



Sylvester Stallone spends \$400k on statue of himself

LOS ANGELES, DEC 31 /- Veteran actor Sylvester Stallone has splashed out over USD 400,000 on his replica Rocky statue from "Rocky III". The "Expendables" star handed over the hefty amount for the replica after making an anonymous bid at it in an auction, reported TMZ. The statue is nine foot tall, weighs 1800lbs and was purchased by Stallone for USD 403,657, before being shipped to Los Angeles. It was made by the artist, A Thomas Schomburg, and the original, which was used in the movie, has been put on display in Philadelphia. This one had been displayed in the San Diego Hall of Champions but it had to be sold off after the place closed down. (PTI)

Ryan Murphy's 'Pose' to have record transgender actors

LOS ANGELES, DEC 31 /- Ryan Murphy's musical drama series "Pose" has been ordered a full season at Fox studios. The musical drama features TV's largest cast of transgender actors in series regular roles and largest recurring LGBTQ cast ever for a scripted series, reported Variety. The series, created by Murphy, Brad Falchuk and Steven Canals, is set around the mid-1980s in New York City. It examines the juxtaposition of several segments of life and society in Manhattan: the emergence of the luxury Trump-era universe, the ball culture world, and downtown social and literary scene. Evan Peters, James Van Der Beek, and Kate Mara are aboard the series. "Orphan Black" star Tatiana Maslany, who was cast in the show, will no longer appear in it after her character was re-written and will be played by Charlayne Woodard. Production on the show will begin in February in New York and Murphy will be directing the first two episodes. (PTI)

I spared myself the soap opera: Bono on near-death experience

NEW YORK, DEC 31 /- Bono has often brushed with death but the rock star says he did not cry a river over his condition when he had one recently. The 57-year-old musician said he dealt with the death scare, which took place in the middle of recording U2's latest album "Songs of Experience," like any other "event." "It's just a thing that... People have these extinction events in their lives; it could be psychological or it could be physical. And, yes, it was physical for me, but I think I have spared myself all that soap opera. "Especially with this kind of celebrity obsession with the minutiae of peoples' lives I have got out of that. I want to speak about the issue in a way that lets people fill in the blanks of what they have been through." Bono told Rolling Stone. "... By the time it (the news) gets to your local tabloid it is just awful. It becomes the question that everyone is asking," he added. The U2 vocalist had met with a bike accident in 2015 and he termed the event as a "comic tragedy" as he did not remember it. "That left me a little uneasy but the other stuff has just finally nailed me." (PTI)

Medical education and healthcare costs in India

Dr. Arun Mitra

The National Medical Commission Bill has been cleared by the cabinet. It will soon be tabled in Parliament for debate. If passed, this will become an Act, which will replace Medical Council of India (MCI) and regulate the medical education in India. Till date the MCI has been the regulatory body, which decides about the admission process to the undergraduate as well as postgraduate classes; it sets basic minimum standards required to open a medical college and carries out regular inspections of the colleges to check the status of education. The MCI also has the power to derecognize any medical college, which does not fulfill the required standards. The

MCI also decides the medical curriculum. The government had some time ago proposed a National Medical Commission instead of the MCI, which was put in public domain for suggestions. As per reports, it has now been cleared by the cabinet with minor amendments to the original draft. A review of the original draft of the bill clearly indicates that it will not yield the desired result. According to this, NMC has 25 members, all of whom will be nominated by the central or the state government/UT. This makes the regulatory body totally undemocratic, with only bureaucratic control and no involvement of various stake holders. Its most flawed clause is that it will give a free hand to any for-profit organisation to open a medical college. Up till

now the medical colleges were permitted to be opened by not for profit organisations. These colleges will be free to fix their tuition fee. The government may exercise control over the tuition fee of only up to 40% of seats, which means tuition fees in 60% plus seats will be at the mercy of private managements. Thus, the cost of medical education, which is already very high in the private sector, will further rise and will be virtually reserved for the rich classes. Since there will be no regular inspections, check on the standard of medical education will be compromised. Already the low standard of education in many medical colleges, which are notoriously known to hire faculty and patients during inspection, will further go

down. There is a proposal to introduce exit exam for the undergraduate students. This is being done because the difference in the standard of education in various medical colleges is glaring. Instead of meeting its responsibility to standardize education, the government is working on an approach to judge the ranking of the colleges by the performance of the students. This will put the future of many students in substandard medical college in the dark. There are several instances where colleges have been closed down and students are running from pillar to post to seek themselves transferred to suitable institutions. It is obvious that medical education will become totally unregulated and go in the hands of business

interests. It would be naive to expect a person who has spent crores on getting education to have social interest and service attitude towards healthcare. The already over privatized healthcare in our country will further get expensive and go out of reach of the majority of citizens who are already devoid of quality health care due to high cost of out of pocket expenditure. It is high time that the medical profession and the civil society speak up for positive actions towards raising the standard of medical education and bringing it within the reach of common man. There is need for strong debate in the parliament as to how healthcare system should be so as to provide universal healthcare to all. (IPA)



Baracades are erected in Trafalgar Square ahead of New Year's Eve celebrations in London, Britain —REUTERS

Lennix on 'The Blacklist' & his dream role on TV

NEW DELHI, DEC 31 /- Harry Lennix has been essaying the role of Harold Cooper on "The Blacklist" for over five seasons now and the actor believes that he has made the character his own by bringing in "personal and emotional" elements to it. "The Blacklist" follows the story of a wanted man, Raymond "Red" Reddington, who surrenders before the FBI and helps in capturing some of the most notorious criminals. The show, currently in its fifth season, airs on Star World and Star World HD in India. It is being headlined by James Spader and Megan Boone. Lennix plays Cooper, the assistant director of the FBI Counterterrorism division, who uses Reddington to take down the bad guys on the show. The actor, 53, said Cooper is all business in the first season but his part has undergone a lot of

change over time. "I got the chance to bring in more personal and emotional aspects of him. I think that is also pretty natural as the taskforce know each other a lot better now. We have been working with Red (Spader) for five years. "I think over the course of time, they got to know each other as characters and interestingly as much off screen as well as people," Lennix told PTI in a telephonic interview from New York. Asked whether Cooper is the only one in the series to possess a clear moral compass, Lennix disagreed. "I don't think so. All people have a moral compass. Even Red. His morality is different. Cooper operates according to strict morality. Red's morality lies outside of the rule of law and Cooper's is based on the rule of law. So Liz (Boone) lives quite in between," Lennix said. The actor called Spader

an "excellent co-worker". "He is a great leader on the show. I think he sets the tone for a serious approach to the work but not overly serious. We have a good time on the show without being goofy. We like to work and we appreciate it." Apart from "The Blacklist", Lennix is also known for his role in the "Matrix" series and in DC Universe's "Man of Steel" and "Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice". When asked about his character General Swanwick's absence from the "Justice League" movie, the actor said, "I wish I could have done it but my character was written out from the script at the last minute. "Maybe, there will be another opportunity to go back and join the universe. It was fun doing the "Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice" and "Man of Steel"... I hope I get to work with Zack Snyder again." The actor also spoke

Hoffman accuses thank Oliver for confronting actor

LOS ANGELES, DEC 31 /- Seven women, who accused Hollywood veteran Dustin Hoffman of sexual harassment and misconduct, have thanked popular TV host John Oliver for confronting the actor over their allegations. Oliver had got into a heated argument with the "Kramer vs Kramer" actor over the allegations against Hoffman at a film panel during the screening of the political drama "Wag the Dog". The women wrote a letter, which was tweeted by author Anne Grahame Hunter, the first women to accuse Hoffman of sexual harassment. It has been signed by Hunter, Wendy Riss Gatsiounis, Kathryn Rosseter, Melissa Kester, Cori Thomas and two anonymous women.

"We want to thank you for confronting Dustin Hoffman. While the questions you asked may not have led to a constructive conversation you hoped for, the fact that you asked them at all is what matters most. Many men listen to and believe women when we recount our experiences of sexual harassment," they said in the letter. "But few men put themselves at risk socially or professionally to have uncomfortable conversations with other men. Women can continue to tell our stories, but ultimately, change will depend on men reflecting on their own behavior and challenging other men to do the same," they added. The letter comes days after Oliver expressed regret over the outcome of his "failed" face-off with Hoffman. "It didn't really go anywhere constructive, so the whole thing just made me feel sad," he had said. Last month, an article written for "The Hollywood Reporter, Hunter opened up about her encounter with Hoffman when she was a minor. Hoffman responded to the story, saying, "I have the utmost respect for women and feel terrible that anything I might have done could have put her in an uncomfortable situation. I am sorry. It is not reflective of who I am." Since then more women have come forward and narrated their encounters with Hoffman, but he has not misbehaved with them.

CREATIVE WORLD Sharmila Tagore pitches for gender equality



KOLKATA, DEC 31 /- Veteran actress Sharmila Tagore has called for gender equality and said parents should realize that a girl is in no way inferior than a boy. A girl child should be treated with equal importance, she said at the concluding day of the 11th Global Doctors' Summit here yesterday. "Parents should be told that if they invest in the education and upbringing of a girl child, she will also make contributions for the family and society," Tagore said at a separate session on gender issue at the doctors' meet. Nothing will change unless people change their mindset, the "Amar Prem" actress said, seeking involvement of Anganwadi workers and social activists in the promotional activities for gender equality. "We have to look at the root cause. Just depending on government initiatives won't do, we must make efforts to change our attitude at the domestic level," she said.

Asked if she had faced gender discrimination, Tagore said, "I was brought up in a Bengali family. We were three girls and never made to feel any lesser than men." However, when she had made her debut in "Apar Sansar" by Satyajit Ray in 1959, there were protests by the school and she had to finally leave the institution, the 73-year-old actress said. "But my parents had never objected to my joining films. Also, no doors got closed for me when I got married (to Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi) in 1969. I did not face any barriers then," she said. In contrast, she said, her grandmother was married off at the age of five and had nine children. She said her mother was also not allowed to attend a co-educational institute and had to do her master's degree in private. Expressing hope that the current generation might be able to bridge this gender gap, Tagore said with knowledge and education, girls can reach new heights and create a niche for themselves in every field. (PTI)

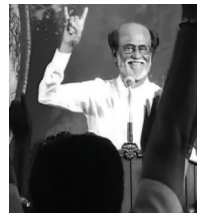
Narrowly missed death: Efron on cycle trip with Hugh



LONDON, DEC 31 /- Actor Zac Efron said that he almost died during a cycling trip with his "The Greatest Showman" co-actor Hugh Jackman. The 30-year-old actor recalled the incident during his appearance with Jackman and Zendaya on "The Graham Norton Show". "I cycled with him in London, but I'm not one to ride a bike early in the morning in traffic so it turned out to be quite dangerous," Efron told Norton who asked "how he prepared for his role in the film. "I followed Hugh around a few cars and suddenly there was a double decker bus right in front of me. I slammed on the brakes, went under the front tire and narrowly missed death," he added. Luckily, the "Baywatch" actor survived and was unharmed. "Hugh was on the other side of the road and stuck up his thumb and just said, 'You good? Let's go,'" Efron said. (PTI)

Big B, Kamal Haasan wish Rajini luck in politics

MUMBAI, DEC 31 /- As Rajinikanth today announced his entry into politics, various celebrities including megastar Amitabh Bachchan and Kamal Haasan gave their best wishes to the Tamil superstar. The 67-year-old star will launch his own party, "My dear friend, my colleague and a humble considerate human, Rajinikanth, announces his decision to enter politics... My best wishes to him for his success," Bachchan tweeted. Haasan posted, "I welcome brother Rajini's social responsibility and political entry."



Deshmukh said he is sure that the "nobility of the superstar's intention" will receive much love.

"He gave his heart and soul to his art form and people's love made him superstar Rajinikanth... I am sure the nobility of his intention will receive as much love, as he announces his political entry. I wish you all the very best and super success sir," he tweeted. Congress spokesperson and actor Khushboo Sundar tweeted, "Rajinikanth announces his political plunge... Anybody who thinks can make a difference to the ideas and has an ideology, aspires for a harmonious India, feels the pain of losing secularism to communalism and dreams of a democratic India, should come to politics. "We know that Mr. Rajinikanth believes in inclusive democracy and development. We wish him the all the best in his endeavours. (PTI)