



THE FAVOURITE' ACTOR OLIVIA COLMAN SAYS WIKIPEDIA ADDED 8 YEARS TO HER AGE AND SHE HAD TO FIGHT TO GET IT RIGHT



NO. ABSOLUTELY NOT: FREIDA PINTO SAYS SHE WILL NOT WORK WITH FILMMAKER WOODY ALLEN AGAIN

US, Taliban agree in principle to Afghan peace framework

Key Concessions Discussed: Qaida And IS To Be Kept Out Of Af, Full Pullout Of US Troops, Taliban-Kabul Govt Dialogue, Ceasefire

Mujib Mashal

Kabul: American and Taliban officials have agreed in principle to the framework of a peace deal in which the insurgents guarantee to prevent Afghan territory from being used by militant outfits like al-Qaida and Islamic State, and that could lead to a full pullout of US troops in return for larger concessions from the Taliban, the chief US negotiator said on Monday.

The American envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, said those concessions must include the Taliban's agreeing to a ceasefire and to talk directly with the Afghan government, issues that the insurgents have doggedly opposed in the past.

"We have a draft of the framework that has to be fleshed out before it becomes an agreement," Khalilzad said in an interview with the NYT in Kabul. "The Taliban have committed, to our satisfaction, to do what is necessary that would prevent Afghanistan from ever becoming a platform for international terrorist groups or individuals." He added: "We felt enough confidence that we said we need to get this fleshed out, and details need to be worked out."

After nine years of halting



NEARING THE END OF A 17-YEAR CONFLICT? The 17-year conflict has caused huge loss of life. According to UN figures, between 6,000 and 11,000 civilians have been killed every year since 2009

efforts to reach a peace deal with the Taliban, the draft framework, though preliminary, is the biggest tangible step toward ending a two-decade war that has cost tens of thousands of lives and profoundly changed

India in tight spot, P9

ed American foreign policy.

A senior American official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Taliban delegation had asked for time to confer with their leadership about the American requirement for the insurgents' agreement to direct Afghan talks and a ceasefire. The official described all those issues as part of a "package deal".

A Taliban official with direct knowledge of the talks on Monday confirmed the draft agreement on the issue of foreign troop withdrawal and that the Taliban pledge that Afghanistan soil would not be used against others. But in a sign that the conditions the Americans have tied the finalising of the deal to may be difficult to reach, the Taliban official said he did not see the agreement as conditioned on a ceasefire or Taliban talking to the Afghan government. He declined to say what the Taliban position on the latter two issues was.

Khalilzad returned to Afghanistan on Sunday to brief the government in Kabul after

conducting six days of talks with the Taliban delegation in Doha, Qatar. In an address to the nation after being briefed by Khalilzad, President Ashraf Ghani expressed concern that a peace deal would be rushed. He highlighted previous settlements that ended in bloodshed, including when the Soviet Union withdrew from the country in the 1980s. Despite a promise of a peace deal at the time, Afghanistan broke into anarchy, and years later the Afghan president who had been in charge during that transition was hanged from a pole at a traffic roundabout. "We want peace quickly, we want it soon, but we want it with prudence," Ghani said. "Prudence is important so we do not repeat past mistakes."

During the talks last week, the Taliban signalled their seriousness by appointing one of their most powerful officials from the original movement, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, as their chief peace negotiator. Though US and Afghan officials said that Baradar was not directly involved in the marathon meetings last week, he was expected to take the lead in the talks to come. The American officials said new high-level talks would start in late February. NYT NEWS SERVICE

Harris kicks off 2020 campaign, says American democracy under attack

Oakland: Indian-origin Democratic Senator Kamala Harris formally kicked off her campaign for the White House by presenting herself as the leader who can best unite an America that is at an "inflection point" and facing a critical question. "We are here because the American Dream and our American democracy are under attack and on the line like never before," Harris said on Sunday. "And we are here at this moment in time because we must answer a fundamental question: Who are we? Who are we as Americans? So, let's answer that question to the world and each other right here and right now. America, we are better than this."

Harris, a first-term US senator from California, rallied thousands of supporters in Oakland, her hometown and where she served as a prosecutor before becoming the state attorney general. Harris invoked the speech that Robert F Kennedy gave in 1968 when he announced that he would challenge President Lyndon B Johnson, noting that Kennedy said "at stake is not simply the leadership of our party and even our country, it is our right to moral leadership of this planet". Harris added, "So today I say to you, my friends: These are not ordinary times, and this will not be an ordinary election, but this is our America."

The daughter of immigrants from Jamaica and India, Harris' campaign is filled with historic possibility. If she wins the White House she would be the first African-American woman and first person of Indian descent to be president. Harris also did not shy away from taking on Trump directly, saying the US welcomes refugees and calling the wall that Trump wants to build a "medieval vanity project". AP



California Senator Kamala Harris at a rally to launch her presidential campaign in Oakland, US, on Sunday

Tulsi Gabbard hits back at critics, says she is targeted for being Hindu

Washington: Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard has hit back at critics who accuse the Democratic presidential hopeful of being a "Hindu nationalist", saying that questioning her commitment to America while not probing non-Hindu leaders creates a "double standard" that can only be rooted in "religious bigotry".

Gabbard, the four-term lawmaker said from Hawaii, wrote an op-ed for the Religious News Services on Sunday, describing the campaign against her, supporters and donors as "profiling and targeting of Hindu Americans and ascribing to them motives without any basis". The 37-year-old on January 11 announced that she would be running for the White House in 2020.

In the article, Gabbard, the first Hindu elected to the US Congress, noted that she has been accused of being a Hindu nationalist. "Tomorrow will it be Muslim or Jewish Americans? Japanese, Hispanic or African Americans?" she asked.

"To question my commitment to my country, while not questioning non-Hindu leaders, creates a double standard that can only be rooted in one thing: 'religious bigotry'. I am Hindu and they are not," Gabbard said.

"My meetings with PM Narendra Modi, India's democratically elected leader, have been highlighted as 'proof' of this and portrayed as somehow being out of the ordinary or somehow suspect, even though President (Barack) Obama, Secretary (Hillary) Clinton, President (Donald) Trump and many of my colleagues in Congress have met with and worked with him," Gabbard said.

"I am proud to be the first Hindu-American to have been elected to Congress, and now, the first Hindu-American to run for president," she said. PTI

FB tightens paid ads rules ahead of EU elections

Brussels: Facebook said on Monday it will beef up its rules and safeguards around political adverts to prevent foreign interference in elections, including those in Europe this year.

The world's largest social network has faced pressure from regulators and the public after last year's revelation that British consultancy Cambridge Analytica had improperly acquired data on millions of US users to target election advertising.

"We will require those wanting to run political and issue ads to be authorised, and we will display a 'paid for by' disclaimer on those ads," Facebook's recently-appointed head of global affairs Nick Clegg said. Clegg, a former British deputy PM hired by Facebook in October last year, said the new tools to be launched in March aim to help protect the integrity of European Union elections due to be held this spring.

Facebook said the transparency tools for electoral ads would be expanded globally before the end of June, while the tools would be launched in India in February before its elections and in Ukraine and Israel before polls in both.

The tools are similar to those adopted for the US mid-term elections, Clegg said, adding that all political ads will be stored in a publicly searchable library for up to seven years. This will contain information such as the amount of money spent and the number of impressions displayed, who paid for them and the demographics of those who saw them, including age, gender and location.

The new tools will also cover 'issue ads' which do not explicitly back one candidate or political party but which focus on politicised topics like immigration. Clegg denied that Facebook sells users' data. REUTERS

PIO facing opioid trial 'bribed' docs with cash, strip club visit

Boston: John Kapoor, Insys Therapeutics Inc's one-time billionaire founder, directed a vast scheme to bribe doctors to prescribe an addictive fentanyl spray as opioid addiction was spiralling into a public health crisis, a US prosecutor said on Monday.

Kapoor and four colleagues are the first painkiller manufacturer executives to face trial over conduct authorities say contributed to the US opioid epidemic, which officials said killed more than 47,000 people in 2017.

Kapoor, who was also Insys' chief executive from 2015 to 2017, turned the company into a "criminal enterprise" that paid doctors millions of dollars to push its drug, assistant US attorney David Lazarus told jurors in Boston federal court. "John Kapoor and his co-defendants paid doctors to abandon their medical duties," Lazarus said.

Kapoor, 75, and former Insys executives and managers Michael Gurry, Richard Si-



Trial of Insys' ex-CEO John Kapoor is first prosecution of a pharmaceutical executive tied to opioid overdoses. It could serve as a test-drive for how jurors weigh claims of industry wrongdoing

mon, Sunrise Lee and Joseph Rowan have pleaded not guilty to racketeering conspiracy. Kapoor's 2017 arrest came the same day US President Trump declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency.

Lazarus told jurors that from 2012 to 2015, Kapoor and his co-defendants conspired to pay doctors bribes in exchange for prescribing Subsys, an under-the-tongue fentanyl spray approved only for use in managing severe

pain in cancer patients. Fentanyl is an opioid 100 times stronger than morphine.

Doctors were allegedly seduced with sham speakers' fees, jobs for relatives, lavish meals and, in one case, a \$1,000 private champagne room session at a strip club in return for issuing more prescriptions for Subsys.

As the bribes generated Subsys sales, Kapoor pumped more money into speakers' fees, with spending jumping to \$10.5 million in 2014 from \$550,000 two years earlier, the prosecutor said, adding, Insys paid doctors as much as \$275,000 in one case. Net revenues for Subsys too grew from \$8.6 million in 2012 to \$329 million in 2015. Lazarus said Kapoor also participated in a scheme to defraud insurers into paying for the expensive drug.

A conviction on federal fraud, racketeering and kickback charges could send Kapoor and four other ex-Insys managers to prison for as long as 25 years. AGENCIES

US med school professor tells Chinese students to speak English, sparks row

Durham (US): The Duke University professor and administrator who sparked an outcry by admonishing students for speaking Chinese has issued a personal apology amid an internal review by the school.

Megan Neely, who stepped down as graduate studies director in the medical school's biostatistics master's degree programme, issued the apology in an email on Sunday to students in the programme. It came two days after she sent a message to a student email list urging students to commit to speaking

English in an academic building and suggesting possible consequences for those who don't. "I deeply regret the hurt my email has caused. It was not my intention," said Neely, who remains an assistant professor.

The warning she emailed to students on Friday angered Duke's international students, as well as social media users outside the campus community. Neely's email on Friday urged students to "commit to using English" in the building housing the programme. She said in the message to an email list for the

programme's students that two faculty members came to her to complain about students loudly speaking Chinese. She wrote that both were disappointed the students weren't working to improve their English and "wanted to write down the names so they could remember them if the students ever interviewed for an internship or asked to work with them for a master's project." The email urged international students to "keep these unintended consequences in mind when you choose to speak in Chinese in the building." AP

Pilot's 'emotional breakdown' blamed for Nepal plane crash

Kathmandu: The captain of a Bangladesh aeroplane "seemed to have an emotional breakdown" before a deadly crash last March, Nepali investigators said in a final report on the nation's worst aviation disaster in 26 years. They blamed the crew's loss of situational awareness for the crash of the US-Bangla Airlines flight to the Nepali capital from Dhaka that caught fire on landing in Kathmandu, killing 51 of the 71 people aboard.

"The pilot thought he could manoeuvre the aircraft and land. But he could not," panel

On March 12, 2018, the US-Bangla Airlines flight to Kathmandu from Dhaka had caught fire on landing, killing 51. Citing the voice recorder and accounts of passengers, the report said the captain was smoking in the cockpit during the flight and 'engaged in unnecessary conversation even in the critical phase'

official Buddh Sasgar Lamichhane, said on Monday, referring to the captain. The captain was under stress and "emotionally disturbed" because he felt that a female colleague who was not on board the fatal flight had questioned his reputation as a good instructor, Nepal's Accident Investigation Commission said in the report. "This, together with the failure on the part of both the crew to follow the standard operating procedure, contributed to the loss of situational

awareness," said the report, submitted Sunday. This... meant the crew did not realise the deviation of the aircraft, a Bombardier Inc Q400 turboprop, from its intended path, which in turn meant they could not sight the runway, the report added. "When the crew sighted the runway, they were very low and too close to (it) and not properly aligned," it added, saying the captain should have halted the landing and initiated a go-around. The plane skidded off the runway on to surrounding grass, catching fire. Both pi-

lots were among those killed.

The flight's captain, aged 52, was released in 1993 from the Bangladesh Air Force because he suffered from depression but was later declared fit to fly civilian aircraft, the report said, with recent medical reports mentioning no symptoms. Citing the voice recorder and accounts of passengers, the report said the captain was smoking in the cockpit during the flight and "engaged in unnecessary... conversation even in the critical phase", violating the norm of maintaining a sterile cockpit. REUTERS

Starbucks' ex-CEO readies for US prez run as independent

Andrew Ross Sorkin

Howard Schultz, the former chief executive of Starbucks and a self-described "lifelong Democrat," said on Sunday that he was preparing to run for president as an independent and had already begun the groundwork required to be on the ballot in all 50 states.

Schultz said he planned to crisscross the country for the next three months as part of a book tour before deciding whether to enter the race. A billionaire, Schultz would face a difficult road despite his considerable wealth: Few independent candidates have mounted successful challenges for the White House. "We have a broken political system with both parties basically in business to preserve their own ideology without a recognition and responsibility to represent the interests of the American people," Schultz said. "The word 'independent,' for me, is simply a designation on the ballot."

The possibility of Schultz's candidacy as an independent has drawn condemnation from Democrats, who said that an independent run would split the vote on Election Day 2020 and hand Trump a second term. Schultz said he was well aware of the criticism, but said it was misplaced. "I don't agree with them... I'm not doing this to be a spoiler." NYT NEWS SERVICE

Maduro rival calls for new protests

Caracas: Venezuela's self-proclaimed president Juan Guaido has called for two new protests, in an effort to push the military to turn against leader Nicolas Maduro as Pope Francis warned on Monday of a possible "bloodbath" in the crisis-wracked South American country. In a video posted on Twitter, the 35-year-old opposition leader Guaido announced a two-hour strike on Wednesday "to demand that the armed forces side with the people."

Millions of Venezuelans have been left in poverty or fled the country due to an economic crisis, marked by hyperinflation and shortages of basic necessities, began in 2014.

The head of the opposition-controlled National Assembly said a second demonstration, on Saturday, would be a "big national and international rally to back the support of the EU and the ultimatum" from Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands that they would recognise Guaido as interim president unless Maduro calls polls by February 3.

Speaking after a trip to Panama, Francis said he was afraid the escalating political crisis in Venezuela would descend into "a bloodbath". He had previously called on both sides to find a "just and peaceful solution." While some member nations have backed Guaido, the EU was more vague, saying it would take "further actions" if polls were not called soon. Australia, said it "recognises and supports" Guaido as interim president pending elections.

The US separately warned there would be a "significant response" if US diplomats, Guaido or the opposition-controlled National Assembly were targeted with violence and intimidation. AFP

AROUND THE WORLD



GUARDIANS OF THE OPERA: The Sydney Opera House in Australia has started deploying 'seagull patrol dogs' to help ward off silver seagulls, a protected species, which have been known to steal food from diners by the harbour. For decades, the Opera House has tried various measures to protect diners, including wire cloches for food, a robotic hawk and sonic deterrents, with little success. Early results from the new dog patrol trial have been positive, with staff recording an 80% reduction in meal replacements due to seagulls

Kuwaiti MP jailed for keeping wife in dark about divorce

A Kuwaiti court on Monday sentenced an opposition politician to seven years in jail for failing to tell his wife he divorced her and continuing to have sexual relations with her, her lawyer said. The appeals court on Monday upheld a 2018 verdict finding him guilty of adultery, said lawyer Naser al-Otaibi. "My client received justice after she was taken advantage of and tricked into something that criminalises her under sharia (Islamic) law," he said. The lawyer said his client had found out her husband divorced her in 2017 — a year later — after she sued him for failing to provide for

her and their child. "Evidence was brought forward that they continued a marital relationship during the time they were divorced, including an exchange of intimate pictures via WhatsApp," he said.

3-yr-old missing for 2 days was 'looked after by bear'

A three-year-old boy who survived two nights alone in freezing woodland has said he was protected by a bear while missing. Rescuers found Casey Hathaway tangled up in thorny bushes in North Carolina, close to where he disappeared from his grandmother's home. He had gone missing on Tuesday in sub-zero temperatures. Craven County sheriff Chip Hughes told local television station WCTI: "He didn't really get into how he was able to survive and all that. He did say he had a friend in the

woods... A bear that was with him." The claim was repeated by the boy's aunt, Breanna Hathaway, who wrote on Facebook: "Casey is healthy, smiling and talking. He said he hung out with a bear for two days. "God sent him a friend to keep him safe. God is a good God. Miracles do happen."

French cops probe theft of Banksy art at Bataclan

A French judicial official says police are investigating the theft of an artwork by the British artist Banksy that was painted as a tribute to the victims of the 2015 terror attacks at the Bataclan music hall in Paris in which 90 people were killed. The artwork, a black image appearing to depict a person mourning, had been made on an emergency door at the Bataclan. It was stolen last week.