



**AMBER HEARD SAYS IT WAS HARD FOR HER TO COME OUT AS BISEXUAL AS HER PARENTS 'JUST COULDN'T PROCESS IT'**



**DRAKE QUIETLY DROPS MJ TRACK FROM UK TOUR AFTER CHILD ABUSE CLAIMS RESURFACE AGAINST 'KING OF POP'**

## Hollywood actors among nearly 50 charged in college admission scam

**Paid Off Univs Like Yale, UCLA, Stanford For Kids' Admission**

Chidanand.Rajghatta  
@timesgroup.com

Washington: Nearly 50 people, including two Hollywood actresses, college administrators, and sports coaches, have been taken into custody by authorities following a stunning college admissions scam that rocked the United States on Tuesday.

In what is being described as the largest academic scandal ever prosecuted by the US department of justice, more than 300 FBI and Internal Revenue Service agents participated in an operation dubbed "Varsity Blues" that resulted in the arrests on charges of bribery and corruption of intermediaries and parents who bought admissions to their children in elite schools such as Stanford, Yale, Georgetown, and UCLA. Among those named in the scandal are actresses Lori Loughlin and Felicity Huffman.

While the rich buying their children admissions in elite schools is not exactly news in



Felicity Huffman with husband William H Macy, who two months ago had talked about his daughter's 'stressful' college application process. Huffman is best known for her role in TV show 'Desperate Housewives' and was nominated at the Oscars for 2005 film 'Transamerica'

the US (President Trump and his son-in-law Jared Kushner have been scrutinised and pilloried over their passage to Wharton and Harvard respectively), what is different in this case is the cheating, bribery, and falsification involved.

"We're not talking about donating a building so that a school's more likely to take your son or daughter. We're talking about deception and fraud," FBI officials who were briefing the media in Boston at the time of writing this said, outlining a scheme where parents went to the extent of paying proxies to write tests on behalf of their wards. Also charged are several college athletic coaches and SAT/ACT

administrators who faked qualifications and marks for children of wealthy families so they could walk into elite schools. In all, the suspects allegedly paid bribes of up to \$25 million to get their kids into top-ranked colleges.

The scheme, in some instances, involved parents paying William Singer, the founder of a college prep business in California, to have someone take the SAT or ACT for their children, according to authorities. Among those accused are actress Lori Loughlin and her husband, Mossimo Giannulli, who allegedly paid \$500,000 to intermediaries at the University of Southern California to have their two

daughters designated as recruits to the college's crew team — even though they did not participate in crew — thereby guaranteeing their admission in the college, according to documents.

Court documents said Huffman paid \$15,000 that she disguised as a charitable donation so that her daughter could take part in the college entrance-exam cheating scam. The court papers further said a cooperating witness met with Huffman and her husband, actor William Macy, at their Los Angeles home and explained to them that he "controlled" a testing center and could have somebody secretly change her daughter's answers. The person told investigators that the couple agreed to the plan.

Also charged is John Vandemoer, the head sailing coach at Stanford University, Rudolph "Rudy" Meredith, the former head soccer coach at Yale University, and Mark Riddell, a counselor at a private school in Bradenton, Florida.

According to the justice department, the conspiracy involved (1) bribing SAT and ACT exam administrators to allow a test taker, typically Riddell, to secretly take college entrance exams in place of students' answers after they had taken the exam; (2) bribing university athletic coaches and

administrators to facilitate the admission of students to elite universities under the guise of being recruited as athletes; and (3) using the façade of Singer's charitable organization to conceal the nature and source of the bribes.

According to the charging documents, Singer, the college prep business founder, facilitated cheating on the SAT and ACT exams for his clients by instructing them to seek extended time for their children on college entrance exams, which included having the children purport to have learning disabilities in order to obtain the required medical documentation. Once the extended time was granted, Singer allegedly instructed the clients to change the location of the exam to one of two test centers: a public high school in Houston, Texas, or a private college preparatory school in West Hollywood, California. At those test centers, Singer had established relationships with test administrators, who accepted bribes of as much as \$10,000 per test in order to facilitate the cheating scheme. Singer typically paid Riddell, who secretly took the college entrance exams, \$10,000 for each student's test. Singer's clients paid him between \$15,000 and \$75,000 per test, with the payments structured as purported donations to the charity.

WWW TURNS 30, CREATOR LAMENTS 'COMING-OF-AGE' WOES

## 'Time for the Web to emerge from digital adolescence'

Geneva: The fraying World Wide Web needs to rediscover its strengths and grow into maturity, its designer Tim Berners-Lee said on Monday, marking the 30th anniversary of the collaborative software project his supervisor initially dubbed "vague but exciting". Speaking at CERN, the physics research centre outside Geneva where he invented the Web, Berners-Lee said users of the web had found it "not so pretty" recently.

"They are all stepping back, suddenly horrified after the Trump and Brexit elections, realising that this web thing that they thought was cool thing is actually not necessarily serving humanity very well," he said. "It seems we don't finish reeling from one privacy disaster before moving onto the next one," he added, citing concerns about whether social networks were supporting democracy.

People who had grown up taking the internet's neutrality for granted now found that the administration of US President Trump had "rolled that back". There was also a threat

"They're all stepping back, suddenly horrified after the Trump and Brexit elections, realising that this web thing that they thought was cool thing is actually not necessarily serving humanity very well"

If we give up on building a better web now, then the web will not have failed us. We will have failed the web. It's our journey from digital adolescence to a more mature, responsible and inclusive future  
—TIM BERNERS-LEE, WWW CREATOR



of fragmentation of the Internet into regulatory blocs — in the US, the EU, China and elsewhere — which would be "massively damaging".

In an open letter to mark the anniversary, Berners-Lee said many people now felt unsure about whether the web was a force for good, but it would be defeatist and unimaginative to assume that it could not change for the better in the next 30 years. "It's our journey from digital adolescence to a more mature, responsible and inclusive future".

Amid the concern, Berners-Lee said that the anniversary was something to celebrate, and warmly recalled how his boss ordered a computer model that CERN did not possess, a deliberate "plot" to enable his project under the guise of testing the interoperability of different computers. The boss, Mike Sendell, had pencilled in an assessment of his idea as "vague but exciting". "Thank goodness it wasn't 'exciting but vague'", Berners-Lee said. REUTERS

## Amid peace talks with US, Taliban wipe out an entire Afghan army company

Mohammad Saber and Rod Nordland

Herat: Taliban fighters killed or captured an entire Afghan National Army company of more than 50 soldiers on Monday, Afghan officials said, the latest in a series of major attacks by the militant group even as it pursues a peace deal with the United States.

The attack, in which the Taliban were reported to have killed 16 soldiers and taken 40 prisoners, took place in north-western Badghis province, close to the country's western border with Turkmenistan. It came as Taliban negotiators entered a third week of talks with US diplomats in Qatar.

In the assault, a large force of Taliban insurgents surrounded a base in the Bala Murghab district. After four hours of fighting, the militants captured or killed all of the soldiers in their base, as well as others at two outposts nearby, according to Abdul



The attack, in which the Taliban were reported to have killed 16 soldiers and taken 40 prisoners, came as Taliban negotiators entered a third week of talks with US diplomats in Qatar

Aziz Beg, head of the Badghis provincial council.

The episode was the deadliest in a weeklong insurgent campaign that has killed, wounded or captured 70 soldiers in the district, Beg said. "The district is on the verge of collapse," Beg said. "The fighting has gone on for a week, but the government is not paying any attention." Qais Mangal, a spokesman for the Afghan ministry of defence, confirmed

the attack and said that four security outposts were captured by the Taliban.

The attack came 10 days after a Taliban attack in southern Helmand province in which 20 insurgents penetrated the defenses of an Afghan army camp, killing as many as 40 soldiers. US forces stationed in the base helped to repel the Taliban attack.

On Monday, smaller Taliban attacks in Samangan, Sar-

e-Pul, Balkh, Kunduz and Helmand provinces were reported to have killed at least 13 members of the security forces. Afghan forces have been dying in record numbers. Last week alone, nearly 120 soldiers, police officers and pro-government militia members were killed in Taliban attacks.

The Taliban, claiming credit for the attack, said they had killed 20 soldiers. A spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, posted photos on his Twitter feed that he claimed were of the Afghan soldiers taken prisoner. It was not possible to verify their authenticity.

In a familiar pattern, Afghan government officials attributed their forces' failure to the Taliban's purported possession of superior equipment and the insurgents' greater numbers. "The situation in Bala Murghab district is very bad," said Saleh Mohammad Mubarez, commander of the local police forces there. NYT NEWS SERVICE

## May makes final push for UK parliament to back Brexit deal

Daisuke Wakabayashi

San Francisco: Alphabet's board of directors agreed to pay a former top Google executive as much as \$45 million when he resigned from the company in 2016 after being accused of groping a subordinate.

The previously undisclosed sum was in the separation agreement for Amit Singhal, a senior vice president who ran Google's search operations until February 2016. The amount was revealed on Monday in a shareholder lawsuit accusing the board of directors of Alphabet, the parent of Google, of shirking their responsibilities by agreeing to pay executives accused of misconduct instead of firing them for cause.

According to the suit, Google agreed to pay Singhal \$15 million a year for two years and between \$5 million and \$15 million in the third year as long as he was not employed by a competitor. He agreed to take a job at

Uber about a year after his departure, then resigned from the ride-hailing company a few weeks later when the sexual harassment claim at Google became public.

Singhal left Google after an employee said he had groped her at an off-site event. Google investigated the allegation and found that Singhal had been inebriated. The company also concluded that the employee's account was credible. At the time, Singhal said he wanted to spend more time with his family and focus on his philanthropy. Singhal did not respond to a request for comment.

A Google spokeswoman said on Monday that the company had "made many changes to our workplace and taken an increasingly hard line on inappropriate conduct by people in positions of authority." She added, "There are serious consequences for anyone who behaves inappropriately at Google." NYT NEWS SERVICE



Amit Singhal

## Murdoch's News Corp calls for Google breakup in Oz

Sydney: Rupert Murdoch's News Corp has called for Google to be broken up in Australia, the latest salvo in a battle between the corporate media giants. In a petition to Australian regulators, News Corp's local subsidiary complained that "Google enjoys overwhelming market power in both online search and ad tech services."

Going a step further, the company accused Google of "abusing its dominant position to the detriment of consumers, advertisers and publishers." Earlier this week, US presidential hopeful — and former federal consumer watchdog — Elizabeth Warren became the latest in a line of commentators to argue that firms such as Amazon, Google and Facebook hold "too much power" in society.

News Corp echoed her argument that Google's businesses should be split, or failing that, search and advertising businesses should be firewalled off from each other. "Divestment is necessary in the case of Google due to the unparalleled power that it currently exerts over news publishers and advertisers alike." AFP

## UK to probe BBC over 'pay discrimination'

London: The BBC, Britain's public broadcaster, is to be investigated over suspected discrimination following complaints that women have been paid less than men, the country's equality watchdog said on Tuesday. The issue made headlines last year when senior broadcaster Carrie Gracie quit her job as BBC China editor in a highly public protest at being paid less than her male counterparts. This followed an outcry in 2017, when the BBC published a list of its best-paid on-air staff, revealing two-thirds were men, some of whom were paid far more than their female peers.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission said it will examine pay grievances raised by staff and look at how they were resolved. REUTERS

## Readers blast NYT for describing Pulwama attack as an 'explosion'

Chidanand.Rajghatta  
@timesgroup.com

Washington: Agitated readers, many from India, blasted the New York Times on Tuesday for describing the Pulwama terrorist attack that took the lives of 40 Indian soldiers as an "explosion", forcing a hurried online change — without an explanation — from a newspaper famed for its meticulous corrections and clarifications.

The headline, "In India's Election Season, an Explosion Interrupts Modi's Slump" was changed to "In India's Election Season, a Bombing Interrupts Modi's Slump" in the digital edition of the newspaper after chagrined readers vented at it.



The site in Pulwama where the Jaish-e-Muhammed terrorists attacked the CRPF convoy on February 14

"If #Pulwama is explosion, #Osama was 'misguided youth' probably responsible for 9/11 plane crash," one reader said tartly, while another asked if the paper would describe IS as an "adventure group" and Taliban as a "standup comedy group."

The twitter handle @nytimesworld that tweets the paper's international stories also deleted a tweet that read "After an explosion in Kashmir and weeks of brinkmanship with Pakistan, many Indians are rallying behind Prime Minister Narendra Modi as elections approach." The tweet initially misspelled Modi's first name as "Narandra". However, in the print edition of the paper, the headline remained "In India's Election Season, a Kashmir Blast Interrupts Modi's Slump."

Full report on www.toi.in

## US pulling last diplomats from Venezuela

Caracas: The US said on Monday that it is pulling its last remaining diplomats from Venezuela, saying their continued presence at the country's embassy in Caracas had become a "constraint" on US policy as the Trump administration aggressively looks to oust socialist President Nicolas Maduro.

The announcement came from secretary of state Mike Pompeo in a tweet shortly before midnight comes as Venezuela struggles to restore electricity following four days of blackouts around the country. The US has led an international effort to replace Maduro with opposition leader Juan Guaido. Guaido is backed by some 50 countries, while Maduro maintains support from countries such as China, Russia and Cuba. AP

## AROUND THE WORLD



FLOUR POWER: Revellers celebrate Ash Monday by participating in a colourful flour war, a traditional festivity marking the end of the carnival season and the start of the 40-day Lent period, in Galaxidi, Greece

## Leader in sledder race loses out as dogs quit midway

Stuck on ice with dogs that refused to mush, lead Iditarod sledder Nicolas Petit dropped from the famed Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race late on Monday. An early favorite in the world's best-known dog-sled race, Petit had been stuck for most of the day with his dogs on a section of Bering Sea ice about 200 miles from the finish line in Nome. The dogs refused to move, and Petit ultimately had them taken off the trail by snowmobile. The 1,000-mile race started on March 2 in Anchorage. The winner will take

home about \$50,000 and a new truck, part of a total race purse of \$500,000.

Woman 'saws off hand' to get £340k insurance payout  
A Slovenian woman has been arrested after allegedly sawing off her own hand in a bid to falsely claim around €400,000 (£340,000) in compensation. Police say the 21-year-old conspired with relatives to make the fraudulent insurance claim by deliberately cutting off her hand above the wrist with a circular saw. The woman was rushed to hospital by family members, who told doctors she hurt herself while sawing branches at her home in Ljubljana. Detectives say the group left the severed hand behind hoping to ensure the disability was

permanent. However, medics were able to recover it in time and reattach it. The suspect recently took out injury insurance and stood to gain monthly payments of around €3,000 (£2,555).

Monks' fast: US man goes on beer-only diet for Lent  
An Ohio man is taking inspiration from the monks of yesteryear with his unusual Lent fast: Giving up all food and drinks except for beer. Del Hall, who works at the Fifty West brewery in Dayton, said he will not eat or drink anything except beer for all 46 days of Lent. Hall said he was inspired by monks from the 1600s, who would make a special bock beer for Lent. Hall said he is altering the monks' tradition by including all types of beer in his fast.

## Flight forced to return after woman forgets baby at airport



NO KIDDING

Helen Coffey

A flight had to turn back to Saudi Arabia after a mother reportedly left her baby at the airport.

Kuala Lumpur-bound Saudia flight SV832 set off from Jeddah, but the pilot requested to return after a passenger told crew she had forgotten her baby in the boarding area of the terminal.

A video in which the pilot can be heard relaying the story to air traffic control was

uploaded to Youtube and has since gone viral, with more than 50,000 views.

"May God be with us. Can we come back or what?" the pilot says over the radio. "This flight is requesting to come back...a passenger forgot her baby in the waiting area," an ATC operative replies.

The pilot is asked to repeat the request, to which he replies: "We told you, a passenger left her baby in the terminal and refuses to continue the flight."

"Ok, head back to the gate," says ATC operative. "This is totally a new one for us!"

It's not the first controversial air travel-related parenting decision. In 2017, a photo of a woman who'd left her baby on the airport floor while she used her phone, with the caption "idiot", quickly went viral. However, the mother, Molly Lensing, was quick to defend her actions, explaining that a technical glitch with Delta had left her stranded in Colorado airport for

more than 20 hours with her then-two-month-old daughter. "Anastasia had been held or in her carrier for many hours," she said. "My arms were tired. She needed to stretch. And I had to communicate with all the family members wondering where the heck we were."

Lensing has said that her shaming experience should be a lesson to those who deem it acceptable to publicly judge a stranger's parenting techniques online. THE INDEPENDENT