of Indian professionals in America who have been waiting for years to get their green cards.

The passage of the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act by the Senate on Wednesday, December 2, comes as a big relief to Indian IT professionals who come to the US on H-1B work visas and their current waiting period for Green Card or permanent residency is running into decades.

Originally passed by the US House of Representatives on July 10, 2019, by a bipartisan 365 to 65 votes, the legislation increases the per-country cap on family-based immigrant visas from seven per cent of the total number of such visas available that year to 15 per cent. It was sponsored by Republican Senator Mike Lee from Utah in the Senate.

The legislation eliminates the seven per cent cap for employment-based immigrant visas, a provision that will facilitate removal of the massive backlog of Indian IT professionals in the US. It also removes an offset that reduced the number of visas for individuals from China. Because of arbitrary per-country caps, the legal status of Indian IT professionals was constantly in jeopardy.

In fiscal year 2019, Indian nationals received 9,008 category 1 (EB1), 2,908 category 2 (EB2), and 5,083 category 3 (EB3) Green Cards. EB1-3 are different categories of employment-based Green Cards.

In July, Senator Lee had told the Senate

that the backlog for an Indian national to get permanent residency or Green Card is more than 195 years.

The new legislation also establishes transition rules for employment-based visas from FY2020-FY2022, by reserving a percentage of EB-2 (workers with advanced degrees or exceptional ability), EB-3 (skilled and other workers), and EB-5 (investors) visas for individuals not from the two countries with the largest number of recipients of such visas.

Of the unreserved visas, not more than 85 per cent shall be allotted to immigrants from any single country. Running against time, the Senate on Wednesday moved the process very quickly. It was passed by the Senate Judiciary Committee by unanimous consent and soon thereafter it was considered by the full Senate. The Senate passed it quickly with unanimous consent.

Currently, there is a backlog of almost one million foreign nationals and accompanying family members lawfully residing in the US who have been approved for, and are waiting to receive, employment-based Green Cards. The largest number of them are from India.

The Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act creates a more merit-based system that levels the playing field for high-skilled immigrants, said Senator Kevin Cramer, who worked to ensure that the legislation includes safeguards against fraud and abuse in the visa system.

The Senate passed the bill as Senator Cramer presided over the chamber.

"Immigration is often a contentious issue but we should not delay progress where there is bipartisan consensus," he

said.

In February 2019, Cramer brought Debjyoti Dwivedy ("DD"), a North Dakota State University alumnus and Vice President of Immigration Voice, a group which advocates for this bill, as his guest to the State of the Union.

"As Congress debates the many aspects of our broken immigration system, Debjyoti offers expertise and experiences that reflect North Dakota priorities and values," Senator Cramer said at the time, adding: "It is my hope we can finally pass a version of the Fairness for High Skilled Immigrants Act this Congress."

"Being invited as his guest to the State of the Union was a great honor. To me, this demonstrates his appreciation for the important role immigrants play to North Dakota. His ardent support for the Fairness for Immigrants Act is found in both his conservative principles and his commitment to the people of North Dakota," DD wrote after the event.

In August, Senator Lee on the Senate floor said he had always been struck by the fact that the government has conditioned green cards and a pathway to citizenship based solely on the applicant's country of origin.

There may have been some legitimate reason many decades ago in fact for this, but this has led to a system that largely discriminates against green card applicants from one country, he told his Senate colleagues.

"I mean literally one country. This is inconsistent with our founding principles. This is not how we try to do things as Americans, and it's not right. Today, if you're a work-based immigrant from India entering into the EB- green



The passage of the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act by the Senate on Wednesday, December 2, comes as a big relief to Indian IT professionals who come to the US on H-1B work visas and their current waiting period for Green Card or permanent residency is running into decades. - Picture for representational purpose only

card application process, you will wait almost 200 years before your application is even considered solely because of where you were born," he had said.

"Almost 200 years on a waiting list. Some people don't even live that long. Our country isn't much older than that and that's the amount of time they would have to wait based solely on the basis of the country in which they were born," Lee had said, urging his colleagues to lift the country-cap on Green Card applicants.

"If you're born anywhere else, anywhere else other than China; let's say in Ghana, Sweden, Indonesia, basically any other country other than India your application will be considered immediately. This sort of discrimination is simply inconsistent with the principles of a merit-based immigration system and with our founding principles and the principles that unite us as Americans," he had said.

(Source: PTI)

US court blocks two H-1B regulations proposed by Trump administration

Most of the nearly 600,000 H-1B visa holders in the U.S. are from India and China

WASHINGTON (TIP): In a huge relief to tens of thousands of Indian professionals and top American IT firms, a US court has blocked two H-1B regulations proposed by the Trump administration to restrict the ability of American companies to hire foreign employees.

H-1B visas is a non-immigrant visa that allows American companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The US issues up to 85,000 H-1B visas each year. Usually, they're issued for three years and renewable. Most of the nearly 600,000 H-1B visa holders are from India and China.

In his 23-page order on Tuesday, US District Judge Jeffrey White of Northern District of California blocked the Trump administration's recent policy that required employers to pay foreign workers on H-1B visas significantly higher wages.

He also set aside another policy that narrowed the eligibility of H-1B valued by US tech firms and other employers.

As a result of the ruling, the Department of Homeland Security rule on occupations and other issues that were to come into effect from December 7, stands invalid. The Department of Labor rule on wages, which took effect on October 8, is also now no longer valid.

The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on the nation's health, and millions of Americans have been impacted financially by restrictions imposed on businesses, large and small,

during the pandemic; the consequences of those restrictions have been a fiscal calamity for many individuals, the judge wrote.

"However, the history of the US is in part made of the stories, talents, and lasting contributions of those who crossed oceans and deserts to come here. The national government has significant power to regulate immigration. With power comes responsibility, and the sound exercise of national power over immigration depends on the nation's meeting its responsibility to base its laws on a political will informed by searching, thoughtful, rational civic discourse," he said.

The lawsuit, in this case, was filed by US Chambers of Commerce, Bay Area Council and several universities, including Stanford, and trade bodies representing top Silicon Valley

companies, including Google, Facebook and Microsoft.

The lawsuit argued the new restrictions are not only illegal on their face but that the rushed process for implementing them was flawed.

"This is a major win for our economy and for our ability to recover from the worst downturn in generations," said Jim Wunderman, Bay Area Council President and CEO.

"H-1B workers fill an important need in our economy and provide immense benefits not only to the companies they work for but the communities where they live. Many of the leading and fastest-growing technology companies in the Bay Area have been founded by entrepreneurs from other countries who first came here on visas," he said.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

SC rejects demand for govt nominees in trust formed for Ayodhya mosque

The Supreme Court on Friday, Dec 4, rejected the demand to form a trust comprising government nominees to oversee construction work at the 5 acre land allotted to the Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board following the landmark decision of the top court in the Ramjanmbhoomi-Babri Masjid title suit in November last year.

A bench of justices RF Nariman and KM Joseph refused to entertain a petition filed in this regard by two lawyers Shishir Chaturvedi and Karunesh Kumar Shukla.

Appearing for the petitioners, advocate Hari Shankar Jain submitted that as per the November 9, 2019 decision of the Supreme Court, deciding the suit in favour of the Hindu parties, the Sunni Waqf Board was allotted 5 acres of land in village Dhannipur in Ayodhya district. On July 29, 2020, the Waqf Board created a trust called the Indo Islamic Cultural Foundation which had no nominees from either the Central or state government.

TRS largest in Hyderabad polls as BJP improves tally

The ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) emerged as the single largest party in the Hyderabad civic polls on Friday, Dec 4, but was jolted by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that surged into second place, a significant achievement for a party that was a bit player in the state four years ago.

The TRS won 55 of the 150 seats in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), a deficit of 44 seats from its 2016 showing of 99.

The BJP won 48 seats on the back of a high-octane campaign, a huge improvement over its 2016 performance of four seats when it fought in alliance with the Telugu Desam Party.

Rajinikanth's aides urge him to project himself as CM candidate

Tamil superstar Rajinikanth is being persuaded to project himself as the chief ministerial candidate for 2021 assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, a close aide said Friday, Dec 4, a day after the actor announced his intention to launch a political party by January 2021 and contest the assembly election.

"He (Rajinikanth) has taken a firm stand that he will not be chief minister," said a person considered close to the actor. "He had taken this decision even before announcing his political entry in December 2017. We are trying to convince him to rethink."

Farmers up ante, call for Bharat bandh on December 8

NEW DELHI (TIP): Farmers agitating against three farm laws on Friday, Dec 4 announced a nationwide strike, or Bharat Bandh, on December 8 where they said they will block all toll plazas and roads leading to Delhi as they hardened their position ahead of the fifth round of talks with the central government scheduled for Saturday, Dec 5.

Four rounds of negotiations, conducted between three Union ministers and farmers' representatives, have so far failed to break the deadlock between the two sides as thousands of cultivators continued their stir just outside Delhi's borders for the eight straight day.

On Thursday, the Centre had agreed to review the recently enacted legislation and "bring amendments" if required to address the farmers' demands. The farmers, however, have stuck to their stand and said that they did not want amendments to the new laws but want them rolled back entirely.

Farmer leader Gurnam Singh Chadoni said on Friday that if the Centre does not accept their demands during fifth meeting on Saturday, they will further intensify their agitation.

"In our meeting today, we have decided to give a 'Bharat Bandh' call on December 8 during which we will also occupy all toll plazas," said Harinder Singh Lakhwal, general secretary of Bharatiya Kisan Union, one of the groups involved in the talks. "We have planned to block all roads leading to Delhi in the coming days if new farm laws are not scrapped," he said, addressing a press conference at Singhu border that connects Delhi and Haryana.

"Yesterday (Thursday), we told the government that the farm laws should be withdrawn," he told reporters, adding that the farmers will burn effigies of the government and corporate houses on December 5, and that sportspersons will return their medals in solidarity with



Farmers during their protest against the Centre's new farm laws, at Singhu border in New Delhi on December 5, 2020.

the farmers on December 7. However, he did not divulge the details of sportspersons who would be returning their medals.

The call for the Bharat Bandh was supported by various other farmers' organisations. Hannan Mollah, general secretary of All India Kisan Sabha, said, "We need to take this protest forward."

The government, meanwhile, insisted that it was approaching the issue with an "open mind". Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar had said after the talks that the government has no ego and it was discussing the issues raised by farmers with an open mind. "The government will discuss points that emerged at the meeting on Friday and hopes that talks will move towards finality when the next round of discussions is held on Saturday," Tomar had said.

Thursday's talks were led by Tomar, railways, food and consumer affairs

minister Piyush Goyal and minister of state for commerce Som Prakash, a lawmaker from Punjab, while representatives of some of the biggest farmers unions in the country, mainly from Punjab, spoke for the farmers.

Tens of thousands of farmers were out on the streets around Delhi again on Friday, forcing police to shut a majority of roads connecting the Capital from neighbouring satellite towns such as Gurugram and Noida. While the farmers want the three farm laws approved by Parliament in September to be revoked, the government has leaned on its new reform agenda to raise farm incomes and spur investments in the sector.

The recent laws allow businesses to freely trade farm produce outside the so-called government-controlled mandi system, permit private traders to stockpile large quantities of essential commodities for future sales and lay down new rules for contract farming.

Poonawalla of Serum Institute among 6 named 'Asians of the Year' by Singapore daily

SINGAPORE (TIP): Adar Poonawalla, the chief executive of the world's largest vaccine manufacturer Serum Institute of India, is among six people named 'Asians of the Year' by Singapore's leading daily, The Straits Times, for their work in fighting the Covid pandemic.

Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII) has collaborated with the University of Oxford and the British-Swedish pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca for making the Covid vaccine, 'Covidshield', and is conducting trials in India.

The other five named in the list are Chinese researcher Zhang Yongzhen, who led the team that mapped and published online the first complete genome of Sars-CoV-2, the virus that sparked the pandemic, China's Major-General Chen Wei, Japan's Dr Ryuichi Morishita and Singapore's Professor Ooi Eng Eong, who are among those at the forefront of developing vaccines against the virus, and South Korean businessman Seo Jung-jin whose company will enable the



Adar Poonawalla

making and dispensing of the vaccines and other Covid-19 treatments to the world. Collectively referred to as "the virus busters", they are heroes of a kind, having devoted themselves to the pressing cause of resolving the coronavirus pandemic, each in their own capacity, the daily said.

"Sars-CoV-2, the virus that has brought

death and hardship to the world's largest and most populous continent, is meeting its tamer in The Virus Busters," the award citation said.

"We salute your courage, care, commitment and creativity. In this peril-filled hour, you are a symbol of hope for Asia, indeed the world."

The Serum Institute was founded by Poonawalla's father Cyrus Poonawalla in 1966. Poonawalla joined the Serum Institute of India in 2001 and became the CEO of Serum Institute with complete control of the day-to-day operations of the company in 2011.

Poonawalla said that he had put USD 250 million of his family fortune into ramping up his institute's manufacturing capacity.

"I decided to go all out," said Poonawalla, 39, who has pledged that his firm's COVID-19 vaccines will help supply lower- and middle-income countries that face significant disadvantages in the quest to obtain them.

FTA talks with EU stuck due to bloc's reluctance: Jaishankar

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday, Dec 4, said negotiations for a free trade agreement between India and the European Union were stuck for the last six years due to reluctance of the grouping.

The talks for the FTA have been stalled since May 2013 when both sides failed to bridge substantial gaps on crucial issues, including on data security status for the IT sector. Asked during an online interactive session whether the talks were stalled due to India's reservations against FTAs, Jaishankar vehemently dispelled it and said: "It is not a question of principle. India has nothing in principle against free trade agreements or preferential trade agreements."

Launched in June 2007, negotiations for the proposed agreement have witnessed many hurdles as both sides have major differences on crucial issues.

Giving a run down of the developments relating to the proposed FTA, Jaishankar said at the 6th Edition of MED dialogue that India was negotiating on it with the European Union till 2013 but the deal could not be closed.



Chargesheet filed against Arnab in 2018 suicide case

The police on Friday filed a chargesheet against Republic TV Editor-in-Chief Arnab Goswami and two others in a 2018 abetment of suicide case. The chargesheet was filed before a court in Alibaug in neighbouring Raigad district, where the case for alleged abetment to suicide of interior designer Anvay Naik and his mother Kumud has been registered. Besides Goswami, the other two accused named in the chargesheet are Firoze Sheikh and Nitish Sarda.

Rs14 cr Mallya assets seized in France: ED

Businessman Vijay Mallya's property worth Rs 14 crore located at 32 Avenue FOCH in France has been seized under the anti-money laundering law, the Enforcement Directorate said. It said the action was taken by French authorities "on the ED's request".

Covid vaccine may be ready in few weeks: PM Modi at all-party meet

NEW DELHI (TIP): India is set to get a Covid-19 vaccine within weeks, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday, Dec 4, while briefing political leaders on the preparations for "cheap and safe" Made in India vaccines, assuring them that immunisation would start as soon as scientists give a go-ahead.

"There are 8 potential vaccines at different stages of trials and their production will be in India. Three indigenous vaccines are also at different levels of trials. Experts believe it will not be a long wait for a Covid vaccine. It is believed that in the next few weeks, a Covid vaccine will be ready. As soon as scientists give the green signal, immunisation will start in India," the PM said, virtually addressing an all-party meeting.

Modi's remarks, two days after UK's authorisation for Pfizer's dose, was seen by some as an indication that emergency approval may be fast-tracked for the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, which is being produced by the Serum Institute of India. The other two local vaccines are unlikely to be ready in that time frame: Bharat Biotech's Covaxin has started phase 3 trails but the results aren't out yet; Zydus Cadila plans to start final trials in December.

On Saturday (November 28), SII CEO Adar Poonawalla said that SII could apply for emergency approval of the vaccine within two weeks.

Data from final trials in the UK and Brazil have shown the vaccine to be between 62% and 90% effective, depending on the dosage.



The Prime Minister assured the political leaders that Indian vaccines will be cheap but safe. He insisted on dispelling rumours for they are "never in public interest or national interest" and, for the first time, announced the priority list of beneficiaries.

"A few days ago, I had very successful talks with scientists involved in Made in India vaccines. Our scientists have high level of confidence and they are hopeful about success. We are hearing names of some foreign vaccines in the market. But world is looking for the cheap but safest vaccine. And that's why it's natural for the world to also look at India."

The PM also announced that in the first leg (to be spread over first six months) priority in immunisation will be given to health care workers, frontline workers and senior citizens with co-morbidities as per the suggestions of the states. But he also added that current anti-Covid protocols, especially social distancing and masks, must be continued.

India's Covid recovery rate improves to 94.2 percent

India's COVID-19 caseload rose to 95.71 lakh, while the total number of people who have recuperated from the disease crossed 90 lakh pushing the national recovery rate to 94.20 per cent, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Friday, Dec 4.

The total coronavirus cases mounted to 95,71,559 with 36,595 new infections being reported in a day, while the death toll climbed to 1,39,188 with 540 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 90,16,289 pushing the national recovery rate to 94.20 per cent, while the COVID-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.45 per cent. The active COVID-19 caseload continued to remain below 5 lakh. There are 4,16,082 active coronavirus infections in the country which comprises 4.35 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23 and 40 lakh on September 5. It went past 50 lakh on September 16, 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, and surpassed 90 lakh on November 20. According to the ICMR, 14,47,27,749 samples have been tested up to December 3 with 11,70,102 samples being tested on Thursday, Dec 3.

INDIA KICK STARTS TWO-DAY NAVAL DRILL WITH RUSSIA IN EASTERN INDIAN OCEAN

NEW DELHI (TIP): India on Friday, Dec 4, kick-started a two-day naval exercise with Russia in the eastern Indian Ocean, two weeks after it conducted the Malabar wargames with the US, Australia and Japan.

The Russian Navy had deployed its guided-missile cruiser Varyag, large anti-submarine ship Admiral Panteleyev and medium ocean tanker Pechenga for the "passage exercise", officials said.

The Indian Navy has been represented by indigenously constructed guided-missile frigate Shivalik and anti-submarine corvette Kadmatt along with their integral helicopters.

"The exercise is aimed at enhancing interoperability, improving understanding and imbibing best practices between both the friendly navies. It would involve advanced surface and anti-submarine warfare exercises, weapon firings, seamanship exercises and helicopter operations," Indian Navy spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal said.

"The passage exercises are conducted regularly by the Indian Navy with units of friendly foreign navies while visiting each other's ports or during a rendezvous at sea," he said.

He said the ongoing exercise reflects the strong long-term strategic relationship between the two countries.

"This exercise is being conducted on the occasion of 'Navy Day' which emphasises the strong bonds of friendship shared between the two friendly militaries. It would be another step towards strengthening Indo-Russian defence relations," Commander Madhwal said.

Navy Day is celebrated every year on December 4 to commemorate the Indian Navy's achievement in inflicting heavy damage on Pakistani vessels in Karachi harbour during the India-Pakistan war in 1971.



India asks for warning message with online gaming ads

The Union information and broadcasting ministry has asked TV channels to carry statutory warnings whenever they carry advertisements of online gaming or fantasy sports sites.

In an advisory issued on Friday, the ministry said that it has come to its notice that channels were showing ads of gaming sites but did not inform the viewers of the financial risks associated.

Online gaming is associated by many with gambling and following concerns, the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has released guidelines for issuing these ads, the ministry said.

According to the guidelines, which become effective from December 15, no person below 18 years of age should be shown playing such games for real money winnings.

Print ads have also been asked to display a disclaimer that playing these games may involve financial risk and can be addictive. The guidelines suggest that the disclaimer should not occupy less than 20% of the space of the print ad.

WHY FARMERS ARE PROTESTING AGAINST AGRICULTURE BILLS

The laws enacted by the Modi government lay the framework for allowing farmers to sell produce directly to corporates, but farmers fear that this may be an excuse to pull off the Minimum Support Price (market intervention by the Government of India to insure agricultural producers against any sharp fall in farm prices) safety net from under their feet

Since 26th November 2020, the borders of Delhi have been witnessing a huge agitation being carried out by farmers, most of them from Punjab and Haryana.

The three laws introduced by the Government, on paper at least, seem well intentioned. The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020 – allows farmers to bypass the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) and sell the produce directly to a big company, warehouses, cold storage chains, or even set up shop to sell directly to consumers.

The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020 allows for contract farming, for a farmer to get into a contract with a buyer to cultivate specific products for a specific price. This ensures that farmers know the price they will get even before cultivation starts.

The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020 allows buyers to purchase and stock commodities without getting called a hoarder and being vulnerable to penal action.

The changes in law facilitates the entry of big retailers and exporters in the market. The Government would like to withdraw from the business of procuring foodgrains and eventually hand over the assets of Food Corporation of India (FCI) to these private corporates. While it makes sense from the Government's point of view, the implications of such a move are by no means certain in the long run.

Why are the farmers upset?

The farmers of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Haryana are angry with the provisions of these Bills as they are afraid that these Bills may be the platform that the government (at the Centre) is setting up for the replacement or scrapping of the otherwise robust support system prevalent in their states for the purchase of their crops. They fear that the Minimum Support Price (MSP) guarantee that was their safety net since the Green Revolution of the 1960s kicked in, maybe snatched away from under the pretext of giving the farmers more playing ground and better platforms.

The state-government driven crop produce procurement infrastructure in these areas is very good. Procurement through the Food Corporation of India at promised MSP to farmers, which is declared before every agriculture season, encourages farmers to focus on taking more yield. 23 agricultural crops have MSPs, though the governments primarily buy only rice and wheat. Farmers fear the two recent bills as they feel these agriculture reform processes will kill the government procurement process as well as the MSP. And why do we see most protesters from Punjab and Haryana? That is because they are the biggest beneficiaries of this safety net.



Why has the Centre not reached out?

The Central ministers and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have tried reassuring the farmers that the government has no plans to end the government procurement system nor the MSP policy. But fear, misconceptions persist and the two sparring parties have not had meaningful negotiations.

The farmers of Punjab and Haryana

As per certain reports, nearly 89 per cent of the rice produced by the farmers in Punjab is procured by the government. In Haryana, it is 85%. Farmers in Punjab and Haryana face no price risk and are in fact incentivised to grow paddy and wheat. But the nation has been facing a shortage of pulses and the wheat and rice instead have been a surplus in FCI's godowns.

Also, rice is a water-intensive crop and farmers from areas with water shortage too grow it as there is an MSP assured in the end. Continuous adoption of rice-wheat cropping system in North-Western plains of Punjab, Haryana and West Uttar Pradesh has resulted in depletion of ground water and deterioration of soil quality, posing a serious threat to its sustainability," says a government study.

Also, these Farm Bills are encouraging farmers to strike deals with large corporates, and farmers do not trust corporates.



What are the big concerns

Even as the farmer protests against the three new agriculture-related laws have gathered momentum, one thing seems obvious: Much of the opposition really is just to one of the three laws.

Even in that one - the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act - there are only some contentious provisions, which, although key, can still leave doors

open for negotiation.

The other two laws

Consider first the two laws that ought not to be serious cause for farmer angst. The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act is about doing away with the Centre's powers to impose stockholding limits on foodstuffs, except under "extraordinary conditions". These

Continued from page 16

could be war, famine, other natural calamities of grave nature and annual retail price rise exceeding 100% in horticultural produce (basically onions and potato) and 50% for non-perishables (cereals, pulses and edible oils).

Given that stock limits apply only to traders - the amendment exempts processors, exporters and other "value chain participants" as long as they don't keep quantities beyond their installed capacity/demand requirements - it shouldn't concern farmers at all. Farmers, if anything, would gain from removal of stocking restrictions on the trade, as it potentially translates into unlimited buying and demand for their produce.

The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act has to do with providing a regulatory framework for contract cultivation. This specifically concerns agreements entered into by farmers with agri-business firms (processors, large retailers or exporters) ahead of any planting/rearing season for supplying produce of predetermined quality at minimum guaranteed prices.

Again, there is little rationale for objecting to an Act that merely enables contract farming. Such exclusive agreements between companies and farmers are already operational in crops of particular processing grades (the potatoes used by beverages and snacks giant PepsiCo for its Lay's and Uncle Chipps wafers) or dedicated for exports (gherkins). The processors/exporters in these cases typically not only undertake assured buyback at pre-agreed prices, but also provide farmers seeds/planting material and extension support to ensure that only produce of desired standard is grown. The point to note is that contract cultivation is voluntary in nature and largely for crops not amenable to trading in regular APMC (agricultural produce market committee) mandis.

There is hardly any domestic market for gherkins, just as the milk in mandis either. The produce sugar mills and dairy plants source from them is practically contract farming. An Act that formalizes contract cultivation through a "national framework" and explicitly prohibits any sponsor firm from acquiring the land of farmers - whether through purchase, lease or mortgage - should actually be welcomed.

The contentious one

That leaves the only law - the FPTC Act, for short - which is a bone of contention. It permits sale and purchase of farm produce outside the premises of APMC mandis.

Such trades (including on electronic platforms) shall attract no market fee, cess or levy "under any State APMC Act or any other State law".

At issue here is the very right of the Centre to enact legislation on agricultural marketing. Article 246 of the Constitution places "agriculture" in entry 14 and "markets and fairs" in entry 28 of the State List. But entry 42 of the Union List empowers the Centre to regulate "inter-State trade and commerce". While trade and commerce "within the State" is under entry 26 of the State List, it is subject to the provisions of entry 33 of the Concurrent List - under which the Centre can make laws that would prevail over those enacted by the states.

However, some experts make a distinction between agricultural "marketing" and "trade". Agriculture per



se would deal with everything that a farmer does - right from field preparation and cultivation to also sale of his/her own produce.

The act of primary sale at a mandi by the farmer is as much "agriculture" as production in the field. "Trade" begins only after the produce has been "marketed" by the farmer. Going by this interpretation, the Centre is within its rights to frame laws that promote barrier-free trade of farm produce (inter- as well as intra-state) and do not allow stockholding or export restrictions.

But these can be only after the farmer has sold. Regulation of first sale of agricultural produce is a "marketing" responsibility of the states, not the Centre. Farmers, for their part, would want no restrictions on the movement, stocking and export of their produce.

Maharashtra's onion growers have vehemently opposed the Centre's resort to ban on exports and imposition of stock limits whenever retail prices have tended to go up. But these restrictions relate to "trade". When it comes to "marketing" - especially dismantling of the monopoly of APMCs - farmers, especially in Punjab and Haryana, aren't very convinced about the "freedom of choice to sell to anyone and anywhere" argument.

The reason for this is simple: Much of government procurement at minimum support prices (MSP) - of paddy, wheat and increasingly pulses, cotton, groundnut and mustard - happens in APMC mandis.

In a scenario where more and more trading moves out of the APMCs, these regulated market yards will lose revenues. "They may not formally shut, but it would become like BSNL versus Jio. And if the government stops buying, we will be left with only the big corporates to sell to," said a Panipat (Haryana)-based farmer.

What could be negotiated

If the protesting farmer union leaders were to sit down at the negotiating table, the government can possibly get them to agree to drop the demand on repealing all the three laws. Their problem is essentially about the FPTC Act and its provisions that they see as weakening the APMC mandis. There is also disquiet on the dispute resolution mechanism for transactions outside the mandis. The Act proposes these to be referred to offices of



the sub-divisional magistrate and district collector. "They aren't independent courts and cannot deliver us justice, leave alone guarantee timely payment," alleged the same farmer. These may be just fears, but they aren't small. From the government's standpoint, the elephant in the room would be if the farmers insist on an additional demand: Making MSP a legal right. That would be impossible to meet, even if the three farm laws were to be put on hold.

Why MSP is not a solution

A key debate after the enactment of three farm-reform laws and the subsequent protests is around the issue of federally-fixed minimum support prices (MSPs), a system guaranteeing farmers assured prices for their produce through procurement. MSP is an obligatory, not a statutory exercise. Farmers have demanded a legislation to prohibit sale of any farm produce below these minimum prices. If the government agrees to this, it is likely they will end their protests against the three new farm reforms.

But a law making MSPs the legal floor price defies economic logic. The government sets MSPs for 23 crops, but it is effective only in case of rice and wheat because it buys only these two commodities in sufficiently large quantities. MSPs are an assurance that the government will intervene if market rates fall below that threshold, thereby helping avoid distress sale. This policy was salutary when India faced acute food shortages. Farm policies to deal with

surpluses will fundamentally have to be different from measures adopted to overcome a previous era of scarcity. A law barring purchases of the other 21 crops below MSPs by any private trader will also, immediately, fuel high inflation. Every one percentage point increase in MSPs leads to a 15-basis point increase in inflation. Higher MSPs could also upend the Reserve Bank of India's inflation targets, hurting economic growth. An MSP mechanism that ignores demand and global prices creates market distortions. If it is not profitable for traders to buy at MSPs, then the private sector will exit the markets. In such a scenario, the government cannot be a monopoly buyer. Mandatory MSPs will render India's agri-exports non-competitive because the government's assured prices are way higher than both domestic and international market prices.

MSPs have also incentivised foodgrains over other crops, giving rise to imbalances of water and land resources and shifting land away from crops such as pulses and oilseeds, necessitating costly imports. Surplus cereals can't be exported without a subsidy, which invites the World Trade Organization (WTO)'s objections. WTO rules cap government procurement for subsidised food programmes by developing countries at 10% of the total value of agricultural production based on 1986-88 prices in dollar terms. There is no argument that farmers need support, but policies that are less distortionary are in the interest of both farmers and consumers.

KATRINA KAIF CALLS HERSELF A 'NOOB'



Jacqueline Joins Akshay & Kriti in 'Bachchan Pandey'

Jacqueline Fernandez has been keeping quite busy with her projects. She was recently in Dharamshala shooting for the horror-comedy *Bhoot Police* alongside Saif Ali Khan, Anil Kapoor and Yami Gautam. Now, according to a report by Mumbai Mirror, Jacqueline has joined the cast of Sajid Nadiadwala-produced gangster drama *Bachchan Pandey*. The film also stars Akshay Kumar and Kriti Sanon.

Speaking to the publication Jacqueline says, "Sajid Nadiadwala and my friendship go way back. I had just joined the film industry when I did the song 'Dhanno' for *Housefull*. *Bachchan Pandey* will be Sajid and my eighth collaboration and I am looking forward to it. As for Akshay, its always been great fun to work with him".

A source told Mumbai Mirror that while Kriti Sanon plays a journalist who aspires to be a filmmaker in the movie, details about Jacqueline's character is yet to be given. The Farhad Samji directorial will go on floors from 6 January.

Katrina Kaif has spoken about her struggles with technology, along with a detailed step-by-step explanation of what happens during her video interviews. The actor called herself a 'noob'.

She shared a video on Instagram which showed her trying to connect with a person online. She mistakenly called different people, including her fitness trainer Yasmin Karachiwala and Shaheen Bhatt. The video opened with Katrina googling the meaning of the word 'noob', which has been explained as - 'a person who is inexperienced in a particular sphere or activity, especially computing or the use of the internet'. She was seen committing various mistakes, like switching off her camera or blaming her network as she disconnected with the person on the other side. She even forgot to switch off the virtual meeting before making side conversations with her sister.

Sharing the video, she wrote, "For those not so tech savvy people. Who else has spent a great deal of time this year struggling with connectivity issues on their lives. - turn your WiFi on , -turn your WiFi off , - are you on 4G ? 'Yes I AM'. hold pleasant face while waiting for your guest to join who cannot - ensuing a small panic. - most important make sure you END your live session - before having side conversations."



Aditya Narayan ties the knot with Shweta Agarwal

Singer Aditya Narayan and actress Shweta Agarwal tied the knot on Tuesday, Dec 1, in a small temple ceremony. The wedding took place on groom's singer-father Udit Narayan's birthday.

The newly-wed couple were dressed in shades of beige and pink for their big day. The bride dazzled in a glittering, embellished lehenga, and the groom opted for a classic sherwani.

According to a report by Mumbai Mirror, the couple had a packed weekend of pre-wedding festivities - Tilak on Saturday, Mehendi on Sunday and Haldi on Monday.

Narayan Sr, along with the groom's friends, sang ' Mehndi Laga Ke Rakhna' and ' Bole Chudiyaaan' for Mehendi ceremony. While Haldi ceremony was a family affair, Narayan had informed that the wedding will be at a small temple with just 50 guests in attendance, followed by a reception. "I've invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Amitabh Bachchan, Shatrughan Sinha, Dharmendra, Ranveer Singh, Deepika Padukone and Madhuri Dixit, but with Covid-19 cases on the rise, I don't know if they will be able to attend," he told Mumbai Mirror.



Alia says she has seen 'a lot of hate'

Actor Alia Bhatt has entered the clothes retail business and what to make it an eco-friendly, home-grown success story. In a recent interview, she opened about the new venture and how all the trolling and hate she has received online recently, has motivated her to spread more kindness in the world.

After laying low online for the last few months, Alia is back in full throttle on Instagram. She has been promoting her clothes brands for kids-Ed-a-mamma and starting a new journey as an entrepreneur.

Speaking to Your Story, Alia said, "The new phase of my work life will be different in taking that time off and making time for them. I have realised we have to be kind to each other and to our planet. I've seen a lot of hate, and a little kindness can take you a long way."

Alia received hate comments and threats on social media soon after the death of Sushant Singh Rajput. His fans were



targeting 'star kids' for hogging limelight in Bollywood and not letting outsiders such as Sushant get their due. Apart from Alia, stars such as Ananya Panday,

Kareena Kapoor, Sara Ali Khan and many others were also targeted. Alia's sister Shaheen had also shared screenshots of the comments they had been receiving.



Hailee Steinfeld Confirmed as Kate Bishop

The inclusion of Kate Bishop in Hawkeye has been the hyped part of this series since it was announced at San Diego Comic-Con 2019. Created by writer Allan Heinberg and artist Jim Cheung, the character is the first woman to adopt the Hawkeye mantle. The daughter of one of New York City's wealthiest families, Kate turns her attention to fighting crime after a life-changing attack in central park, joining the Young Avengers and eventually settling on fellow archer Clint Barton as a mentor. Renner teased Kate's arrival to set on Twitter but there hasn't been an official casting confirmation from Marvel quite yet. So, you know, don't tell them about this.

For as long as people have been talking about Kate Bishop finally making the jump to live-action, they've been discussing Hailee Steinfeld filling the role. The young actress first made a splash at 13 in the Coen Bros' True Grit remake before starring in two Pitch Perfect sequels, leading the Transformers spinoff Bumblebee, and providing the voice for Gwen Stacy in Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse.

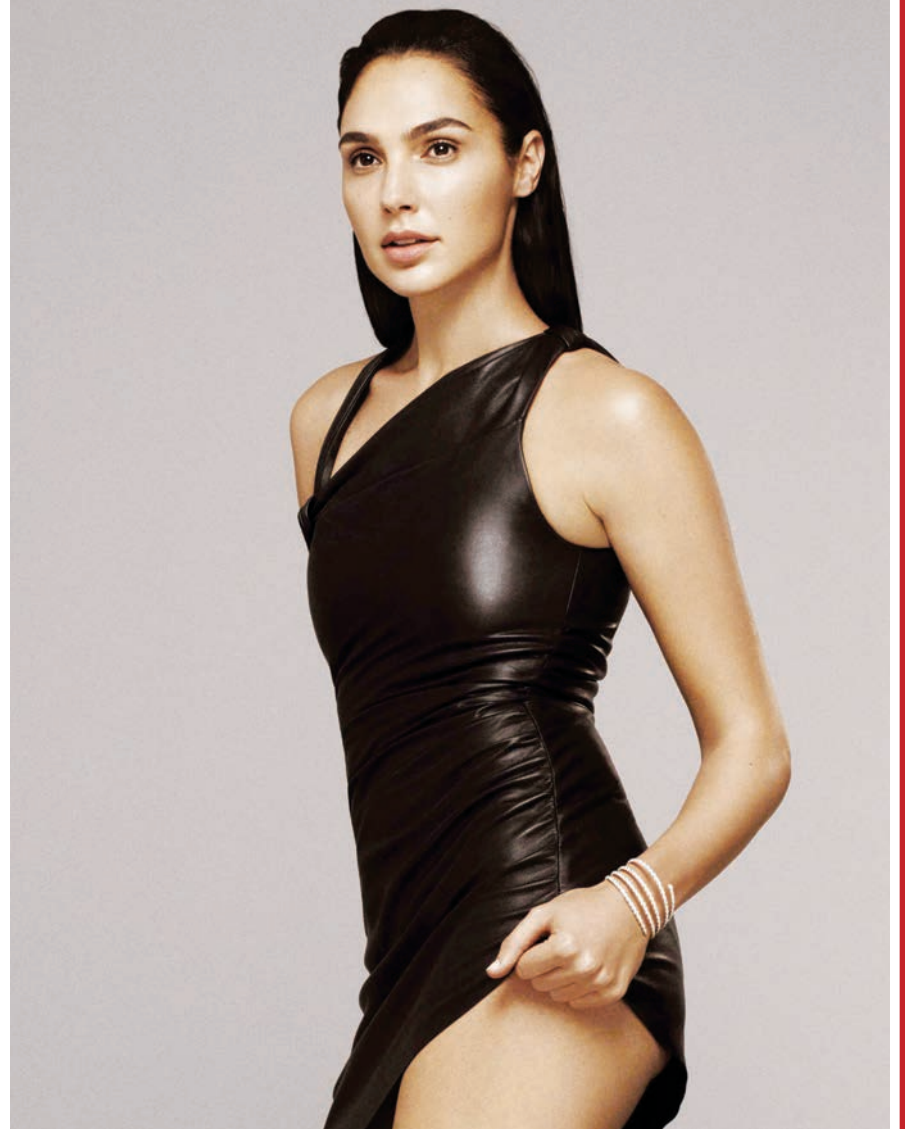
GAL GADOT TO STAR IN 'HEART OF STONE'

In an eight-figure deal that puts her at the upper levels of the actress salary scale, Gal Gadot has been set to star in Heart of Stone, an original international spy thriller hatched by Skydance Media that endeavors to put a female spin on action franchises like Mission: Impossible and 007. Tom Harper, who helmed The Aeronauts and Wild Rose, is in talks to direct.

The script is by Greg Rucka (The Old Guard) and Allison Schroeder, latter of whom was Oscar nominated for Hidden Figures. The film will be produced by Skydance Media's David Ellison, Dana Goldberg and Don Granger, along with Gadot and her Pilot Wave producing partner Jaron Varsano, Bonnie Curtis and Julie Lynn. Skydance Media is keeping options open on whether this will be a theatrical or streaming bow.

Gadot, whose next Patty Jenkins collaboration Wonder Woman 1984 has been set to debut Christmas Day on HBO Max, will next star in the Kenneth Branagh-directed Death on the Nile. She also recently wrapped Red Notice for Netflix, the Rawson Thurber Marshall-directed heist drama she stars in with Dwayne Johnson and Ryan Reynolds. She continues to gravitate toward tentpole projects, including Cleopatra, the Jenkins-directed period pic that Laeta Kalogridis is writing based on a story by Gadot. Paramount acquired that project in heated bidding.

Beyond The Aeronauts and Wild Rose, Harper's directing credits include the BBC miniseries War & Peace, along with Peaky Blinders, Misfits and This Is England '86. He also directed the pilot of AMC's The Son.



Jennifer Lopez Reacts to Her and Alex Rodriguez Elopement Rumors

Life sometimes imitates art for Jennifer Lopez -- but it's not always planned. The entertainer has a slew of projects in the works, including the upcoming films Marry Me and Shotgun Wedding, which have fans speculating if she and fiancé Alex Rodriguez are either already married or eloping.

As Lopez, 51, told ET while promoting her new skincare line, JLo Beauty, it's just pure coincidence, but it does make for a good story.

"It's funny because life does reflect into things you are doing at times," the Hustlers star explained. "But it's just kind of a coincidence because when I did 'El Anillo,' the song in Spanish, which is, 'When are you going to give me a ring?,' I was not really trying to send a message. It was just a song that we wrote that we liked and with Marry Me, it was something we were developing for, I would say, seven years."

"All of that stuff and it was happening now where Alex and I are engaged and about to get married at some point," she continued. "It just happens that way. It's a funny thing, life and art, they kind of intersect."



MILEY CYRUS ADMITS SHE 'STILL' LOVES LIAMHEMSWORTH

Miley Cyrus says she still 'loves' ex-husband Liam Hemsworth and always will. But she revealed why they suddenly married and had things dramatically end in divorce only months later.

Miley Cyrus says that the massive losses she suffered when her Malibu home with then-fiance Liam Hemsworth burned to the ground in the 2018 Woolsey Fire ultimately led to the couple's demise later down the road. The 28-year-old singer explained to Howard Stern on his Dec. 2 SiriusXM radio show that losing literally everything but Liam, 30, caused her so much trauma. As a result, they rushed into marrying six weeks later on Dec. 23, 2018 at her Nashville home, which turned out to be a big mistake.

"We were together since 16," Miley explained about Liam, as they fell in love while filming the 2010 love story The Last Song. "Our house burned down. We had been like, engaged — I don't know if we really ever thought we were actually going to get married."



DECEMBER FILMS ON VOD

BY MABEL PAIS

SKY BLOSSOM: Diaries of The Next Greatest Generation

DIR: Richard Lui | USA | 2020 | Doc | 1h 20m

I wanted to show caring for other people is still an honor. Young caregivers are also doing the most difficult, but for (the) family. This next greatest generation deserves all the effort we can muster."

"I am one in three Americans who is touched by caring for an ailing loved one. And I'm part of the half a trillion annual dollars in work me and 53 million others do for loved ones. A major part of this community is military caregivers. Military caregiver journeys start earlier and last longer than most."

"Diversity and inclusion remained part of the film's DNA in front and behind the camera. I wanted to stay true to this both with the families that I chose and my crew. They also lose on average, almost \$200,000 in wages over their lifetimes." - Richard Lui, Director

"SKY BLOSSOM" is an Academy-Award-qualifying-film salute to 2020. It is a raw, uplifting window into 24.5 million children and millennials stepping forward as frontline heroes. Caring for the family with tough medical conditions, they stay at home doing things often seen only in hospitals. They are cheerleaders, work part time, and go to college - but also live double lives - quietly growing up as America's next greatest generation.

The filmmaker, veteran journalist and award-winning CNN/MSNBC news anchor Richard Lui says the interviews were so honest they genuinely surprised him, as they revealed insights into the lives of young people across America. Troops used to look up and say, "Here come the Sky Blossoms" - paratroopers rushing to their aid. Today, there is a new generation answering that call. These are their stories.

My DARLING VIVIAN - Gives Voice to Johnny Cash's First Wife

DIR: Matt Riddlehoover | USA | 2020 | Doc | 1h 30m

'VARIETY': OSCAR CONTENDER for BEST DOC FEATURE

In "MY DARLING VIVIAN," director Matt Riddlehoover traces the romantic, wrenching, and dizzying journey of Vivian Liberto, Johnny Cash's first wife and the mother of his four daughters, who was targeted by hate groups over her perceived race.

"After their divorce, [the public] saw her as, I don't know, as nothing," daughter Rosanne Cash says in this



Director Richard Lui with his ill dad. Credit: Sky Blossom Films.



"Dear Santa" Poster. Credit: dearsanta.movie/IFC Films.

DEAR SANTA

DIR: Dana Nachman | USA | 2020 | Doc/Family | 1h 24m

DEAR SANTA," from veteran documentarian and producer Dana Nachman. She is one of the great directors who are using their talents to tell inspiring stories in the face of the pandemic and economic downturn that have impacted so many families.

The film shines a light on the 100-year-old Operation Santa Program of the United States Postal Service. Each year, hundreds of thousands of letters to Santa arrive at Post Offices around the country. Through Operation Santa, the United States Postal Service makes it possible for the public to safely adopt these letters and make children's dreams come true. The film invites audiences along for the magic of this massive endeavor. Traveling the country, much like Santa does on Christmas Eve, the film focuses on select Operation Santa centers: some in metropolitan areas like the massive operation in New York City and others in small towns where the post office is the heart of the community.

The film highlights letters where a child is asking for something poignant, something that goes beyond the common wish for a toy. Santa will explain how he enlists kind-hearted strangers across the country for these special requests while he concentrates on toy making and his demanding delivery schedule.

This timeless documentary captures the warmth and spirit of Christmastime through the lens of this great American tradition, provoking audiences throughout the world to ask themselves how they can make the world a better place, one gesture at a time.

Watch the trailer - youtu.be/OMhSPWfBbtE
For more information, visit www.dearsanta.movie
Release: On December 4 in Theaters Nationwide and on VOD including Amazon, Apple TV, YouTube Google Play, Vudu, Xbox, Xfinity, Spectrum & DirectTV. Visit - dearsanta.movie/watch-at-home

touching, often heartbreaking, and revelatory film. "So, my mother faded into a kind of negative obscurity."

"My Darling Vivian" has exclusive, unprecedented access to never-before-seen footage, photographs, and love letters, as well as to all four Cash daughters themselves. Rosanne Cash, Kathy Cash Tittle, Cindy Cash, and Tara Cash Schwoebel share first hand, and for the first time, their mother's entire untold story.

Watch the trailer - youtu.be/3bjwGJOE5VM
Website: mydarlingvivian.com
Facebook: facebook.com/mydarlingvivian
Instagram: [@mydarlingvivianfilm](https://twitter.com/mydarlingvivianfilm)
Twitter: [@mydarlingvivian](https://twitter.com/mydarlingvivian)

KOKO-DI KOKO-DA

DIR: Johannes Nyholm | Sweden | 2020 | Swedish & Danish w/Eng subs | Color | 1h 26m | NR

Elin and Tobias are a happily married couple who regularly vacation with their young daughter. The family is on a dreamy holiday when an innocuous case of food poisoning derails their plans and forever alters the course of their lives.

Three years later, the once loving couple is on the road again to go camping, looking for one last chance to go back to the way things used to be. But what once was is lost, and our characters instead find themselves having to relive the same nightmarish events, as that day and the horrors it brings repeat themselves infinitely. Together, they must overcome their trauma, reconcile with their past and fight for their lives. Over, and over, and over again.

Discerned through a dreamlike fabric, a story emerges about relationships in general, grief and reconciliation in particular, and love as a healing force.

Watch the trailer - youtu.be/TbOanKCCvWA
Vod Release: December 8 (US & Canada) Including: Apple TV/ iTunes, Amazon, Google Play, Xbox, Vudu, You Tube, Fandango Now, Dish Network and all major cable providers (Including: Comcast/Xfinity, Spectrum, Cox and Verizon Fios)

18 TO PARTY

DIR: Jeff Roda | USA | 2019 | Eng | 1h 20m

It's 1984 and outside a small-town nightclub, a group of 8th graders gather, grappling with a spate of recent suicides, UFO sightings, their absentee parents, and each other. 18 TO PARTY spans a single evening in the lives of these kids, but manages to transport us fully to a time when waiting for something to happen felt just as significant as the thing itself.

Gorgeously atmospheric, with a pulsating sense of anticipation that steadily builds, the film pulls us into the fears, wounds, and desires of each character, ultimately revealing that hope may arrive from the last place we expect.

The meticulously authentic production design, killer soundtrack, and universally excellent performances recall the spirit of classic 80s teen movies like Stand By Me and The Breakfast Club. 18 TO PARTY is a spot-on love letter to Gen X, awkward teenagers, and the transcendent power of friendship.

Watch the trailer - youtu.be/k3jqnEzuHWI
Website: <https://www.18topartymovie.com>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/18ToPartyMovie>
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/18ToPartyMovie>
Instagram: [@18ToPartyMovie](https://www.instagram.com/18ToPartyMovie)
#18ToPartyMovie

VOD Release: Currently available on Apple TV, Prime Video, Google Play, Vudu, Fandango and more to follow.

Mabel Pais writes on The Arts and Entertainment, Social Issues, Spirituality, and Health & Wellness.



Vivian Liberto Cash, Johnny Cash with children. Credit: Courtesy, mydarlingvivian.com

NJ: LEADING THROUGH CRISES

BY MABEL PAIS



NJ Governor Phil Murphy
Photo / Courtesy NJPAC

LEADING THROUGH CRISES: GOV. MURPHY ON NJ, THE PANDEMIC, & THE WAY FORWARD

Halfway through his first term as New Jersey's governor, Phil Murphy was confronted by a crisis of extraordinary magnitude: A worldwide pandemic, which immediately impacted NJ, followed by an unprecedented financial downturn.

Murphy fought these dual emergencies with every tool at his disposal - daily briefings, limits on indoor gatherings, a celebrity-studded COVID relief fundraiser, even "Don't Be A Knucklehead" signs on major highways to remind Garden Staters to embrace social distancing.

Thanks to his leadership, New Jersey successfully "flattened the curve" of coronavirus infections - but the state still faces the pandemic's second wave, lingering economic hardship, and delays before a vaccine is available.

Join the next NJPAC Business Partners "Roundtable @ Home" at 9AM on Friday, December 11, for an enlightening 30-minute conversation with Governor Murphy at the to find out what the Governor learned from the singular challenges of 2020, and his plans for the year ahead.

Follow the registration link below; details for logging onto this Zoom meeting will be emailed to you.

njpac.org/support/bprt-registration-form/
For more information on the event, contact businesspartners@njpac.org



Eunice Peterson,
1942 - 2020

Eunice Peterson - Photo / Courtesy NJPAC

John Schreiber Pays Tribute to NJPAC's Eunice Peterson

Eunice insisted that every artist - from Aretha Franklin to a local student who'd never been on stage before - got the same high-level care."

Allison Wyss, NJPAC's Senior Artist Assistant, (worked with Eunice for over 20 years)

In an open letter to NJPAC wellwishers, John Schreiber, President & CEO of the Arts Center, pays tribute to recently deceased Staff member, Eunice Peterson.

He considers NJPAC's team members as NJPAC's "owners" - because they see NJPAC as "their" place. They're deeply invested in ensuring that it thrives. Schreiber considers the Arts Center (NJPAC) to be blessed in having a team of fierce advocates ("owners") working to advance its mission. He believes that of all these "owners" of NJPAC, Eunice Peterson, who passed away recently, was "one of the proudest and one of the most effective."

From the Arts Center's opening in 1997 through the Spring of 2019, Eunice was the Senior Artist Assistant. An artist assistant is the person who greets performers when they arrive at NJPAC's stage door, brings them to their dressing rooms, and sees to their every need while they're there. A good artist assistant will know how to give performers just what they require - silence or conversation, a cup of tea or a warm towel - so that when they appear on stage, they feel nurtured and valued.

"They feel, in short, like they're at home. And no one did that the way Eunice did.

She just had the gift of hospitality. When performers came to NJPAC and spent time with Eunice, it was like they were hanging out in their momma's kitchen, that's how at ease they felt," Eyesha Marable, Director of Community Engagement, tells John Schreiber.

Before she came to the Arts Center, Eunice's first career was as an in-demand backup vocalist who toured and recorded with Cissy Houston, Whitney Houston, Darlene Love, Dionne Warwick and many others from the 1960s through her arrival at NJPAC.

"I have this beautiful memory of hanging out with Dionne Warwick, Johnny Mathis, Lee and Eunice in the production office of NJPAC, and all of them just talking about the good old days," says Chris Moses,

NJPAC's Senior Director of Production.

Eunice and Chris Moses's predecessor, Larry Goldman, created the artist assistant program at NJPAC before the opening night, basing their approach on that of Carnegie Hall.

"Eunice insisted that every artist - from Aretha Franklin to a local student who'd never been on stage before - got the same high-level care."

"Because she remembered what it was like to be a performer. She would tell stories of all the times she was on the road, how hard it was, the things she encountered: No proper dressing rooms, no access to food, even the unacceptable names she was called as an African-American artist touring in the 1960s and 1970s. She vowed nothing like that would happen to any artist at NJPAC."

Eunice's performing days didn't end when she came to NJPAC. In 1998, a year after the Arts Center opened, Larry decided to establish a community choir and encouraged staff members to audition. Eunice was a charter member of what became the 'Jubilation Choir'. She sang soprano with the choir until she fell ill.

"She'd traveled the world with a lot of these artists, she knew them personally. We ended up on a lot of projects, like Dionne Warwick's latest, really because of Eunice running her mouth about the choir. She'd say to them: 'Oh, y'all sound good, but you need to hear my choir' and give them a bunch of CDs," Rev. Stefanie Minatee (Rev. Stef), Artistic Director of the Jubilation Choir, says.

"Genuine," "sincere" and "loving" are the words almost everyone at NJPAC has reached for to describe Eunice as her passing was mourned.

That sincerity, that love, made the Center's backstage a uniquely warm and welcoming space, and a particularly appealing one to artists. Great artists know when you're for real and when you're just going through the motions. Eunice never went through the motions.

"Although we miss Eunice's hugs and her caring, her outfits and her remarkable voice, she'll never really be gone. When you go backstage at NJPAC, you'll feel her spirit. You may not know her the way we were privileged to, but her vibe - her great, comforting, warm, loving vibe - is embedded in our walls. This was her place; it always will be," Rev. Stefanie Minatee.

(Mabel Pais writes on Health & Wellness, The Arts and Entertainment, Social Issues, and Spirituality)

Suspected murderer remanded in custody after German car rampage

TRIER (TIP): A 51-year old German man suspected of murdering five people, including a baby, by ploughing a speeding car into a pedestrian zone in Trier on Tuesday, is to be held in prison after a judge decided he did not need to be sent to a psychiatric institution.

The man, who had been drunk, had shown psychological abnormalities during and after his arrest on Tuesday, said the Trier prosecutor, adding an expert would examine him and issue an official opinion.

"A preliminary evaluation finds no concrete indications to completely exclude culpability," said the prosecutor, adding he was suspected of committing five murders and attempted murder and grievous bodily harm in a further 18 cases.

"The accused is suspected of having randomly and deliberately driven at high speed in the pedestrian zone in Trier ... with a Land Rover with the intention of killing or at least injuring as many people as possible," said the prosecutor.

The motive of the suspect, not named by prosecutors but identified as Bernd W. by media, was still unclear, said the prosecutor, reiterating, however, that questioning so far had given no indication of a political or religious background.

Residents and politicians wept and hugged as they placed flowers, candles and hand-written messages to the victims in the city's landmark Roman gate, Porta Nigra.

"The pain of the mother who lost her child and her husband takes my voice away," said Malu Dreyer, premier of the state of Rhineland-Palatinate, her voice breaking.

"There will never again be the laughter of the father and the child. Others who have to mourn dead feel the same way... they will have to carry this burden for the rest of their lives," she said. --- Reuters

Argentina cops search office of 2nd doctor in Maradona case

BUENOS AIRES (TIP): The investigation into Diego Maradona's death continued with police raids on the office and home of the psychiatrist who cared for the soccer star and is being investigated for possible medical negligence.

By order of the attorney general's office of San Isidro, officers entered an apartment used by Agustina Cosachov for consultations in Buenos Aires on Tuesday, while another group of police searched her private home. AP

China's Chang'e-5 probe drills Moon's surface, collects samples

BELJING (TIP): On the most complex mission to the Moon, China's Chang'e-5 probe drilled the lunar surface, collected samples on Wednesday in the first such effort in over 40 years and began preparations to bring the precious soil to earth, the country's space authority said.

The Chang'e-5 probe has collected Moon samples after landing on Tuesday, the China National Space Administration (CNSA) announced on Wednesday.

The unmanned probe landed in the area called Oceanus Procellarum, also known as the Ocean of Storms, on the near side of the Moon and started rolling out its solar panel wings and unlocking some of the payloads on-board to prepare for sample collection.

The lander first drilled a 2-meter-deep hole, digging out soil, and sealed it up at 4:53 a.m. on Wednesday. Next, it will use its robotic arms to scoop up more samples from the lunar surface for backup, state-run media reported.

About two kg of samples are expected to be collected and sealed in a container, CNSA officials said.

State-run media has shown photos of the lander on the lunar surface after it landed successfully.

"We designed two methods for the spacecraft to collect samples. One is to sample the lunar surface, and the other is to drill underground. The two methods could increase the chance of getting more diverse samples," Peng Jing, deputy chief designer of the Chang'e-5 probe said.

It is China's maiden attempt to retrieve materials from an extra-terrestrial body.

The United States sent astronauts to the Moon to collect samples. In the Soviet Union's unmanned lunar sampling missions, the spacecraft took off from



the Moon and returned to Earth directly.

The US space agency on Wednesday congratulated China for the Chang'e-5 mission. Nasa's top science official, Dr Thomas Zurbuchen, said he hoped the international research community would eventually get the chance to analyse any samples sent home.

"When the samples collected on the Moon are returned to Earth, we hope everyone will benefit from being able to study this precious cargo that could advance the international science community," he tweeted.

Explaining why China chose to do what has been accomplished by the US and Soviet Union much earlier, Pei Zhaoyu, deputy director of the Lunar Exploration and Space Program Centre of the CNSA said that China chose a complicated technological approach including unmanned rendezvous and docking in lunar orbit, and could bring back more samples and lay a technological foundation for manned lunar missions.

The samples collected on Wednesday, will be sealed in what scientists have described as a long "sausage-like package". "Samples have to be sealed up

in case any contamination occurs during the course back to earth," Luan Enjie, the chief commander of China's first lunar mission told the China Central Television (CCTV).

"The Moon environment is very different from the Earth, so samples need to be stored in a very clean container," he added.

These soils obtained from the Moon are expected to provide information about its geological evolution and offer insights into solar activities in the universe, according to the mission team.

The Chang'e-5 probe includes a lander, ascender, orbiter, and return vehicle. The sealed packages will be stored in the ascender, which will lift off from the Moon's surface to transfer the samples to the returner and orbiter waiting in lunar orbit.

At the proper time, the returner will then separate from the orbiter and carry the samples back to Earth, finally landing in north China's Inner Mongolia.

A no stranger to the Moon, China launched its first lunar probe, Chang'e-1 in 2007 which orbited 200 km above the Moon and mapped 3D images of the lunar surface followed by Chang'e-2 in 2010 which had sent high-resolution photos of the Moon's surface.

Chang'e-3 was launched in 2013 which softly touched down on the Sinus Iridum 12 days later.

The Chang'e-4 probe was launched in 2018. It made the first-ever soft landing on the Von Karman Crater in the South Pole-Aitken Basin on the far side of the Moon. A major space power, China launched its first Mars mission 'Tianwen-1' on July 23 this year. The Mars spacecraft which included an orbiter, lander and rover is on its way to the red planet. PTI

Israel hands over \$1 billion in Palestinian tax backlog in sign of warming ties

RAMALLAH (WEST BANK) (TIP): Israel handed over a backlog of billions of shekels in tax money to the Palestinian Authority on Wednesday, both sides said, in another sign of warming ties between the sides after the US presidential election victory of Joe Biden.

The taxes, managed by Israel under interim peace accords from the 1990s and usually handed over monthly, make up more than half of the budget of the Palestinian Authority (PA), whose economy has been hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

The 3.77 billion shekels (\$1.14 billion) transfer is the first since June, when the Palestinians snubbed the handover due to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plans, currently suspended, to annex parts of the occupied West Bank.

The Palestinians also rejected the cash

several times in 2019 after Israel trimmed the sum in retaliation for funds going to the families of jailed or killed militants. It usually amounts to about \$190 million a month.

"The #Israeli government transfers all financial dues of the clearance to the account of the #Palestinian Authority," Palestinian Affairs minister of civil affairs Hussein al-Sheikh tweeted, giving the figure as 3.768 billion shekels.

The Israeli Finance Ministry confirmed the details.

The PA has been unable to pay full wages of its 130,000 employees in the past months. Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said this week it would pay full salaries once it received the tax money.

Israel froze its annexation plans in August as part of an agreement to forge diplomatic ties with the United Arab Emirates. The Palestinians in November



said they were resuming civil and security cooperation with Israel suspended over the annexation. The announcement came about two weeks after Biden beat incumbent Donald Trump in the U.S. presidential race.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has since indicated he will drop his three-year political boycott of the White House.

"Right now we are sending clear messages not only to the Israelis, not only to the Biden administration but also to the Europeans and many others that Palestine, and the Palestinians are ready to reengage completely with Israel," Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki said in a November 26 video conference.

(\$1 = 3.2861 shekels) --- Reuters

WeChat blocks Australian Prime Minister in doctored image dispute

SYDNEY (TIP): The Chinese social media platform WeChat blocked a message by Australia Prime Minister Scott Morrison amid a dispute between Canberra and Beijing over the doctored tweeted image of an Australian soldier.

China rebuffed Morrison's calls for an apology after its foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian posted the picture of an Australian soldier holding a bloodied knife to the throat of an Afghan child on Monday.

The United States called China's use of the digitally manipulated image a "new low" in disinformation.

Morrison took to WeChat on Tuesday to criticise the "false image", while offering praise to Australia's Chinese community. In his message, Morrison defended Australia's handling of a war crimes investigation into the actions of special forces in Afghanistan, and said Australia would deal with "thorny issues" in a transparent manner.

But that message appeared to be blocked by Wednesday evening, with a note appearing from the "Weixin Official Accounts Platform Operation Center" saying the content was unable to be viewed because it violated regulations, including distorting historical events and confusing the public.

Tencent, the parent company of WeChat, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Australian special forces allegedly killed 39 unarmed prisoners and civilians in Afghanistan, with senior commandos reportedly forcing junior soldiers to kill defenceless captives in order to "blood" them for combat, a four-year investigation found.

Australia said last week that 19



current and former soldiers would be referred for potential criminal prosecution. China's embassy has said the "rage and roar" from Australian politicians and media over the soldier image was an overreaction.

'Hypocrisy is obvious to all'

Australia was seeking to "deflect public attention from the horrible atrocities by certain Australian soldiers", it said.

Other nations, including the United States, New Zealand and France – and the self-ruled island of Taiwan which China claims as its own – have expressed concern at the Chinese foreign ministry's use of the manipulated image on an official Twitter account.

"The CCP's latest attack on Australia is another example of its unchecked use of disinformation and coercive diplomacy. Its hypocrisy is obvious to all," the US State Department said on Wednesday, referring to the Chinese Communist Party. State Department deputy spokesman Cale Brown said the fabricated image of the soldier was "a new low, even for the Chinese Communist Party". "As the CCP spreads

disinformation, it covers up its horrendous human rights abuses, including the detention of more than a million Muslims in Xinjiang," Brown wrote in a tweet.

France's foreign affairs spokesman said on Tuesday the tweeted image was "especially shocking" and the comments by Zhao "insulting for all countries whose armed forces are currently engaged in Afghanistan".

China's embassy in Paris hit back on Wednesday, saying the soldier image was a caricature by a painter, adding that France has previously loudly defended the right to caricature.

WeChat has 690,000 active daily users in Australia, and in September told an Australian government inquiry it would prevent foreign interference in Australian public debate through its platform. Morrison's message had been read by 57,000 WeChat users by Wednesday. Zhao's tweet, pinned to the top of his Twitter account, had been "liked" by 60,000 followers, after Twitter labelled it as sensitive content but declined Canberra's request to remove the image.

Twitter is blocked in China, but has been used by Chinese diplomats.

China on Friday imposed dumping tariffs of up to 200 per cent on Australian wine imports, effectively shutting off the largest export market for the Australian wine industry.

A group of parliamentarians from 19 countries that has lobbied against China's actions in Hong Kong, where it has cracked down on dissent, and in the farwestern region of Xinjiang campaigned on social media for the public to drink Australian wine. Reuters

South Korea passes law allowing BTS stars to postpone military service

NEW YORK (TIP): In a major move, the South Korean parliament has passed a bill allowing music sensation BTS and other musicians to postpone their mandatory military service until the age of 30.

As per the South Korean laws, all able-bodied South Korean men, aged between 18 and 28, are required to serve in the military for about two years, reported New York Times.

Two of the members of the group, Jin and Suga, will soon turn 28 and their with the group was under threat.

According to the revised Military Service Act, "a pop culture artist who was recommended by the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism to have greatly enhanced the image of Korea both within the nation and throughout the world" would be allowed to postpone their military service until age of 30 if they do not have an extraordinary reason.

Before revision, the Military Service Act only gave deferral exceptions to athletes, classical musicians, and those who enrolled in Ph.D. programs abroad. All seven members of BTS—the full name is Bangtan Sonyeondan (Bulletproof Boy Scouts) or Beyond The Scene as their English branding—meet that requirement as they were awarded the medal in 2018.

The fans of the group, known as the BTS Army, celebrated the legal change on social media, calling it a gift to Jin ahead of his birthday on December 4. PTI

Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong defiant as he is jailed over 13 months for protest

HONG KONG (TIP): Joshua Wong, 24, one of Hong Kong's most prominent democracy activists, was jailed on Wednesday for more than 13 months over an unlawful anti-government rally in 2019, the toughest and most high-profile sentence for an opposition figure this year. Wong's sentence comes as critics say the Beijing-backed government is intensifying a crackdown on Hong Kong's opposition and chipping away at wide-ranging freedoms guaranteed after the former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997, a charge authorities in Beijing and Hong Kong reject.

Reacting to the court ruling, Britain's foreign minister Dominic Raab urged Hong Kong and Beijing authorities to stop their campaigns to stifle the opposition.

Wong had pleaded guilty to organising and inciting an unlawful assembly near the city's police headquarters during the height of the sometimes violent demonstrations in June last year. He faced a maximum of three years in jail.

About 100 supporters gathered quietly inside the court ahead of the sentence, while a small group of pro-Beijing people rallied outside, calling for a hefty prison sentence. "I know the coming days will be tougher. We will hang in there," Wong, wearing a black sweater and surgical face mask, shouted after the sentence was read out. "It's not the end of the fight," Wong said later through his lawyers.

"Ahead of us is another challenging battleground.



We're now joining the battle in prison along with many brave protesters, less visible yet essential in the fight for democracy and freedom for Hong Kong."

Wong's long-time colleagues Agnes Chow, 23, and Ivan Lam, 26, were jailed for a total of 10 and seven months, respectively, on charges linked to the same siege when thousands of protesters surrounded the police headquarters on June 21 to demand the government withdraw a now-shelved extradition bill.

Chow, who cried inside the court room on hearing her sentence, had pleaded guilty to incitement and participation in an unlawful protest, while Lam pleaded guilty to incitement. A familiar face at democracy protests since he was a teenager, Wong was less than a

year old when Hong Kong returned to Beijing 23 years ago with a guarantee of freedoms not enjoyed on the mainland, including freedom of speech and assembly. China's imposition of a national security law on Hong Kong on June 30 was seen as the latest blow to the city's liberties, which are crucial for its status as a global financial hub.

'KEEP THE FAITH' : Ahead of sentencing, the district court judge read a letter from Wong's mother to the court in which she said her son was "a young person who cares about society and is persistent in his ideals".

Under the handover agreement in 1997, Beijing promised to maintain the free-wheeling city's way of life for 50 years under a "one country, two systems" formula, although some fear 2047 is arriving early as authorities tighten their grip.

US Senator Marsha Blackburn accused China of cracking down on human rights and destroying "any semblance of autonomy in Hong Kong".

"Keep the faith, Joshua, you are truly an inspiration to freedom fighters everywhere," Blackburn said in a statement. Rights groups were swift to condemn the court ruling. "By targeting well-known activists from Hong Kong's largely leaderless protest movement, authorities are sending a warning to anyone who dares openly criticise the government that they could be next," said Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Regional Director Yamini Mishra. - Reuters

HOME REMEDIES TO NOURISH YOUR DRY SCALP

There are several potential causes of a dry scalp. These include washing the hair too frequently, not drinking enough water, and having a reaction to harsh hair care products. Health conditions such as psoriasis could also result in a dry scalp.

However, a person may be able to treat their dry scalp at home.

Although they may not work for everyone, the following are some potential home remedies that may have some merit when it comes to treating a dry scalp.

Coconut oil

Coconut oil has some recognition in the medical community as being an effective moisturizer.

A review of research found that coconut oil is safe and effective in treating dry skin, which may indicate that it could also be useful in treating scalp dryness.

However, another study showed that although coconut oil did not have any ill effects, there was no noticeable difference between the scalps of people who used the oil and those who did not. In this study, the researchers compared the hair care practices of 240 medical students.

Tea tree oil

Tea tree oil is a popular essential oil that lots of people use for its many potential health benefits.

According to a research review in the journal *Clinical Microbiology Reviews*, tea tree oil may have antifungal, antiseptic, and antibiotic properties that could help with scalp dryness.



Aloe vera

Some people use aloe vera for relief from sunburn and dry skin. Research suggests that people may experience relief with aloe vera due to its anti-inflammatory effects.

When a person applies it to the scalp, aloe vera may help alleviate the itching associated with a dry scalp. It may also help with moisturizing the scalp.

An old study comparing the use of aloe vera gel with a placebo in 44 participants with seborrheic dermatitis — which is a condition that causes scaly, flaky skin — found that the aloe vera gel was more effective in reducing scaliness and itching.

Olive oil

In the diet, olive oil has displayed anti-inflammatory properties. Some research suggests that these properties could also be present

when a person applies it to the skin.

A review of research notes that olive oil has helped boost wound healing and skin regrowth in animal studies, largely through its anti-inflammatory effects. Skin inflammation can lead to dry skin.

Mashed bananas

Witch hazel may also help with the symptoms of a dry scalp, such as itchiness.

According to some research, the nutrients in bananas may provide effective scalp treatment.

One research paper, for example, suggests that the potassium, oils, and vitamins in bananas can help moisturize the scalp, treat dandruff, and improve hair health. The authors state that people can try this natural remedy by making their own banana hair conditioner at home.



By Tript Arora

CONNOISSEUR'S CHOICE



PAV BHAJI

Pav Bhaji is a Mumbai Street Food popular all over India. It is sold in every nook and corner with the name 'Bombay Pav Bhaji' written on the stalls. The basic ingredients in this mouth watering dish are potatoes and tomatoes. While cooking this dish at home I try to make it healthy by adding as many vegetables as possible. You can add whatever veggies are available at your home. Cut them in bite-size pieces and pressure cook them with water for 7 whistles or slow-cook them for 10 minutes after one whistle. Mash the cooked mixture and temper with ginger & garlic paste, onions and butter. Street food is always prepared with lots of butter. But you can adjust the quantities if you are calorie conscience. However the taste will be a little different if you use less butter. My family loves to have it as breakfast on Sundays. The recipe I am sharing today is very easy to prepare. You can boil vegetables a day before, store it in the refrigerator (without mashing) and use it the next day. This way you can enjoy Pav bhaji even on the days when you are too lazy to cook, because the subsequent steps don't take much time.



Traditionally, the Pav is cooked on the Tawa (Girdle) with Bhaji but that way the paav soaks up a lot of butter. Therefore, there is a twist here. I cook it on an electric griller to reduce butter.

We need

1 Cup Peas, 1 Large Capsicum, 200 Gm Potatoes, 250 Gm Tomatoes, 12 Cloves Of Garlic, 2" inch Ginger, 1 Green Chillies, 1 Large Onion, 1 Lemon, 2 Onions Chopped, 1Tbsp Oil, 2 Tbsp Butter, 1 Tsp Cumin Seeds (Zeera), 1 Tsp Kasuri Methi, 2 Tbsp Chopped Coriander, 3 Tbsp Pav bhaji Masala, ¼ Tsp Red food Colour (optional), 1 Tbsp Kashmiri Red Chilli Powder, 1 Tsp of Salt.

Let us Start

Wash all the vegetables . Peel potatoes. Cut them into cubes. De-seed Capsicum and cut into cubes. Chop tomatoes. Grind ginger, garlic and green chilli together to a fine paste.

Add all the vegetables to a pressure cooker with 2 cups of water along with salt and 1 Tsp of Pav bhaji masala. Cook it till 6 whistles. Don't release the pressure, let it cool on its own. Open only when the pressure is totally released.

All the vegetables are soft by now. Mash them well with a hand masher. Don't use a blender otherwise bhaji will become very loose and runny like a chutney!

After everything is blended together , keep another pan on flame. Add butter and oil to it. It is always advisable to add oil along with butter to prevent the butter from burning into an ugly brown colour. Add 1 Tsp of zeera. When it starts sputtering, add chopped onions to it. Saute them on low flame till translucent brown.

When the onions turn to translucent brown add ginger, garlic and chilli paste to the pan. Saute for one minute.

Add a pinch of salt, turmeric powder, Coriander powder, Kasuri methi, 2 tsp of Pav bhaji Masala and kashmiri red chilli powder. Add 2 tbsp of water and saute till oil separates out on the sides. Adding water prevents the masala from burning.

Now our masala is ready. Add mashed vegetables to it. If you want market style red colour of Bhaji then you can dissolve ¼ tsp of food colour in 1 Tbsp of water and add to the bhaji . Give it a good mix. Now let the vegetables simmer for 4 to 5 minutes to absorb all the flavours in it. After 4 to 5 minutes of simmering, bhaji is ready to serve. Just squeeze one lemon on it and mix well, right before serving it to give it a tangy taste.

Heat an electric griller. Soften around 3 Tbsp of butter. Now paste the Pav with the softened butter. Put it in the griller and grill it till your desired level of crispness. Avoid tightly closing the griller. Just keep the lid softly otherwise the pavs will become hard and crisp.

Pav Bhaji is ready to be served! Just top the bhaji with butter, serve it with grilled pavs, green chutney and chopped onions. Enjoy the street food of Mumbai in the hygiene of your kitchen.

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Scotland becomes first nation to make menstrual sanitary products free

Scotland on Tuesday, Dec 1, made sanitary products free to all women, becoming the first nation in the world to take such a step against "period poverty."

The measure makes tampons and sanitary pads available at designated public places such as community centres, youth clubs and pharmacies, at an estimated annual cost to taxpayers of 24 million pounds (\$32 million U.S.).

The Period Products (Free Provision) Scotland Bill passed unanimously, and First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon called it "an important policy for women and girls."

"Proud to vote for this groundbreaking legislation, making Scotland the first country in the world to provide free period products for all who need them," Sturgeon posted on Twitter.

During the debate, the bill's proposer, Scottish Labour MP Monica Lennon, said: "No one should have to worry about where their next tampon, pad or reusable is coming from.

"Scotland will not be the last country to consign period poverty to history, but we have the chance to be the first," she said.

In 2018, Scotland became the first country to provide free sanitary products in schools, colleges and universities.

Some 10% of girls in Britain have been unable to afford sanitary products, according to a survey by the



children's charity Plan International in 2017, with campaigners warning many skip classes as a consequence.

Sanitary products in the United Kingdom are taxed at 5%, a levy that officials have blamed on European Union (EU) rules that set tax rates on certain products.

Now that Britain has left the EU, British Finance Minister Rishi Sunak has said he would abolish the "tampon tax" in January 2021.

CAN STRESS CAUSE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

Stress—and often how you cope with it—can make so many things worse, including your blood pressure.

A major risk factor for heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure stage 1 is defined as an upper or systolic blood pressure reading of 130-139 systolic millimeters of mercury (mm/Hg) and a lower or diastolic pressure reading of 80-89 mm Hg. Systolic blood pressure is the pressure when your heart beats while pumping blood, and diastolic blood pressure is the pressure when your heart is at rest between beats. A blood pressure of less than 120/80 mm Hg is considered normal.

Stage 2 is when blood pressure consistently ranges at 140/90 mm Hg or higher. This is when doctors are likely to suggest medication and lifestyle changes, according to the American Heart Association.

Untreated, high blood pressure can set the stage for heart attack, stroke, and other complications by damaging blood vessels throughout your body. Stress can have both direct and indirect effects on blood pressure levels, explains Vijay Nambi, MD, associate professor of medicine, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston.

Here's what you need to know about stress and how it affects your heart rate and blood pressure.

Stress triggers your body's fight-



or-flight response, and this is a good thing when you are faced with an immediate threat or scare, says Dr. Nambi.

"If something scares me and jumps in front of me, my blood pressure should go up," he says. In these cases, stress stimulates your sympathetic nervous system which releases the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol that can increase heart rate and blood pressure.

This is exactly what is supposed to happen to help you avoid harm, he notes.

Chronic stress—whether related to work, finances, personal relationships, or life in general—is

another story altogether. Researchers are still trying to unravel how chronic stress directly impacts blood pressure. What they do know is that that stress gets in the way of making healthy choices, which will have indirect effects on your blood pressure.

When you are stressed, you are less likely to do the things that you know are good for you. This includes following a healthy diet and exercising regularly, says Stephen J. Huot, MD, professor of medicine (nephrology), associate dean and director of graduate medical education, Yale School of Medicine/Yale New Haven Hospital.

Reasons why you're not losing weight

Countless guides exist on how to lose weight, which makes it hard to figure out what approach is right for you. However, before you start trying to lose weight, it's important to consider whether or not you should lose weight — and if so, how much is healthy.

Therefore, you should consult with your doctor before beginning any weight loss program, as they can help you decide if losing weight is right for you. They can also help you determine the safest way to lose weight based on your own unique health needs. While shedding pounds may help decrease your risk for heart disease and diabetes, losing too much weight can also come with its own set of health conditions such as fatigue, weak bones, and fertility problems.

Once you're in a healthy weight-loss plan, there's always the risk of not losing as much weight as you like. Adjusting your diet or activity level might be all you need to do to see results. But sometimes, your efforts can fall flat. Here are some common reasons why you may be struggling to lose weight:

You're eating too many calories

To lose weight, you need to take in fewer calories than you burn. This is called a calorie deficit. If you're in a calorie surplus, your body stores those extra calories as fat.

To ensure you're consuming the right amount of calories, monitor your caloric intake, as well as physical activity. You can do this by keeping track of the calories you're eating and burning through fitness apps or in a food log. A large 2006 study found that those who planned meals and tracked calories successfully lost weight and maintained weight loss more than those who did not.

You're drinking too much alcohol

Alcohol is energy dense, meaning it contains a high amount of calories per volume, says Ariana Chao, CRNP, the medical director of the Center for Weight and Eating Disorders at the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine.

For reference, alcohol has about seven calories per gram, while a carbohydrate has four calories per gram. Alcohol can also reduce inhibitions about eating, making you more likely to choose high-calorie foods if you're drinking, Chao says.

A large 2018 study of overweight and obese people with type 2 diabetes found that people who drank heavily lost less weight over a four-year period than those who did not drink and decreasing alcohol consumption may improve weight management in people with diabetes.

You're not drinking enough water

Drinking water can help you lose weight by boosting your metabolism and suppressing your appetite, thus making you feel fuller.

A small 2007 study found that drinking 500 mL (two cups) of water increased energy expenditure by 24% in overweight or obese individuals. Additionally, a small 2015 study of obese people compared participants who drank two cups of water before meals with those who did not. It found those who drank water lost an average of almost three more pounds.

Cancer survivors at higher risk of dying from flu: Study

Survivors from a wide range of cancers are more likely than people in the general population to be hospitalised or die from seasonal influenza even several years after their cancer diagnosis, warn researchers, including one of Indian-origin.

The study, published in the journal *EClinicalMedicine*, suggests that cancer survivors are also likely to be at higher risk of severe Covid-19 outcomes.

The research team from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), analysed medical records from 1990 to 2014 of more than 630,000 people in the UK, including over 100,000 survivors of a range of cancers.

Comparing the rates of influenza hospitalisation and death between cancer survivors and the cancer-free population, they found that the risk of these outcomes was more than nine times higher in survivors from lymphomas, leukaemia, and multiple myeloma, compared to those with no prior cancer.

Crucially, this raised risk persisted for at least 10 years after cancer diagnosis.

Despite the risks being raised compared to the general population, the absolute risks of developing severe flu were still relatively low, with about 1 in 1000 survivors of these types of cancer hospitalised with flu each year.

Survivors from other types of cancer also had more than double the risk of severe influenza outcomes for up to five years from diagnosis.

These findings persisted even after accounting for



other suspected risk factors such as old age, smoking, socioeconomic status, body mass index and other illnesses.

The researchers also found that cancer survivors were more likely to have other diseases that are associated with increased risk of severe Covid-19 outcomes, such as heart disease, diabetes, respiratory disease and kidney disease.

"These findings have an immediate relevance as we enter the winter period: we have a flu vaccine available, and the likelihood of a Covid-19 vaccine in the near future," said study author Krishnan Bhaskaran from LSHTM.

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Google set to win EU approval for Fitbit takeover next week

Google is set to win conditional European Union approval for its \$2.1 billion takeover of health tracker Fitbit Inc. this month, people familiar with the discussions said.

The deal could be approved as soon as next week after national competition authorities give their opinion, said the people who asked not to be named because the procedure isn't public. The EU usually consults the so-called advisory committee on mergers days before it issues approval. Google announced its plans to buy Fitbit in November 2019, noting that it would use the smartwatch maker to improve its lagging hardware business. Clearing regulatory obstacles for the deal come in a tough climate when the company is facing mounting global scrutiny of big technology companies and potentially restrictive regulation in the EU and other regions.

Amazon now lets you interact with Alexa via text on iOS

Alexa can now respond to commands via text on iOS. Amazon appears to have quietly added the capability in the last few days, though the company officially confirmed the feature to The Verge.

With the change, users can opt to text commands to Alexa rather than speaking them. According to Amazon, the feature is still a "public preview," so it could have some bugs and may change before it becomes official. But if you want to try it out now, it's already available in the Alexa app on iOS (tapping the Alexa button in the app will bring up a keyboard icon that opens a chat window).

Microsoft aims to help businesses get handle on data with new tool

Microsoft Corp on Thursday, Dec 3, announced a new cloud-based tool designed to help corporate customers understand where data is scattered throughout their operations and whether they are in compliance with data privacy regulations. Once known for its Windows operating system and applications such as Office, Microsoft has built a large business in cloud computing, helping store and process huge amounts of data for corporate customers. Last year, it introduced a tool called Azure Synapse that is being used by companies such as FedEx Corp to analyse the flow of its 16 million daily packages. But for large companies, stores of data have become so large, and distributed across so many countries, that Microsoft is rolling out a tool called Azure Purview to help companies better understand precisely what information they have and where it resides.

Indian companies face highest number of malware attacks after US, Japan: Report

India is on the third position when it comes to highest number of malware attacks, after the US and Japan, according to a 2020 Acronis Cyberthreats Report. It has been mentioned that 1168 malware detections were encountered per 1000 clients in a month. Also, Maze ransomware detections were reported at 7.8% in Q3 2020.

The report also warns users about cyber criminals who can now pivot their attacks from data encryption to data exfiltration. "Ransomware continues to be the leading threat in India with Maze ransomware accounting for nearly half of all known cases in 2020. Yet the Acronis Cyberthreats Report points to a growing trend of cybercriminals trying to



maximize their financial gain. Not content to collect ransoms to decrypt infected data, they steal proprietary – and sometimes embarrassing – data before encrypting it. They then threaten to publicly release the stolen files if the victim doesn't pay up," says the report.

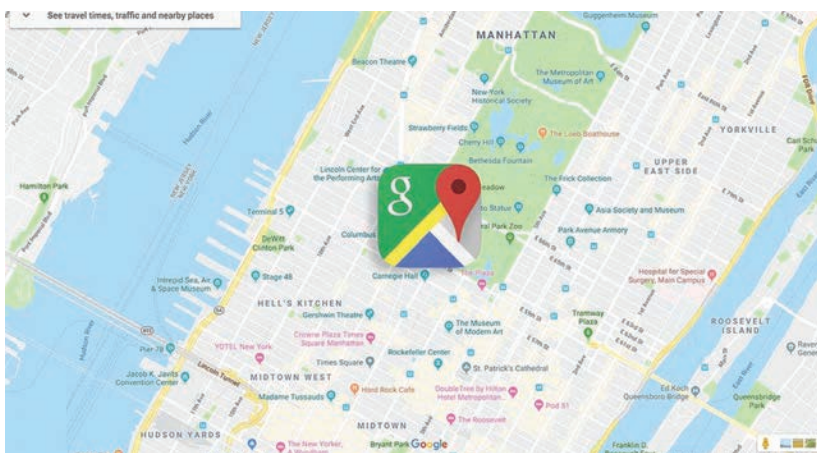
It has been mentioned that

while 31% of global and Indian companies reported daily cyberattacks in 2020, the frequency of attacks targeting their remote workers is projected to increase in 2021. That's because the defenses for systems outside of the corporate network are more easily compromised, giving bad actors access to that

organization's data.

"When it comes to existing solutions and strategies, the current trends in cyberattacks all show that traditional cybersecurity is failing – globally and in India, it's usually because of weak technologies and human error, which are both avoidable," said Rajesh Chhabra, Global Business Development Leader of Inside Sales at Acronis. "Just as cybercriminals are evolving their attacks, organizations in India need to advance their protection and security. Comprehensive cyber protection solutions offer the integration and automation that eliminate complexity, optimize performance, and streamline recovery when a successful attack inevitably occurs."

Google Maps to Get New 'Go' Tab for Quick Access to Frequent Destinations



Google Maps is getting a new 'Go' tab to help users navigate easily to frequently visited places. This new tab will replace the Commute tab that currently sits between the Explore and the Saved tabs. Google Maps Go tab will let you pin your favourite destinations to quickly get information about these places. People will be able to add frequent destinations like a school or a grocery store marked to the new Go tab, to quickly access directions, see how long it would take to reach, as well as live traffic trends. This new Go tab is will go live soon in Google Maps.

The tech giant posted on its blog that Google Maps is getting a new Go tab soon. Users will be able to pin their favourite destinations, and once pinned, you will not have to type a place's address every time they need route information, and can easily head to the Go tab and access details about frequently visited places.

The new Go tab will also let users pin public transit routes they frequent. "If you take public transit, you can pin specific routes, which will let you see accurate departure and arrival times, alerts from your local transit agency, and an up-to-date ETA right from the Go Tab. You can even pin multiple routes (including a driving route and a transit route) to the same destination to see which one will get you there most efficiently," Google said in the blog.

Recently, Google Maps introduced a new community feed in the Explore Tab.

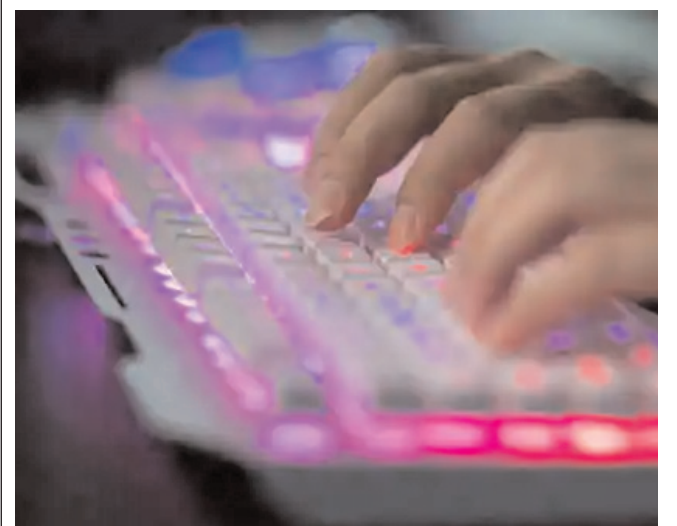
This new community feed offers recommendation of nearby events and places. It shows latest reviews, photos, and posts of places and events near you, offered by people and businesses you follow. It also offers content from experts like food and drink merchants, and articles from noted publishing houses.

Hackers Target Covid-19 Vaccine Distribution 'Cold Chain'

Hackers "assumed to be state agents" have been waging a phishing campaign against pharmaceutical firms and other institutions involved in the forthcoming distribution of a vaccine against the novel coronavirus, IBM announced on Thursday, December 3.

In a post on Security Intelligence releasing their findings, IBM Security X-Force researchers wrote that "precision targeting of executives and key global organizations hold the potential hallmarks of a nation-state tradecraft," adding the unknown hackers likely sought to obtain "advanced insight into the purchase and movement of a vaccine that can impact life and the global economy." The target, according to IBM, appears to be the "cold chain"—a term for the logistics network that allows vaccines and other drugs to be carried from point of manufacture to distribution in temperature-controlled shipping containers. What the attackers hoped to accomplish is unknown, with possible motives ranging from theft of technology to intel that could be used to undermine trust in the vaccine or disrupt distribution.

IBM researchers wrote that the individuals targeted firms in at least six countries and used tactics such as impersonating a Haier Biomedical executive to send spear-phishing emails and targeting the help and support pages of organizations.



RBI keeps benchmark lending rate unchanged at 4%

Concerned over elevated inflation, Reserve Bank of India on Friday decided to leave benchmark interest rate unchanged at 4 per cent but maintained an accommodative stance, implying more rate cuts in the future if need arises to support the economy hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The benchmark repurchase (repo) rate has been left unchanged at 4 per cent, Governor Shaktikanta Das said while announcing the decisions taken by the central bank's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC).

Consequently, the reverse repo rate will also continue to earn 3.35 per cent for banks for their deposits kept with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

He said MPC voted for keeping interest rate unchanged and continued with its accommodative stance to support growth.

The central bank had slashed the repo rate by 115 basis points since late March to support growth.

The RBI had last revised its policy rate on May 22, in an off-policy cycle to perk up demand by cutting interest rate to a historic low.



HCL's Roshni Nadar richest woman in India

IT major HCL Technologies' Roshni Nadar Malhotra has topped a list of the richest women in the country with a networth of Rs 54,850 crore, followed by Biocon's Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw at Rs 36,600 crore, a report said on Thursday, Dec 3.

A total of 31 women in the list of 100 having a networth of at least Rs 100 crore, prepared by Hurun India and Kotak Wealth, are "self-made", it said. This includes six professional managers and 25 entrepreneurs.

Shaw leads in the self-made category, followed by Radha Vembu of Zoho (Rs 11,590 crore networth) and Jayshree Ullal of Arista Networks (Rs 10,220 crore), it said.

Interestingly, all the three—Shaw, Ullal and Vembu—also feature in a global rich list prepared by Hurun.

The average age of women on the list, whose cumulative wealth is pegged at Rs 2.72 lakh crore, is 53 and 19 of the 100 women are under the age of 40, it said.

Two of the women have promoted unicorns—retailer Nykaa's Falguni Nayar who has a wealth of Rs 5,410 crore and 34-year-old Divya Gokulanth of Byju's with a networth of Rs 3,490 crore.

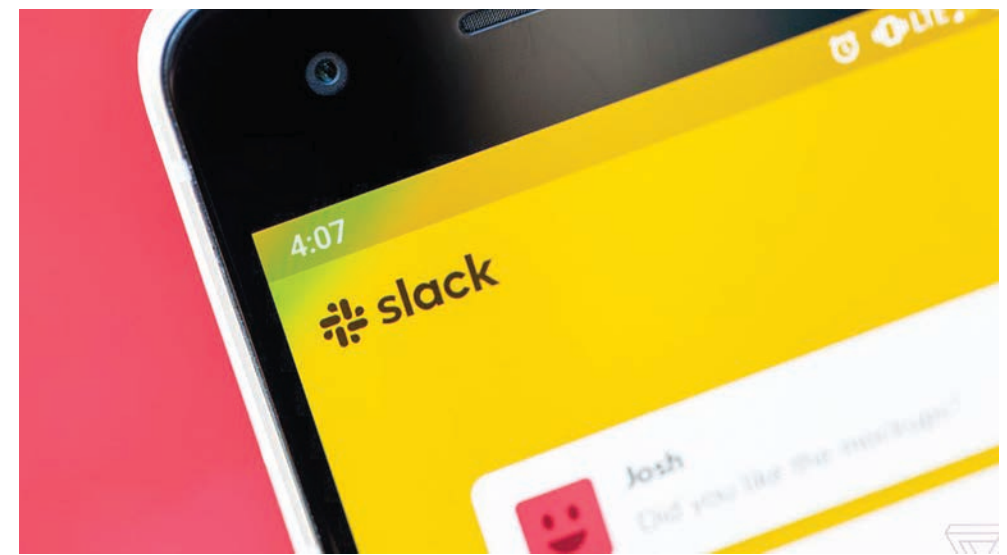
Salesforce to buy office chat app Slack for \$28 billion

Cloud computing giant Salesforce is acquiring workplace chat app Slack, the two companies announced on Tuesday. The deal, rumblings of which began surfacing last week, marks one of the most consequential acquisitions in the business software industries in recent years and Salesforce's biggest purchase ever.

Salesforce is paying \$27.7 billion for Slack, according to the press release. "Under the terms of the agreement, Slack shareholders will receive \$26.79 in cash and 0.0776 shares of Salesforce common stock for each Slack share, representing an enterprise value of approximately \$27.7 billion based on the closing price of Salesforce's common stock on November 30, 2020," the announcement reads.

"Stewart and his team have built one of the most beloved platforms in enterprise software history, with an incredible ecosystem around it," said Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff. "This is a match made in heaven. Together, Salesforce and Slack will shape the future of enterprise software and transform the way everyone works in the all-digital, work-from-anywhere world. I'm thrilled to welcome Slack to the Salesforce Ohana once the transaction closes."

"Salesforce started the cloud



revolution, and two decades later, we are still tapping into all the possibilities it offers to transform the way we work. The opportunity we see together is massive," said Slack CEO Stewart Butterfield. "As software plays a more and more critical role in the performance of every organization, we share a vision of reduced complexity, increased power and flexibility, and ultimately a greater degree of alignment and organizational agility. Personally, I believe this is the most strategic combination in the history of software, and I can't wait to get going."

Slack has transformed from a fast-rising startup formed as a gaming company in 2009 into a major competitor of Microsoft with more than 12 million daily active users as of October of last year (and likely many more now, though the company has not disclosed concrete numbers) and a market value of close to \$25 billion. The company, led by Flickr co-creator Butterfield, started primarily as an email alternative that pitched itself to startups, media companies, and other tech-savvy businesses to better manage interoffice communication.

Indian economy is gradually recovering: IMF

India's economy, severely affected by the coronavirus pandemic, is gradually recovering, the International Monetary Fund said on Thursday, Dec 3.

India's economy recovered faster than expected in the September quarter as a pick-up in manufacturing helped GDP clock a lower contraction of 7.5 per cent and held out hopes for further improvement on better consumer demand.

"India has indeed been severely affected by the pandemic but is gradually recovering," IMF chief spokesperson Gerry Rice told reporters.

Fiscal, monetary, and financial sector measures announced to date provided much-needed support to the economy, including businesses, agriculture, and vulnerable households, Rice said in response to a question on the IMF's assessment of India's economy during the coronavirus pandemic.

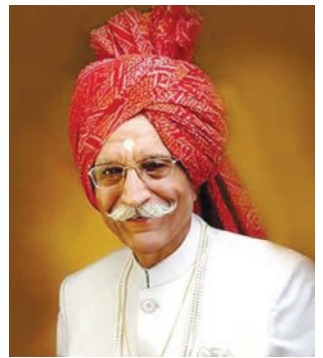
"To further support growth, we believe the Indian authorities should prioritize swift implementation of the existing support programs and may need to consider expanding their scope, as warranted," Rice said.

In her address to the International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC), the ministerial-level committee of the IMF, through video conference, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said that a V-shaped pattern of recovery is being seen in several high-level indicators.



'Spice King' MD Gulati passes away at 98

Mahashay Dharampal Gulati, the owner of spice company MDH Masala, passed away on Thursday, Dec 3, morning due to a cardiac arrest at a Delhi hospital. Clad often in signature red turban and white pearls, the Masala King was the face and brand ambassador of his company. The 98-year-old went on to feature on several television commercials and became one of the country's most recognisable faces. The MDH jingle also made an indelible impression.



However, in the business community and people who knew him well, Gulati will always be remembered as the dedicated person who built an empire from scratches. Even at the age of 90, Gulati was said to have actively participated in his company's day to day operations. Born in Sialkot (Pakistan) in 1923, he left school before he could have completed fifth class to help his father Chunni Lal Gulati who had founded Mahashian Di Hatti (MDH) in 1919.

Dharampal came to India after partition with just Rs 1,500 in his hand. Initially, he started work as a horse-cart puller but soon gathered enough to open a spice shop in Karol Bagh and later in Chandni Chowk. Slowly and steadily, he turned it into an Rs 1,000 crore empire, globally known as MDH Masala today.

It has a strong global presence with offices in Dubai and London, and in India it is only second to S Narendrakumar's Everest Spices. Gulati himself was one of India's highest paying executives and took Rs 21 crore salary in 2017. He, however, has donated nearly 90 per cent of his income to charity.

Gulati's entry to fame was rather comical and accidental. Coming to his popularity, 'Mahashay Ji', was no less than a Bollywood Star. He was often compared with Queen Elizabeth on social media as the duo, despite being 90-plus, enjoyed a very strong recall value.

Shree Ganeshaya Namah



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Chirag Bejan Daruwalla with his father late Bejan Daruwalla

The Indian Panorama brings you Weekly and Birthday Horoscope from the World's most trusted Vedic Astrologer Nastur Bejan Daruwalla.

WEEKLY HOROSCOPE DEC 07-13, 2020

ARIES: Ganesha says your finances may not be on point at the starting of the week and also your expenses will increase. Don't think about any long investments this week. You may travel short distance. Neptune says you can reveal your secrets and you can meet new people. Untidy scenarios of last few days will be swept off. Projects will restart which stopped. You will visit to spiritual places with your life partner and Soulmate.

TAURUS: Your financial planning will show results this week. Don't make emotional decisions this week. This week will require you to be physically and mentally strong. Also focus on family security. You can also think about small investment this week. Take a chance to re-join the creative group. You will be attracted to spirituality this week. Love will flourish for people with Taurus zodiac. Praying Lord Hanuman will help you find peace this week.

GEMINI: Ganesha says, you may face a financial crisis this week and therefore have a red eye on your spending habits. You may also face losses in long term investments with siblings you make this week so be careful. Praying Lord Ganesha will help you this week. You may experience a little sleep disturbance. Stars in your horoscope will boost up some confidence. Things will be confusing by the end of the week but the next week will calm think down.

CANCER: Laziness may kick in at the starting of the week and due to less focus, you may feel demotivated but things will be fine. You may think of short-term investment but avoid taking haphazard decisions. Love is in the air this week. Try to restore connection in relationships.

LEO: Financial conditions this week are looking strong. Be patient while making big decisions this week. Try to stay balanced and meditate. This week is lucky for monetary transactions. This week be careful about how you spend your time. People in love will be able to spend time with their partners. You may find that perfect job this week which you have been seeking since long and your talents will be put on display soon.

VIRGO: You may find new projects this week. There are chances of good news coming this week. It would be good seven days to make financial moves. You may feel peevish but trust your intuitions about creativity and take recommendations from your superiors will help you make better decisions.

LIBRA: You must be careful about your health this week. Your mind is wavering around new business plans but widely research and analyse your plans before making a decision. Practice self-care this week as it will remove the feeling of dullness. Buying luxury goods this will attract negativity so avoid it. Family issues about children may arise but try to deal patiently with them.

SCORPIO: Think before spending this week. Your hard work is going to pay off this week. Don't doubt yourself so much, you are heading towards the right direction. Your subordinates and superiors are going to appreciate your work and capabilities. Avoid taking monetary decisions this week as it is not the good time. Spend more time with family. Your over thinking issue is going to go away as Mercury will leave your zodiac.

SAGITTARIUS: You will make a good short term plan this week and your finances will support your moves. Goddess Laxmi will send you blessings so worship her. You will make calm and clear choices. Health of elderly people will improve. You will also attain good mental health. Singles will make unexpected connections.

CAPRICORN: You will set into a new routine and adapt new schedule. You may feel negative by the middle of the week but gradually it will improve. Venus will help you captivate crowds. You will come over disappointments. You will find higher strata in your family. Students will find creative aspects of themselves and will do better in studies.

AQUARIUS: Your finances will be balanced. Your work will be supported by your subordinates and partners. Avoid taking any emotional decisions this week. You may also spend time with your family. Heavy gains of past investments will find its way to you this week. Try to improve relationship with your life partner this week. Praying Lord Ganesha will bring you domestic peace.

PISCES: As your horoscope suggests, you will have a very busy week and find it difficult to implement all your plans at once. Your overseas network will help you solve your business issues. Beware of your distant enemies. This week will be the triumph time for you. Mercury will get your prime concerns on top. You will have lots of opportunities this week but be careful about spending. Stay warned about your health and try to speed down on road. Spend time with your children this period and pray Lord Shiva, he has his eyes on your period.

Birthday Horoscope December 7 to December 13, 2020

DEC 7: Ganesha says though activities seen pretty well lined up when the day begins, plans can begin to fall apart. It will help to put aside habitual or narrow ways of reacting and instead view things from a more inclusive angle.

DEC 8: A rather tense or discouraging mood can prevail and stir up trouble, but only if you let it. Yesterday's advice applies again today; don't be inflexible. Open minds make quite a difference.

DEC 9: Excellent ideas flow and are exchanged, which can stimulate a more enlightened approach to relationship interests. Some carefully chosen words can work wonders.

DEC 10: Any one of a number of snags behind the scenes can make things touch and go today and tonight. Concentrate on neglected work. Let bygones be bygones.

Dec 11: Your heart may just not be in whatever you have to do in the outside world.

Regardless, benefits can be derived from taking a time - out.

DEC 12: It's a good policy to question yourself and others closely today, as perceptions can go askew and misunderstandings ensue, especially when you encounter unexplained or passive resistance.

DEC 13: Your way with others is confident, thanks to the Moon in your sign. Still, you should prepare to disarm some home-front resistance.

SANKASHTI CHATURTHI

Sankashti Chaturthi is one of the most auspicious days that is observed every month on the fourth day Krishna Paksha in the honour of Lord Ganesh. This month, Sankashti Chaturthi will be observed on December 4. On this auspicious day, devotees Lord Ganesh observe fast to seek his blessings and to get rid of all obstacles in their respective lives. If you too are going to fast on Sankashti Chaturthi, then here we are with the auspicious time of Sankashti Chaturthi and its importance.

Auspicious time for Sankashti Chaturthi Puja:

- Sarvartha Siddhi Yoga- December 3, Thursday afternoon, 12 noon to 22 minutes until December 04, Friday morning at 6:59 am.
- Moonrise time- 7:56 pm
- Sandhya Puja- From 5:24 pm to 6:45 pm.

Importance of Sankashti Chaturthi

If Ganesh ji is worshiped on Sankashti, the negative effects of the house go away. Also, peace prevails in the house. It is believed that during this period, all the disasters coming into the house are overcome by worshipping Ganesh by law. Chandra Darshan is also very auspicious on this day. This fast starts at sunrise and ends at lunar darshan. Please tell that 13 fasts of Sankashti Chaturthi are kept in the whole year.

It is also said that if the devotees worship Lord Ganesh on Sankashti Chaturthi, all their sorrows will be destroyed. Every Sankashti day is associated with a Peetha, and a specific form of Ganesh is worshipped on this day. During Adhik Maas Chaturthi, devotees pray to Vibhuvana Palaka Maha Ganapati and the Peetha is Doorva Bilva Patra Peetha.

The tradition of keeping fast on this day dates back to the time of King Chandrasen in the Satyuga. Pandava King Yudhishtir also practiced it after learning about its significance from Maharshi Ved Vyasa, a great sage and the author of the Mahabharata. The Rishi Markandeya also narrated the tale associated with Sankashti to King Chandrasena and thus the tradition of keeping fast on this day started.

Puja Vidhi

On the day of Sankashti Chauth (Chaturthi), after bathing in the morning, women worship Lord Ganesh, who offers Riddhi-Siddhi and observe a fast throughout the day. After this, in the evening, Lord Ganesh is worshiped with rituals and, flowers, sesame, jaggery etc. are offered. Do not forget to offer a coconut in the worship of Ganesh. Light a lamp in front of Ganapati and chant the mantra of Ganesh. After the rise of the moon, offer Arghya while looking down.

The fast is performed for the well-being and progeny of the family. The devotees must observe the fast from morning till evening. After the Ganesh puja, moon god is sighted and offerings are made to the moon god. People need to abstain from daily food items but here are few of the items that you can consume during the fast.

Puja Mantra

*Om Gam Ganpataye Namah
Vakratunda Mahakaya, Surya Koti
Samaprabaha*



*Nirvighnam Kurumedeava Sarva
Karyeshu Sarvada
OM Ekadantaya Viddhmahe,
Vakratundaya Dheemahi
Tanno Danti Prachodayat*

Sankashti Chauth Vrat Katha

It is said that in the Satyuga there was a potter in the kingdom of King Harishchandra. Once, despite all efforts, when his dishes were being left raw, he told this to a priest. The priest told him that the problem would be solved only by the sacrifice of a young child. After that, the potter caught a child and put it in Anwa. It was the day of Sakat Chauth. Even after much searching, when her mother could not find her son, she prayed before Ganesh Ji with a sincere heart. On the other hand, when the potter woke up in the morning, his dishes were cooked in Anwa, but the child was also safe.

After this incident, the potter got scared and reached before the king told the whole story. After this, the king summoned the child and his mother, and the mother described the glory of Sakat Chauth, who had overcome the troubles. Since then, women started fasting for the good luck and long life of their children and family.

Difference between Sankashti Chaturthi and Vinayaka Chaturthi

- A lunar month comprises of two fortnights. The fortnights can be divided into the dark half of the lunar month (Krishna Paksha) and the bright half of the lunar month (Shukla Paksha). The Chaturthi that arrives in the dark part is termed as Sankashti Chaturthi. While the

Chaturthi that falls in the bright half is known as Vinayaka Chaturthi.

- Sankashti Chaturthi fasting is observed for the deliverance from difficult times. While Vinayaka Chaturthi fasting is done for the salutations of Supreme Lord, Ganesh.
- Sankashti Chaturthi is popular as Sankatahara Chaturthi, whereas Vinayaka Chaturthi is famous as Varada Vinayaka Chaturthi

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

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

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

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Moderna to make up to 125mn Covid-19 vaccine doses available globally

US-based drugmaker Moderna has said that it expects to have between 100 million and 125 million doses of its experimental Covid-19 vaccine available globally in the first quarter of 2021.

Out of these, about 85-100 million doses will be made available in the US and 15-25 million doses will be available outside of the US, the company said on Thursday.

These expected first quarter doses are inclusive within the 500 million to up to one billion doses that the company expects to manufacture globally in 2021.

Moderna also re-affirmed its expectation of having approximately 20 million doses available in the US by the end of this year.

The development comes after the company's November 30 announcement that the primary efficacy analysis of the Phase 3 study of the "mRNA-1273" vaccine showed efficacy of 94.1 per cent.

Also on November 30, Moderna submitted a request for an emergency use authorisation (EUA) from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and conditional approval from the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

S'pore to contribute \$5mn to help other nations get Covid-19 vaccines

Singapore on Friday announced its decision to contribute \$5 million to support low- and lower-middle-income countries procure Covid-19 vaccines. The announcement was made in a joint statement by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Health, reports Xinhua news agency.

The money would go through the Covid-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Advance Market Commitment (AMC) mechanism, which will help support 92 low- and lower-middle-income countries' access through the COVAX Facility, said the statement.

The COVAX Facility is a global risk-sharing mechanism which seeks to procure, equitably allocate and deliver 2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines by the end of 2021. Singapore is one of 97 self-financing participants in the Facility.

The contribution is part of "our consistent support for vaccine multilateralism, and the fair and equitable access and allocation of vaccines", said the statement.

The AMC eligible countries include several ASEAN countries as well as small states globally, it added.

The Covid-19 virus "does not respect borders, and no one is safe until everyone is safe", said the statement, adding that the successful development of safe and efficacious vaccines is a critical step towards overcoming the pandemic.

Global Covid-19 cases top 65.7mn: Johns Hopkins

The overall number of global coronavirus cases has topped 65.7 million, while the deaths have surged to more than 1.51 million, according to the Johns Hopkins University.

In its latest update on Saturday, Dec 5, the University's Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) revealed that the current global caseload and death toll stood at 65,771,488 and 1,516,035, respectively.

The US is the worst-hit country with the world's highest number of cases and deaths at 14,343,430 and 278,605, respectively, according to the CSSE. India comes in second place in terms of cases at 9,571,559, while the country's death toll soared to 139,188.

The other countries with more than a million confirmed cases are Brazil (6,533,968), Russia (2,382,012), France (2,321,703), the UK (1,694,800), Italy (1,688,939), Spain (1,684,647), Argentina (1,454,631), Colombia (1,352,607), Germany (1,157,514), Mexico (1,156,770), Poland (1,041,846) and Iran (1,016,835), the CSSE figures showed. Brazil currently accounts for the second highest number of fatalities at 175,964. The countries with a death toll above 20,000 are Mexico (108,173), the UK (60,714), Italy (58,852), France (54,859), Iran (49,695), Spain (46,252), Russia (41,730), Argentina (39,512), Colombia (37,467), Peru (36,076) and South Africa (21,963).

TRACKING THE VIRUS

GLOBAL

Cases 65,771,488 | Deaths 1,516,035

INDIA

Cases 9,571,559 | Deaths 139,188



US pandemic death toll mounts as danger season approaches

US deaths from the coronavirus pandemic have surged past 2,000 for two days in a row as the most dangerous season of the year approached, taxing an overwhelmed healthcare system with US political leadership in disarray.

The toll from Covid-19 reached its second-highest level ever on Wednesday with 2,811 lives lost, according to a Reuters tally of official data, one short of the record from April 15.

Nearly 200,000 new US cases were reported on Wednesday, with record hospitalizations approaching 100,000 patients. The sobering data came as the head of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Wednesday warned that December, January and February were likely to be "the most difficult time in the public health history of this nation."

CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield told an event hosted by the US Chamber of Commerce that the United States could start losing around 3,000 people - roughly the number that died in the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 - each day over the next two months.

"The mortality concerns are real and I do think unfortunately before we see February, we could be close to 450,000 Americans that have died from this virus," Redfield said. The US death toll



since the start of the pandemic stands at around 273,000.

Meanwhile, the administration of outgoing President Donald Trump has yet to articulate an effective strategy to contain the virus beyond promoting the development of a vaccine, which could be rolled out later this month but faces an uphill battle amid a skeptical public and logistical challenges.

The Republican president's few public appearances recently had been dedicated to efforts to overturn the results of the Nov. 3 election won by Democratic President-elect Joe Biden, who will assume office on Jan. 20. Maryland Governor Larry Hogan, a

Republican, said he had been concerned about the transition between the Trump and Biden administrations, but he had grown more hopeful that the federal government response would not lapse.

"We're in the middle of the worst battle of this war, and the hand-off has got to be smooth. We've got to work together. There's got to be no politics in this virus," he told ABC News' "Good Morning America" program.

Hogan echoed Redfield's warning, citing dark days ahead and noting even when vaccines are approved, there initially won't be enough to even cover all of his state's healthcare workers.

JODHPUR: THE BLUE CITY

Jodhpur, the second largest city in Rajasthan is popularly known as the Blue City. The name is clearly befitting as most of the architecture – forts, palaces, temples, havelis and even houses are built in vivid shades of blue. The strapping forts that tower this magnificent city sum up to a spectacle you would not want to miss. The mammoth, imposing fortress of Mehrangarh has a landscape dominating a rocky ridge with the eight gates leading out of the fortress. The new city is located outside the structure. Jodhpur is also known for the rare breed of horses known as Marwari or Malani, which are only found here.

Jodhpur marks its origin back to the year of 1459 AD. The history of this prosperous city revolves around the Rathore clan. Rao Jodha, the chief of Rathore Clan is credited with the origin of Jodhpur in India. The city is known to be built in place of the ancient capital, Mandore of the state of Marwar. Hence, the people of Jodhpur and surrounding areas are commonly known as Marwaris. Also, it is believed that the relics of Mandore can still be witnessed in the Mandore Gardens.

PLACES TO VISIT

MEHRANGARH FORT

Rising perpendicular and impregnable from a hill which is 125 metres above Jodhpur's skyline is the Mehrangarh Fort. This historic fort is one of the most famous in India and is packed with history and legends. Mehrangarh Fort still bears the imprints of cannonball attacks courtesy the armies of Jaipur on its second gate. Chiselled and sturdy, the fort is known for its exquisite latticed windows, carved panels, intricately decorated windows and walls of Moti Mahal, Phool Mahal and Sheesh Mahal.

KHEJARLA FORT

Located 85 kilometres from the main city, the 400-year old Khejarla Fort is situated in a rural setting. The stunning red sandstone monument, now a hotel, is an example of Rajput architecture. Visitors will be mesmerised by the fort's picturesque settings, latticework friezes and intricate Jharokas.

UMAID BHAWAN PALACE

Umaid Bhawan Palace was built by Maharaja Umaid Singh in 1929 to counter a famine which had hit the state at the time. It was also known as the Chittar Palace while being constructed thanks to the use of stones drawn from the Chittar hill. The palace was designed by HV Lanchester, a renowned British architect, and was completed in 16 years. Built with sandstone and marble, the architecture of the palace is described as a blend of Indo-Saracenic, Classical Revival and Western Art Deco styles. It is recognised as one of the largest private homes in the world and also one of the more spectacular buildings. It is the only palace built in the 20th century.

MOTI MAHAL

Moti Mahal, as the name suggests, is the Pearl Hall where the royal families held their audience. The hall is known to have glass windows and five nooks that enabled the queens to listen to the proceedings taking place in the Sringar Chowki, The Royal Throne of Jodhpur.

SHEESH MAHAL

Situated within the compound of Mehrangarh Fort is the glass palace of Jodhpur, popularly known as Sheesh Mahal. This magnificent piece of architecture is adorned with walls of mirror work that stretch across ceilings



and to the floors. It is superimposed by the mirror work of brightly painted religious figures cast in plaster.

PHOOL MAHAL

Going by the name, the Phool Mahal or Flower Hall is the most exorbitant of all the halls in the palace. This beautiful chamber is said to be the pleasure dome for the Maharajas. The gold used for constructing the Mahal came from Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

CHAMUNDA MATAJI TEMPLE

Chamunda Mataji was Rao Jodha's favourite goddess and so her idol was bought to the Mehrangarh Fort. Thus, the fort became a place of worship and was turned into a temple. Since then, locals have followed the culture of worshipping Chamunda Mata. In fact, till date, the goddess remains the Isht Devi (the adopted goddess) of Maharajas and the royal family.

RANISAR PADAMSAR

Located near the Fateh Pole in Mehrangarh, the Ranisar and Padmasar are adjacent lakes that were constructed in the year 1459. Ranisar Lake was built on orders of Queen Jasmade Hadi, Rao Jodha's wife while Padmasar Lake was ordered by Queen Padmini of Rao Ganga, daughter of Rana Sanga of Mewar.

JASWANT THADA

This milky white memorial built towards the end of the 19th century as a tribute to the leader Jaswant Singh is a huge tourist attraction. Jaswant Singh, who ruled Jodhpur, invested well in his state. He made attempts to bring down the level of crime, subdue dacoits, built railways and broadly worked on raising the economy of Marwar. Jaswant Thada is managed and looked after by the Mehrangarh Museum Trust (MMT) and is open to public.

The Trust is operating a Museum in Jaswant Thada displaying portraits of Marwar rulers along with informative didactics – the information serves as orientation space to understand the history of Marwar through the Portraits. Its grounds serve as a serene venue for morning concerts during music festivals such as the Rajasthan International Folk Festival and the World Sacred Spirit Festival.



Tokyo Olympics delay costs may reach USD 2.8 billion

The cost of the postponed Tokyo Olympics could reach about USD 2.8 billion, according to figures released on Friday by the Tokyo organising committee, the Tokyo city government and Japan's national government.

The numbers are in line with estimates that have been made in Japan since the Olympics were postponed eight months ago.

They are now set to open on July 23, 2021. About two-thirds of the added costs are being picked up by the two government entities, with the other one-third going to the privately funded organizing committee. The operational cost for the delay is listed at 171 billion yen, or about USD 1.64 billion at the present exchange rate. The organizing committee and the Tokyo government share equally in covering the expenses.

SA-England ODI postponed after positive case

The first ODI between South Africa and England that was scheduled December 5 has been moved to Sunday, Dec 6, after a player from the home team tested positive for Covid-19. Cricket South Africa said the latest round of tests conducted on Thursday resulted in an unnamed South African player returning a positive result, the third from within the camp during the six-match limited-overs series. The teams had travelled to the stadium to prepare for the game but it was officially called off an hour before the start. The decision places a spotlight on the South Africa camp and their protocols during a tour. Two players tested positive ahead of the T20I series that started on November 27 and was won 3-0 by England. Yet more worrying will be the positive case from within the secure hotel bio-bubble, where both teams have been based since November 17.

West Indies win MCC's Spirit of Cricket award

West Indies have won this year's Spirit of Cricket award after sending both their men's and women's teams to tour England during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) has announced. The men's side arrived in England in June for a three-test series played in a biosecure environment, which saw international cricket resume for the first time since the novel coronavirus outbreak brought the global calendar to a halt. The women featured in a Twenty20 international series against England in September after India and South Africa were unable to tour because of the pandemic.

'Concussion Sub' Chahal trumps Australia, India win first T20 by 11 runs

CANBERRA (TIP): Yuzvendra Chahal turned out to be the perfect concussion substitute after an injured Ravindra Jadeja did his part with the bat as the duo played their roles to perfection in India's impressive 11-run victory over Australia in the first T20 International here on Friday, Dec 4.

While Jadeja smashed an unbeaten 44 off 23 balls to propel India to 161 for 7, his head injury turned out to be a blessing in disguise with India unleashing Chahal (3/25 in 4 overs) on an Australian side caught completely off-guard.

The hosts could manage only 150 for 7 in 20 overs.

Credit was also due to the lion-hearted effort from debutant Thangarasu Natarajan (3/30) and off-spinner Washington Sundar (0/16 in 4 overs), who bowled well in Powerplay.

ICC match referee David Boon allowed the visitors a "like for like" replacement, as mandated by the rules, for Jadeja in Chahal even though home team coach Justin Langer looked visibly angry.

And to make matters worse, Chahal dismissed two form men -- Aaron Finch (35) and Steve Smith (12) -- in his first two overs to turn the game on its head.

At the end of it all, he also scooped the man of the match honours for his superb effort.

The Australians were not prepared for Chahal, who bowled way better in his most preferred format, varying the pace of his deliveries and using the flight to good effect.

Natarajan, whose nerves had eased



Indian teammates celebrate the wicket of Australia's Glenn Maxwell during their T20I match at Manuka Oval, in Canberra.

after a decent ODI debut, was right on the money and got one to straighten catching Glenn Maxwell plumb in-front.

If that wasn't enough, Natarajan snuffed out a frustrated D'arcy Short (34 off 38 balls) to make it 113 for 4 and India didn't have to look back from then on.

Earlier, vice-captain KL Rahul continued his impressive run in the shortest format with yet another fifty but it took Jadeja's brilliant back-end flourish to take India to a fighting total.

The Indian vice-captain hit 51 off 40 balls but leg-spinner Adam Zampa (1/20 in 4 overs) and all-rounder Moises Henriques (3/22 in 4 overs) were brilliant between overs 11th and 15th, which shifted the momentum in favour of the

home team till Jadeja came into play with a 44 not out off 23 balls.

During 11th and 15th over, India scored 22 runs and lost three wickets in Sanju Samson (23 off 15 balls), Manish Pandey (2 off 8 balls) and Rahul.

However, Jadeja (five fours and a six), who suffered from hamstring trouble, launched into Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc in the final two overs that yielded 34 runs taking Indian to a par-score at the Manuka Oval.

The Indians found Zampa difficult to get away as he conceded only one boundary while Henriques conceded just a six, cleverly varying the pace of his deliveries with a good mix of cutters and seam-up stuff.

Jadeja ruled out of remainder of T20I series

India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja was ruled out of the remainder of the T20I series against Australia after sustaining a concussion in the first match in Canberra on Friday. In a press release, the BCCI announced that Jadeja will no longer be a part of the squad for the remaining two T20Is.

"Ravindra Jadeja sustained a concussion after being hit on the left side of his forehead in the final over of the first innings of the first T20I against Australia in Canberra on 4th December 2020," the BCCI press release said.

"The diagnosis was confirmed based on a clinical assessment in the dressing room during the innings break by the BCCI Medical Team. Jadeja remains under observation and will be taken for further scans if required based on the assessment on Saturday morning. He will not take any further part in the ongoing T20I series," the release further added.

Jadeja was struck on the helmet by Australian fast bowler Mitchell Starc during the final over of India's innings. The left-handed batsman did not return to take the field as leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal was named as his concussion substitute. Chahal picked up 3 wickets for 25 runs as he helped India to a 11-run win in the first T20I.

Jadeja's knock of 44* runs set up the victory for India as the visitors were struggling at 116/5 when Hardik Pandya was dismissed. Jadeja's cavalier knock took India to a competitive total of 161/7 in 20 overs.

Williamson's double ton puts NZ on top against West Indies

HAMILTON (TIP): The second day of the first Test between New Zealand and West Indies belonged to Kane Williamson.

The New Zealand captain, whose actions and decisions shaped the day, scored 251, his third double century and highest score in Tests, before making an assertive declaration at 519/7 early in the final session.

Williamson's innings came to an end 14 runs before his declaration but he courteously waited for Kyle Jamieson to complete his maiden half-century before calling his batsmen in, with around 26 overs left in the day.

At stumps, West Indies, depleted by minor injuries to batsman Darren Bravo and wicketkeeper Shane Dowrich, were 49/0. Bravo has a sprained ankle and Dowrich an injured hand.

Openers Kraigg Braithwaite (20) and John Campbell (22) batted doggedly through the late afternoon.

Most of the day was a process of ticking off milestones for Williamson who steadily built his innings and played New Zealand into a more dominant position than it could have hoped when it lost the toss Thursday and was sent in.

"After the day's play yesterday and looking at the surface, we were pretty happy finishing with only a couple of wickets down because both teams were pretty keen to bowl first," Williamson said.



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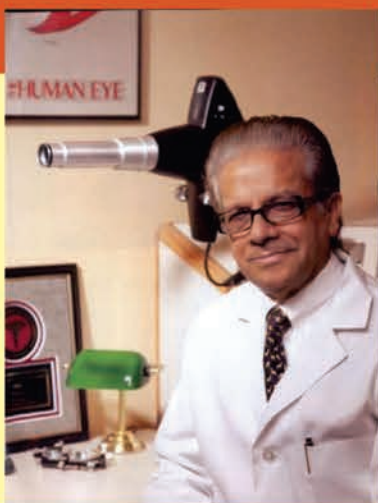
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