

Police launch suicide inquiry into death of Indian 'Houdini'



Indian stuntman Chanchal Lahiri, known by his stage name "Jadugar Mandrake", is lowered into the Ganges river, while tied up with steel chains and ropes, in Kolkata.

Kolkata, India

Indian police said yesterday they were investigating whether a stunt artist deliberately drowned himself while performing a Houdini-inspired escape act in a Kolkata river.

Chanchal Lahiri died on Sunday in front of horrified onlookers who watched as the chained magician was lowered into the river but never reappeared.

The body of the so-called "Jadugar Mandrake" (Wizard Mandrake) was only recovered on Monday, still shackled, from the Hooghly river, a tributary of the Ganges river.

Kolkata police said they had started an "abetment to suicide" investigation against Lahiri's company.

"A negligence case has been initiated against

Chanchal Lahiri's company, Magic Belt India," Syed Waqar Raza, deputy commissioner of Kolkata's port police, told AFP.

"The investigation is also under section 306 of the penal code -- abetment to suicide."

Lahiri had not received permission to perform in the water, he added.

"Lahiri never mentioned in his authorization letter that he was going to jump into the river," said the officer.

"We wonder why he was in such a rush to perform the stunt. It's a mystery to us."

River traffic police were absent when he began his act an hour earlier than he had told authorities, Raza added.

US to begin removing 'millions' of illegal migrants, says Trump

● The US is facing a surge in migrant arrivals from Guatemala and other impoverished Central American countries which are plagued by gang violence

● Earlier Monday the US said it would not offer any more aid to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras unless they take "concrete actions"

Washington, United States

The United States will start removing "millions" of illegal migrants next week, President Donald Trump said Monday, adding that Guatemala is preparing to sign a safe third country deal.

"Next week ICE will begin the process of removing the millions of illegal aliens who have illicitly found their way into the United

States. They will be removed as fast as they come in," Trump said on Twitter, referring to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency.

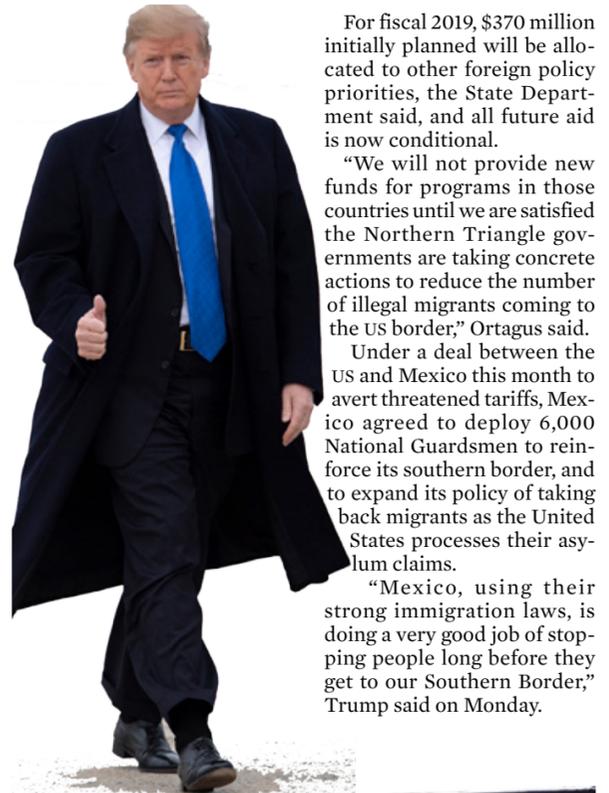
He added that "Guatemala is getting ready to sign a Safe-Third Agreement," an apparent reference to a pact in which migrants entering Guatemalan territory would have to apply for refugee status there, not in the United States.

The US is facing a surge in migrant arrivals from Guatemala and other impoverished Central American countries which are plagued by gang violence.

The numbers have overwhelmed the ability of US authorities to temporarily shelter and process them.

Trump has called it "an invasion," and has made the fight against illegal migration a central plank of his administration.

Earlier Monday the US said it would not offer any more aid to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras unless they take "concrete actions" to deter undocumented migrants from heading for the US.



For fiscal 2019, \$370 million initially planned will be allocated to other foreign policy priorities, the State Department said, and all future aid is now conditional.

"We will not provide new funds for programs in those countries until we are satisfied the Northern Triangle governments are taking concrete actions to reduce the number of illegal migrants coming to the US border," Ortugas said.

Under a deal between the US and Mexico this month to avert threatened tariffs, Mexico agreed to deploy 6,000 National Guardsmen to reinforce its southern border, and to expand its policy of taking back migrants as the United States processes their asylum claims.

"Mexico, using their strong immigration laws, is doing a very good job of stopping people long before they get to our Southern Border," Trump said on Monday.



French high wire artist Philippe Petit performs an aerial walk to launch the celebration of the 70th anniversary of Philip Johnson's Glass House at their summer party

Tightrope virtuoso Petit still defying gravity as he nears 70

New York

Weeks from his 70th birthday, and a few decades from his famous high-wire walk between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, French tightrope artist Philippe Petit continues to defy gravity.

It's been a few minutes since Petit wrapped up his show on this sunny Saturday afternoon but his mind is still up there. Several people draw near, but the red-haired artist appears not to see them.

He has come down off the wire but not out of his trance.

"My close friends, they say when you come back down after a walk, you're like a zombie, like an alien.

"You're still on the wire," he said after the walk earlier this month above the roof of the Glass House -- a house-turned-museum in New Canaan, Connecticut, designed exactly 70 years ago by famed architect Philip Johnson.

With a tight physique but a supple way of moving, Petit says age hasn't dented his abilities. He still trains three hours a day, six days a week.

"I think I can do what I was doing when I was 18 years old," he said after the ceremony to mark the Glass House's 70th birthday.

"I think I'm actually more in possession of my talent as a wire walker today at 70 years old than I was as a little kid," he added.

"I have nothing to prove anymore."

American by adoption, he decided to stay permanently in the United States after his famed walk at the World Trade Center in New York in 1974 -- 1,300 feet (400 meters) above the ground. He still feels the call of the wire just as deeply.

"I always feel excited," he said. "Like a kid. I am impatient to start."

A return to Notre-Dame?

At the Glass House, as always, mischief-maker Petit is never content to simply walk on the wire.

He lengthens his stride, then lies down, and then starts all

over again, just like during his World Trade Center walk. The performance helped humanize the initially cold-seeming towers.

"I wasn't born in the circus. I was born in the theater, in the opera," said the self-taught performer.

"I am a poet wire-walker and I want to use my wire to connect."

From his home in northern New York, not far from Woodstock, the subject of the Oscar-winning documentary "Man on Wire" (2008) and the movie "The Walk" (2015) fantasizes about seeing himself summit increasingly high towers, all over the world.

The twin Petronas towers in

Kuala Lumpur (1,483 feet high) made him dream, but it is no longer possible to undertake such feats without permission, he admitted, even though he once strung his wire high above New York, Paris or Sydney without authorization.

"A guy with a ton of equipment at night on top of a giant tower -- don't you think they're going to shoot him and then ask questions?" he asked.

"We live in a world that is so paranoid about security."

The balancing man is currently preparing for an international tour, though he can't give many details yet.

He also has the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris on his mind,

which, along with the rest of the world, he saw burn on April 15.

"I would love to maybe do a walk again between the two towers like I did in 1971," he said, "to help rebuild or to be part of the promotion of what's happening."

He reached out to the French culture minister, who has yet to respond.

Although Petit has never done the same walk twice, Notre-Dame would be a different story.

"It would be the same cable placement between the towers, but I would do something very different," he said. He already imagines cellist Yo-Yo Ma playing at the top of the tower at the other end of the wire.