

Ivanka takes unpaid job as WH adviser



WASHINGTON, MARCH 30 -- First daughter Ivanka Trump is about to take an unpaid adviser to her father, President Donald Trump, the White House has announced. Ivanka, whose husband Jared Kushner also works as a senior aide to the president, will not receive a salary for her work as a federal employee.

Kushner, a real estate developer, is also unpaid. "We are pleased that Ivanka Trump has chosen to take this step in her unprecedented role as first daughter and in support of the president," a White House statement said. "Ivanka's service as an unpaid employee furthers our commitment to ethics, transparency and compliance and affords her increased opportunities to lead initiatives driving real policy benefits for the American public that would not have been available to her previously."

In the couple of months since her father became president Ivanka, 35, has been a regular presence at the White House, where she already has an office. She was present when her father received Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in January and earlier this month took part in a round-table discussion with President Trump and Chancellor Angela Merkel during the German leader's visit to the



Soldiers patrol Saint Mark's Square in Venice, Italy.—REUTERS

H1B system needs 'common sense' reforms: Khanna

WASHINGTON, MARCH 30 -- Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna has said the US needs to "remain open" to immigrants who contribute to creating jobs and help shape the economy, as he called for "common sense" reforms in the H1B visa system. Khanna, who represents the Silicon Valley where a large number of Indian techies and other immigrants work, said many Americans believe the H1B visa programme needs to be reformed. His remarks came amid increasing calls in the US to review the work visa programme, highly popular with Indian technology firms, and US President Donald Trump's campaign pledge to put "America First". Apart from the Trump administration's crackdown on immigrants, the

H1B visa programme has become a key issue in the tensions between US tech firms and the White House. When Trump signed a controversial immigration order in January banning people from seven Muslim-majority nations - which had caused chaos and sparked protests before US judges stopped its enforcement in February - tech firms had voiced their displeasure at the move. Trump, however, persisted with his decision and issued a "revised" executive order with changes, excluding Iraq from the list of countries on which the travel ban was slapped. "Of course, we have to end the abuses. We should have companies that have more than 50 per cent H-1B visas and we should make sure that they are paid the prevail-

ing wage," Khanna, a first-time Congressman, told PTI in an interview. "These are common sense reforms that even people like Venk Shukla (TIE Silicon Valley leader) and many Americans believe in. Let's fix the system, end the abuses but make sure we recognise the role of immigrants in creating jobs." He said the H1B is a non-immigrant visa that allows American firms to employ foreign workers in occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. It is highly popular among Indian techies and the technology companies depend on the programme to hire tens of thousands of employees each year. Khanna, who was elected to the US House of Representatives last November and was sworn-in as a Congressman this

January, said, "We have to remain open to immigration, people coming here who can contribute jobs and help the economy." According to a report by The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine in September, immigrants contributed USD 2 trillion to the US economy in 2015-16 and Indians were the "most entrepreneurial" of all groups. Khanna also pushed for strong relations between India and the US, in particular the trade ties. "There's a strategic partnership in advancing market security interests. India provides a large export market for American products with a large growing middle class. That can help create jobs in the United States," he said. "They both share values of democratic pluralism of a respect and tolerance for different faiths, a respect for dissent, a respect for robust journalism, a respect for spirituality. I think that there is the common values also," Khanna said, adding he looks forward to visit India soon. Condemning the recent hate crimes against Indian-Americans and Indians in the community has tremendously contributed to jobs, innovation, and service to the United States," he said. Khanna is working with other Indian-American lawmakers Pramila Jayapal and Raja Krishnamoorthi, Ami Bera, and with Congressman Joe Crowley

Israel cuts UN contribution due to 'discrimination'

JERUSALEM, MARCH 30 -- Israel announced today a USD 2-million cut in its contribution to the United Nations budget, condemning "obsessional discrimination against Israel on the part of the United Nations and its agencies" to justify the cut in funding. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "decided to allocate the two million dollars to international aid and to investment in developing countries, which support Israel in international bodies", it said. The Jewish state had already cut USD 6 million from its contribution of USD 1.1 billion following a UN Security Council resolution passed in December condemning Israel's settlement building in the occupied Palestinian territories, a foreign ministry spokesman said.

Last week, a United Nations rights expert issued a blistering criticism of Israel's policies, deepening a row over alleged anti-Israel bias within the UN following US pressure. In a report, the UN special rapporteur on the Palestinian territories, Michael Lynk, charged Israel with "the subjugation (of Palestinians) humanity" and intensifying a crackdown on human rights campaigners. Lynk made the claims in a report presented to the UN rights council during the Geneva-based body's mandate session in Israel, known as Agenda Item Seven. Israel is the only country targeted with a dedicated rights council agenda item. The Jewish state and its supporters, notably in Washington, have repeatedly accused the council of disproportionately targeting Israel. (PTI)

UN chief Guterres lands in Iraq to review aid efforts

BAGHDAD, MARCH 30 -- UN chief Antonio Guterres arrived in Baghdad today to review the humanitarian situation, calling for protection of civilians to be the "absolute priority" as Iraqi forces battle to retake Mosul. Hundreds of thousands of civilians remain in Mosul, which was seized by the Islamic State group in 2014, and officials and witnesses have said that air strikes have taken a devastating toll on civilians in the city this month. "Just arrived in Iraq to focus on the dire humanitarian situation on the ground. Protection of civilians must be the absolute priority," a post on the UN chief's official Twitter account said.

Guterres was to meet top Iraqi officials including Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi in Baghdad before flying to Arbil, the capital of the country's autonomous Kurdistan region. In addition to civilians caught in the crossfire inside the city many more have fled their homes to escape the fighting. According to Iraqi authorities, more than 200,000 civilians have fled west Mosul since the operation to retake it was launched last month. (AFP)

US to review UN peacekeeping missions'

NEW YORK, MARCH 30 -- The United States is looking to comprehensively review UN peacekeeping missions, its envoy to the UN has said, ruling that the focus of such operations too often is on troop contributions or funding countries, and not on protecting civilians or achieving a political solution. Nikki Haley said UN peacekeeping operations in an area with great potential for reform and her approach in dealing with peacekeeping will be "different" when she assumes the rotating presidency of the 15-nation Security Council in April. "The goal of any UN peacekeeping mission should be to ensure that political solutions to conflicts are actually real-

ized. But too often the focus of our peacekeeping efforts is on the troop contributing countries or the funding countries or the bureaucracy or the operations and not on protecting civilians and on achieving a political solution," Haley said at the Council on Foreign Relations thinktank here yesterday. The Indian-origin ambassador to the UN said members have too often been bogged down in "parochial questions", spending a lot of time worrying about which country or bureaucracy benefits from the peacekeeping missions. "We have worried about donor countries, troop supplying countries. We have missed the forest for the trees in peacekeeping operations altogether. During the US presidency I intend to do something different," she said. Haley said the US "will lay out a comprehensive vision for how peacekeeping missions should be reviewed moving forward. We will ask hard questions." India has traditionally been among the largest troop contributing countries to the UN peacekeeping operations, with nearly 180,000 troops having served in over 46 of the 69 peacekeeping operations so far. The country has repeatedly called for the Security Council to consult troop contributing countries before drawing up peacekeeping mandates given that troops now have to function in increasingly difficult and hostile conflict situations across the world's hotspots.

Haley voiced support for cutting US contribution to peacekeeping and capping it at 25 per cent from the current 28 per cent. "That is something that will happen." The US is the biggest contributor to the UN, paying 22 per cent of the USD 5.4 billion core budget and 28.5 per cent of the USD 7.9 billion peacekeeping budget. "We don't want to just cut for the sake of cutting. Everybody knows there is fat at the UN, there is fat in the peacekeeping missions," she said. She said a lack of "basic evaluation" in UN missions was "shocking" and cited the example of the mission in Afghanistan that has been in place for more than 15 years but has never once been reviewed. Calling this "unacceptable", Haley said "we are in the process of proposing a strategic review of this mission and other missions to get the facts on the ground." With peacekeeping being the largest item in the UN budget, she said the review will identify the missions in need of structural reforms. "We will determine where we need to augment, re-structure and cut back," she said, emphasising that the US is supportive of "better and smarter" peacekeeping operations not the ones that are "cheaper." "We have to have the political will to adjust the missions even if some countries are going to lose funding in the process," she said. (PTI)

S Korea's ousted Prez Park appears in court

SEOUL, MARCH 30 -- South Korea's ousted president Park Geun-Hye arrived at court today for a hearing to decide whether she should be arrested over the corruption and abuse of power scandal that brought her down. Looking grim-faced and pale, Park ignored a barrage of flashbulbs and did not speak when she arrived at the Seoul Central District Court. Her formal detention and transfer to custody would be a key step in the disgrace of South Korea's first woman president, who secured the largest vote share of any candidate in the democratic era when she was elected in 2012. Park had her removal from office confirmed by the country's top court earlier this month, ending her executive immunity and her prosecution has been a key demand of the millions of people who took to the streets to protest against her.

The former president is accused of multiple offences including bribery, leaking government information, and abuse of power in the scandal. Park has denied all charges. Choi Soon-Sil, Park's secret confidante at the heart of the scandal, is already on trial for forcing top local firms including tech giant Samsung to "donate"



nearly 70 million to non-profit foundations which she allegedly used for personal gain. Prosecutors have submitted around 120,000 pages of documents to the Seoul Central District Court in relation to the charges against Park, and said it would be "counter to the principle of fairness" if she was not arrested. The 65-year-old was driven away from her home in southern Seoul past hundreds of flag-waving, screaming supporters lining the narrow street.

Some tried to break through police barricades in an effort to block her four-car convoy, and its journey was broadcast live on television. Today's hearing was expected to last for several hours, with Park sitting in the centre facing Kang Bu-yong, 43, with lawyers and prosecutors to either side. Afterwards Park was to be removed to a detention centre to await Kang's decision, which was not expected until late into the night - although he has to make it within 24 hours. Samsung Electronics vice chairman Lee Jae-Yong, who was arrested last month in connection to the scandal, was in court for over seven hours for his hearing, and his detention was approved early the following day. If Park's arrest warrant is granted, she will become the third former leader to be arrested over corruption in Asia's fourth largest economy where politics and big business have long been closely tied. (AFP)

Mother was denied judgeship in India, claims Haley

NEW YORK, MARCH 30 -- US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley has claimed her mother, who had studied to be a lawyer in India, was not allowed to sit on the bench as a judge because of the situation with women in the country during that time. "I am a big fan of women. I think there's nothing they can't do. And I think any democracy that has allowed themselves to restrict the rights of women has benefited from it," Haley said when asked about the role of women following her speech to the Council on Foreign Relations here yesterday. Haley went on to briefly narrate the story of her mother's life in India where she was among the first female judges but was not allowed to sit on the bench as she was a woman.

"And so I think, this is near and dear to my heart because my mother, you know, when you didn't have a lot of education in India, my mother actually was able to go to law school. And she was actually put up to be one of the first female judges in India, but because of the situation with women she wasn't allowed to sit on the bench. But it's amazing for her to watch her daughter become governor of South Carolina and US ambassador to the United Nations," Haley said. Haley was born in Natick, Massachusetts to a Hindu Rasthawa and mother Raj Kang Randhawa, who had emigrated from India to Canada and then to the US in the 1960s. However, Justice Anna Chandav was the first female judge in India and

also the first woman in India to become a high court judge. She was appointed as a munsif in Travancore in 1937. Haley added that nations' goal should always be to empower women and show how they can be fantastic leaders, "and to help them get there and when they are successful, support them on it and encourage them on that." Underlining that legal education is the fabric of America, Haley added that she is the "proud daughter" of Indian immigrants and stressed that people should not be banned from countries due to their religion. "I'm the proud daughter of Indian immigrants who reminded my brothers, my sister and me everyday how blessed we were to be in this country." Haley said responding to questions. She

of South Carolina when President Donald Trump named her his nominee for the UN job this year. Former US president Barack Obama had endorsed India's long-held demand for a permanent seat on the Security Council, saying in a speech to the Indian Parliament in 2010 that he looked forward to a "reformed United Nations Security Council that includes India as a permanent member." India has for long been pushing for completing the reforms of the Security Council. In a bid to get the reform process moving, India and other G nations earlier this month said they were willing to not exercise "veto" as permanent members of a reformed Security Council until a decision on it has been taken.

So from that standpoint that is something that is near and dear to my heart and I very much support. Haley was asked if Trump's immigration policies and vetting people coming in from Muslim majority nations carry the risk of alienating the three million Muslim-Americans already in the country. "We should never ban based on religion. Period. I don't think that's what this is," she said adding that there are another dozen Muslim countries that could have been on the list of the seven countries on Trump's executive order but are not. "We will never close our doors in the US but what we did do is take a pause and say how are we going to keep our people safe," she said adding that she hopes the vetting process gets better and the administration moves forward with it. She said Trump's travel ban aimed to make sure that no danger comes into the country. "This is not about not wanting people in. This is about keeping the terrorists out," she said. Haley referred to the recent terror attack in London, saying "when you look at situations like what happened in London, not just the president but everyone is trying to make sure we are keeping our people safe." The attack on the UK Parliament, however, was perpetrated by a man identified as Khalid Masood who, according to media reports, was not an immigrant but born in the county of Kent in southeast England. (PTI)