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US govt 'fake varsity covert op' traps 8 from T & AP running student visa scam

600 'Students' From India Face Jail, Deportation

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Washington: The polar vortex may have brought untold cold to the American Midwest, but hundreds of purported Indian students across the country are getting the shivers after being entrapped by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in an immigration racket.

In an extraordinary saga that has put some 600 Indian youngsters on thin legal ice and resulted in the arrest of eight alleged masterminds (all from Telangana and Andhra Pradesh), the US Department of Homeland Security set up a fake university in Michigan to target foreigners

FAKE INDIAN STUDENTS FALL FOR US GOVT TRAP

- ▶ Arrest warrants against 600 'students'; 100 already under detention
- ▶ The fake varsity, 'University of Farmington', was set up by US Homeland Security
- ▶ Created by US govt to ensnare anyone trying to enter US via fake academic route
- ▶ The US operation was conducted between Feb 2017 and Jan 2019
- ▶ 'Recruiters' helped 'students' remain illegally in US under 'pay-to-stay' fraud



resh Reddy Kandala, 31, of Culpeper, Virginia; Phanidep Karnati, 35, of Louisville, Kentucky; Prem Kumar Rampeesa, 26, of Charlotte, North Carolina; Santosh Reddy Sama, 28, of Fremont, California; Avinash Thakkalappally, 28, of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Aswanth Nune, 26, of Atlanta; and Naveen Prathipati, 26, of Dallas.

In an indictment filed in January and unsealed this week, US prosecutors alleged that from February 2017 through January 2019, the eight defendants "conspired with each other and others to fraudulently facilitate hundreds of foreign nationals in illegally remaining and working in the United States by actively recruiting them to enroll into a metro Detroit private

university that, unbeknownst to the conspirators, was operated by HSI (Homeland Security Investigation) special agents as part of an undercover operation."

The so-called University of Farmington set up by the homeland security department harvested nearly 600 "students," mostly from India, whom the defendants helped illegally remain and work in the United States as part of a 'pay to stay' scheme, the indictment said, alleging that the youngsters "knew that they would not attend any actual classes, earn credits or make academic progress toward an actual degree," and were willing participants in an immigration fraud.

▶ US bid to catch frauds: P2

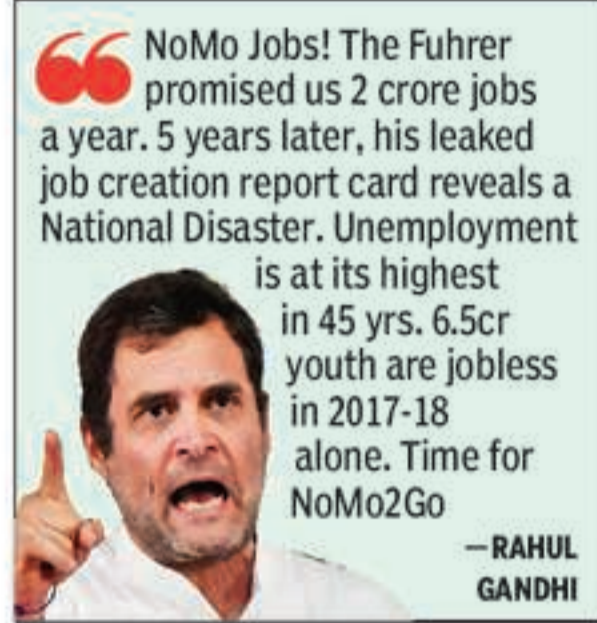
Govt disputes report on jobless rate at 45-yr high

Data Hasn't Yet Been Approved By Govt: Niti VC

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: A major controversy erupted after a business newspaper on Thursday cited an NSSO survey pegging the unemployment rate in the country at a 45-year high of 6.1% in 2017-18, with the opposition attacking the government for its failure to create employment and Niti Aayog, a government think-tank, claiming it was a "draft report" and not final.

The sluffest came against the backdrop of resignation of two members of the National Statistical Commission who said they were bypassed by the government (reported by TOI on Wednesday) and amid allegations that the go-



▶ Niti Aayog comes out against data: P10

vernment was not releasing a jobs report which was finalised by the National Sample Survey Organisation in December as it had shown a sharp decline in employment post demonetisation. "It is a draft report and the data being cited has not yet been finalised or approved by the government. So, using

It's clear that he (Rahul) has inherited Mussolini's shortsightedness and has myopic understanding of issues... Only a man who hasn't ever held a proper job & is totally jobless can peddle such #FakeNews!

—RAHUL GANDHI —BJP

this data is not right," Niti Aayog vice chairman Niti Kumar said, adding that the government would release the final report in March after all the data that had been collected was processed in a manner that allowed for quarter-on-quarter comparison.

▶ 'It is not vetted': P10



GUEST SPORTS EDITOR
SUNIL CHHETRI P18

Verma fails to join new post, puts pension benefits at risk

New Delhi: Former CBI director Alok Verma did not join his fresh posting as director general, fire services, civil defence and home guards, despite directions from the home ministry to do so, potentially putting his post-retirement benefits at risk.

The DG, fire services, posting was given after his removal as CBI head on Jan 10. Verma declined to take up his posting, arguing he had actually superannuated in 2017 and was in service only because of the two-year tenure given to the CBI director. P9

Blaze at Numaish: Organisers, traders ignore insurance, rue

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Hyderabad: A day after a 79-year tradition was shaken and over 150 stalls reduced to ashes, traders and Numaish organisers were caught on the wrong foot over insurance. None of the stakeholders bothered to think about insurance for the most popular exhibition in south India. Though stall allotment booklet does dwell a bit on the 'insurance' aspect, neither the organisers nor traders took it seriously. Result: Over 150 traders do not know how to recoup their losses.

In the 2019 edition, the Exhibition Society, which organises the All India Industrial Exhibition, granted over 2,500 stalls to traders to showcase and sell their wares and services during the 45-day annual fair. "In the rules and regulations prescribed in the booklet we have clearly mentioned (Rule No 8 of Obligations, Re-



The damaged goods a day after the fire at Numaish in Nampally

Cops avoid booking negligence case

Begum Bazar police have filed an FIR under the head 'Accidental Fire' in the Numaish fire instead of booking a negligence case. Though no one was killed, the fire had endangered the lives of thousands of visitors and legal experts opined that FIR should have made a case for negligence, reports U Sudhakar Reddy. Opposition parties have blamed the Exhibition Society for the mishap. P5

sponsibilities & Liabilities of Stall Holders) that it is compulsory for all stall holders to get their products/stalls/pavilions insured against theft, fire and other natural hazards. However, none of them followed the rule," Society vice-president B Srinivasa Rao told TOI. "In fact, it is a major lapse

on our part too. We never verify whether stalls take any insurance for their products or stalls. The allotment application was designed 30 years ago. After yesterday's incident, we decided to amend the rules and regulations," Rao added.

▶ Numaish extended: P5

5-judge SC bench to hear Sabari plea on Feb 6

A five-judge Supreme Court bench will take up for hearing on February 6 a bunch of petitions seeking review of the court's September 28 order striking down the ban on women in the age group of 10-50 years entering the Sabarimala temple. P10

6 working on 2BHK fall 10 floors, 5 killed

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Hyderabad: Five migrant workers died and another was injured on Thursday morning after falling from the 10th floor of an under-construction building of the state government's double-bedroom housing project at Rampally village in Keesara mandal.

The deceased were identified as Saif-Ul-Haq (26), Abhijit Roy (18), Saifal Rai (32), Shaik Milan (22) and Yash Kumar Chowdhary (30) from West Bengal and Bihar.

"The men were doing centring work around 11.30am when the scaffolding collapsed and they fell down," said ACP Shiv Kumar.

While four of them died instantly, one died in the hospital. The condition of the injured



The spot from where the workers fell to their deaths

man, Beebul Roy (18), was stated to be critical. The bodies of the deceased were shifted to the Gandhi Hospital morgue.

The mishap led to tension at the site as workers barged into the office of the contractor executing the work and damaged the furniture.

▶ ₹15L for kin of victims: P6

BJP's Jind win puts Khattar on front foot, Surjewala 3rd

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Jind: BJP's comfortable victory in the Jind assembly bye-election has come as a morale booster for the party ahead of Lok Sabha polls, validating the choice of Manohar Lal Khattar to lead the first-ever saffron government in Haryana.

BJP's Krishan Midha defeated his nearest rival Digvijay Chautala, the rebel grandson of former CM O P Chautala who was in the fray on the platform of the fledgling Jannayak Janata Party (JJP), by nearly 13,000 votes. Congress's Randeep Singh Surjewala, head of the party's national media cell who has gained prominence under Rahul Gandhi, came a poor third and just about managed to save his security deposit.

Chautala's INLD suffered a bigger humiliation. Its candidate Umed Raghu polled a measly 3,454 votes, finishing far behind LSP's Vinod Ashri, a corporator fielded by rebel BJP member of Lok Sabha from Kurukshetra R K Saini only to spoil saffron prospects in the seat.

The bye-election was necessitated by the death of Midha's father H C Midha who had won it on an INLD ticket.

Continued on P8

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SBI risks customer info, holds text msgs in unsecured server

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: State Bank of India (SBI) exposed text messages sent to millions of its customers by storing the data in an unsecured server. The infirmity in the bank's systems was exposed by US-based TechCrunch, which publishes technology news.

TechCrunch said the information was available to anyone who knew where to look. The server held two months of data from SBI Quick—a service that allows customers pull

basic account information by sending an SMS or through a missed call. The texts sent by the bank typically contain the account balance or the last five transactions. Besides the text message, the account-holder's registered mobile number and partially masked account number could be accessed from the server. While TechCrunch did not make the server address public, it shared masked screenshots of SMS details providing recent transactions.

SBI is understood to have

secured the server with a password immediately upon being alerted. Responding to a query, the bank neither confirmed nor denied exposing customer data, but said: "Basis our initial probe, we hereby confirm that SBI's data continues to remain secure and all profiles and financial records of our customers are safe. The bank is continuing its investigation into all the components of the ecosystem to ascertain that there is no other impact."

▶ TechCrunch unsure: P16

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