



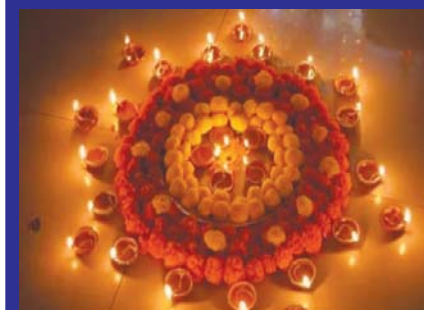
The South Asian



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Now, Diwali is a public school holiday in New York



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Biden seeks to calm relationship with Xi amid global crises



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Jailed in Pakistan, Imran Khan also arrested in Toshakhana, Al-Qadir corruption



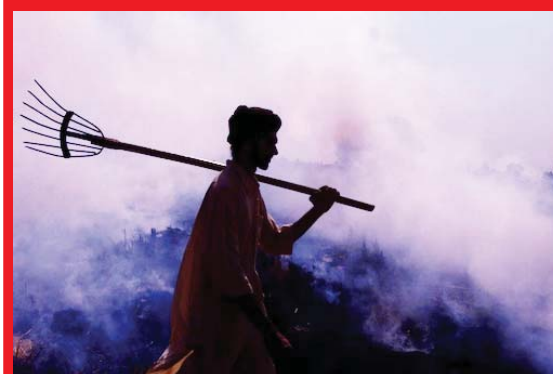
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Canadian man who mowed down 4 of family was 'hunting for Muslims to kill'



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The Sleep of Reason And Delhi's Deadly Smog



(Sai Bureau)- We abuse language, and then language abuses us, imposing a heavy cost on us. Political and intellectual elites abuse language all the time; all of us pay the price. The deadly smog that envelops Delhi-NCR and other parts of north India every year is, to a large extent, the result of the use of the term 'annadata' for the farmer and of the public discourse that occasions such usage.

Literally, annadata means the 'provider of food'. Figuratively, it connotes God, the feudal lord, and even the employer (in a very obsequious manner). Sentimentalism being the characteristic feature of our public discourse, the farmer is often described by politicians and others, especially Hindi news channels, as annadata.

This is in tune with other norms of desi political correctness (PC). Encyclopedia Britannica defines 'political correctness' as a "term used to refer to language that seems intended to give the least amount of offence, especially when describing groups identified by external markers such as race, gender, culture, or sexual orientation". In the West, PC is deployed by Leftists and liberals to further their nefarious agendas. In the Indian context, however, it is used by all—to further sully the already perverted public discourse. So, thanks to desi PC, the handicapped become 'diyaang', the girl child becomes 'beti', the child 'naunihaal', and the farmer 'annadata'. Such phraseology suits politicians because it enhances the potency of sentimentalism in public debate—at the expense of reason, common sense, and facts. It makes the lives of politicians comfortable: it is far easier to wallow in the slime of sanctimoniousness than to address real issues.

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Video of Khalistanis clashing with Hindus on Diwali in Canada emerges

(Sai Bureau)-In the video, a group of men, carrying Khalistan flags, are seen picking up objects from the ground and reportedly throwing them at a Hindu crowd celebrating Diwali.

A purported video of a mob of Khalistan supporters clashing with a Hindu crowd during a Diwali celebration in Canada's Brampton has gone viral on social media.

In the video, a group of men, carrying Khalistan flags, are seen picking up objects from the ground and reportedly throwing them at a



Hindu crowd celebrating Diwali, according to the Toronto Sun. According to a social media user who shared the video on X, the incident took place at Westwood Mall in Malton. Later, in the video, the police are seen telling the crowd to move back. Peel Regional Police, in a statement on X, said that it was investigating the incident that took place at Westwood Square Mall on November 12. "We are taking the appropriate measures and working with the City of Mississauga on any further actions required," the police said. This alleged incident came a week after India recommended

Canada to strengthen its framework to prevent "misuse of freedom of expression" for triggering violence, attacks on places of worship and racial minorities, and address hate crimes and speeches.

KS Mohammed Hussain, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of India, put forth the recommendations while addressing the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) review meeting in Geneva last week.

"In the spirit of constructive dialogue, India recommends the following to Canada - one, further strengthen the domestic framework to prevent misuse of freedom of expression for inciting violence and disallow activities of groups which are promoting extremism. Two, effectively prevent attacks on places of worship of religious and racial minorities, strengthen legislative and other measures to address hate crimes and hate speech," Mohammed Hussain said at the UNHRC meeting.

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South Asian Americans have woven Diwali traditions into fabric of our nation: Biden

US President Joe Biden has said South Asian Americans have woven Diwali traditions into the fabric of the nation.



(Sai Bureau)-South Asian Americans have played a key role in the development of the US, President Joe Biden has said, acknowledging the role of the community that has woven Diwali traditions into the fabric of the nation.

"To more than one billion Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists celebrating in America and around the world, we wish you a happy Diwali," Biden said in a message. "Over the course of generations, South Asian Americans have woven Diwali traditions into the fabric of our nation -- symbolising the message of seeking the light of wisdom, love, and unity over the darkness of ignorance, hate, and division," Biden said. The message posted on X, formally Twitter, on November 12 has since gone viral and has over 2.1 million views.

"It's a message that has helped our nation emerge stronger from the past few difficult years and matters now more than ever. On this Diwali, may we reflect on the strength of our shared light and embrace the enduring spirit of this holiday and of our nation," Biden said. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a message on Monday extended warm wishes for a joyous Diwali to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jain communities observing the festival in

the United States and around the world. "Diwali represents a time of joy and renewal, celebrated through traditions that include lighting diyas, decorating homes with rangoli, and sharing sweets with family and friends," he said.

"Diwali is also a reminder of the strength that the US draws from the

diversity that makes up our nation, as well as the importance the United States places on safeguarding religious freedom at home and abroad," Blinken said. "Happy Diwali to everyone celebrating this festival of lights in the United States and around the world. I wish you and those you love peace, prosperity, and health," he said.

Nikki Haley represents older generation of Republicans: Vivek Ramaswamy



Indian-American biotech entrepreneur presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy has said that he has a "fundamental ideological divide" with his Republican rival Nikki Haley, who represents an older generation in the party.

Both Haley and Ramaswamy have clashed publicly during the last two of the three Republican primary debates.

"I think there's a fundamental ideological divide. She represents an older generation of Republicans," Ramaswamy, 38, told Fox News in an interview on Monday about the 51-year-old former governor of South Carolina. "She talks a lot about how we need a new generation of leadership. I agree with her. It's just that she's on the wrong side of that generational divide, taking us back to the Dick Cheney era, pointless wars that wasted USD 7 trillion of national debt that we accumulated, thousands of America's sons and daughters of lives sacrificed, people my age," Ramaswamy said. "That's a mistake. I think that anybody who has made money off those wars, people who have been part of the establishment, joining military contractors, monetising their time in government, I don't care if that's the Biden corruption family or if it's a Republican version of that, which is what I see in Nikki Haley. It's wrong," he said. "So, I'm calling that out. The

establishment doesn't appreciate that very much. But I think we deserve somebody who is not just a puppet of the special interests, but somebody who's independent, coming in from the outside..." he said in response to a question. The two Indian Americans have qualified for the fourth primary Republican Party debate, boycotted by former president and frontrunner Donald Trump.

"I will be there, and I will be similarly unrestrained, as I was in the last debate as well. That's what our base is hungry for. They want the truth. They don't want professional politicians with talking points. So, yes, I have qualified. I will be there. And I don't think that we're going to disappoint people by hiding behind some shell. I'm going to be pretty open. And that's what people are hungry for," Ramaswamy said in response to another question. Describing himself as the best person to lead the country, Ramaswamy said: "I'm a CEO. I come from outside of this broken world of politics. Forget the slogans. Prices are going up. Interest rates and mortgages are going up, but wages have remained flat. That's why people are upset and feel the pain." "Now, how do we do this? Increase the supply of everything. Increase the supply of energy. Deregulate the sector, so we can drill and frack. Increase the supply of housing. Forget the land use restrictions.

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Kumararaja elected head of NY Tamil Sangam



(By Our Staff Reporter) **K a t h i r v e l** Kumararaja, the founder and CEO of DevJee Inc, a New York-based Artificial Intelligence organization, has been elected President of New York Tamil Sangam last week

He has a prolific career spanning over 25 years in the IT realm specializing as

a data scientist. A native of Erode in Tamil Nadu, he did his Engineering and MBA with a Post Graduate Diploma in Digital Business of MIT and Columbia University via the Emeritus platform

His illustrious professional journey also reflects in pivotal roles such as the head of IT division at Jindal Steel and Power

Limited (a subsidiary of the \$18 billion Jindal group) in India.

He also implemented Construction Management systems for both the Pentagon Renovation Program of US Department of Defense and the iconic Burj Khalifa Tower, an integral part of the \$20 Billion Downtown Burj Dubai

development

He has been associated with the New York Tamil Sangam since 2007 and was its Joint Treasurer, Vice President, supported in Harvard Tamil Chair Fundraising Efforts and chairman of Tamil Entrepreneur Conference

The other office holders elected are Dr Kumarappan Annamalai (Vice President), Dr. Pinchi Srinivasan (Secretary), Vasantha Kumar Venkatachalam (Treasurer); Ganimozhi Baskar (Executive Vice President) Lakshmanan Veerappan (Joint Secretary) and Kalyani Natarajan (Joint Treasurer)

New York Tamil Sangam was founded on Nov 16 1970 and it's the first ever Tamil Association started in the whole of North America. It's a registered non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c) (3) organization promoting culture, art and literature of Tamil ethnic people and charitable causes encompassing people living in and around New York

DIWALI Celebrated in Nassau County



(By our staff reporter) Long Island, New York- IAF (Indian American Forum) recently celebrated Diwali 2023 with other organizations like Friends For Good Health and Chairman of Human Rights Commission of Nassau County. Diwali was celebrated at Legislators Hon. Peter Smith Chamber of Nassau County.

Dr. Bobby Kalotee with Hon. Bruce Blakeman County Executive, Hon. Elaine Phillips NC Comptroller, NYS Senator Steve Rhoads, Hon. Anthony D'Esposito Congressman, Legisla-

tor Hon. Tom McKeivitt, Hon. Rose Marie Walker, Hon. Mazi Melesa Pilip, NYS Assemblyman Hon. Edward P. Ra, Hon. John K. Mikulin, Hon. Michael Durso, Hon. Jennifer DeSena Supervisor Town of North Hempstead were among distinguished elected and appointed officials who attended. Indu Jaiswal Chairperson of Indian American Forum Welcomed everyone and thanked all volunteers and supporters.

Nassau County Citations were presented to Dr Bhupendra R Patel, Mr Animesh Goenka, Mr Surinder Rametra, Dr Subhdra Nori, Mr Shiv Dass, Mr Arthur Pinkhasov, Ms. Olga Hasham and Dr Kabul Singh Pillars of our Community by Honorable County Executive. Dr Bobby Kumar Kalotee and the team presented special recog-

nition and awards to Ms. Elaine Phillips Nassau County Comptroller and Honorable County Executive Mr Blakeman.

Traditional Diya Lighting Ceremony was done by Honorees and Honorable Guests.



GOPIO-CT Chapter Hosts Welcome Dinner for Univ. of Connecticut Students



Students, panelists and GOPIO-CT organizers at the Students Meet and Greet Event

(By Our Staff Reporter) GOPIO-CT organized a Meet and Greet session with the new students enrolled at the University of Connecticut Business School on Friday, October 20th at the Hampton Inn and Suites in Stamford, CT. An Interactive Discussion Panel "Tips on

How to Market Oneself and Succeed in America." followed. It was moderated by GOPIO-CT President Dr. Jaya Daptardar MHA, Chief Strategy and Compliance Officer, Bridges Healthcare, Milford, CT. The program, coordinated by GOPIO Trustees Prasad Chintalapudi and Dr.

Thomas Abraham, started with welcoming remarks by Chintalapudi. Chintalapudi shared his own experience of being an entrepreneur. He then introduced GOPIO Chairman Dr. Abraham for his greetings. Dr. Abraham said, "America is the greatest country which

provides opportunity to open up your mind and you can be whatever you want to become, whether a professional in a large corporation, or help to manage a hedge fund or as a scientist or professor or as an entrepreneur, so, go and grab the opportunities awaiting you."

After Democrats, US Republicans form Congressional Hindu Caucus

Less than two months after Democrat US Congressman Shrinivas Thanedar launched a Congressional Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Jain American Caucus, Republican lawmakers launched a their own Caucus

(By Our Staff Reporter) US Republicans on Wednesday launched a Congressional Hindu Caucus to advocate the concerns and issues of the Hindu American community. This came after Democrat Shrinivas Thanedar launched a Congressional Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Jain American Caucus in September. A congressional caucus is a group of members of the United States Congress that meet to pursue common legislative objectives.

The launch event at Capitol Hill on Wednesday was organised by Shalabh "Shalli" Kumar, an Indian-American who is the founder of the Republican Hindu Coalition. Addressing the Indian community at the event, Republican conference chair of US Congress Elise Stefanik said, "Your core values of free enterprise, fiscal discipline, family values and a firm foreign policy not only guide the Hindu



American community but our central tenets shared and fought by House Republicans and Republicans across America."

She also extended sup-

port to Israel in its war against Hamas. Stefanik applauded the Hindu American community's support for Israel and said, "I greatly admire the Hindu American community for supporting

our Israeli and Jewish friends in their most dire time of need. The shared values of self-governance and we the people unite Israel, India and the United States of America."

Meanwhile, Shalabh Kumar said more than 150 members of the US House of Representatives have committed to becoming members of the Congressional Hindu Caucus. This would make it one of the largest caucuses in the US Congress that would be actively engaged in enacting legislation and passing resolutions important to the Hindu American community, he added. Elise Stefanik said the Hindu caucus would lead efforts to pursue policies that encourage trade between the US and India, decrease India's reliance on Russian and Chinese-made defence equipment and increase collaboration in joint quad and bilateral military exercises. "As partners, the US and India can continue to pursue a strong foreign policy to combat aggression, discourage authoritarian regimes and contain territorial expansions," she added.

Ashneer Grover, Deepak Shenoy trade barbs amid fresh BharatPe fraud revelations

(News Agency) - After Delhi Police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW) uncovered that Ashneer Grover and his wife Madhuri Jain Grover were allegedly involved in generating backdated invoices to channel funds at BharatPe, CapitalMind founder and CEO Deepak Shenoy and Ashneer Grover traded barbs at each other on Thursday.

In May this year, the EOW had registered an FIR against former BharatPe Managing Director Ashneer Grover for alleged cheating and fraud of Rs 81 crore. "Grover apparently siphoned out funds to his family in the name of recruitment services -- a well-known mechanism to take money out. So stupidly done too -- they backdated invoices with bank accounts that didn't even exist at that date," Shenoy posted on X. He also said that more than Rs 53 crore was reportedly paid to "sham" companies, owned or connected to Grovers. "These companies didn't even file GST (though they charged it!) which is what brought the whole house down. I wonder if investors in startups have at least a policy saying we'll do an annual independent review of recruitment-related payments and links to founders... this kind of 'taking it out' is fairly common," the CapitalMind CEO posted on X. Ashneer Grover replied, saying he will be the last man standing long after 'BharatPe'. Shenoy then told Ashneer Grover: "Even Skilling of Enron calling someone an 'a**hole' before he went to jail. Please enjoy your time while the story comes out."

If Congress government is formed at the Centre, we will start caste census in country, says Rahul Gandhi

(News Agency) - Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday addressed election meetings in Taranagar in Churu and Nohar in Hanumangarh and said that the party would start a caste census in the country as soon as the Congress forms a government at the Centre. Taking a jibe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Rahul Gandhi said, "Narendra Modi ji says 'Modi's guarantee'. Modi's guarantee means Adani's guarantee. Congress means government of farmers, labourers and the youth. This is the difference. Narendra Modi's guarantee is that Adani ji's government will be formed and will be run by him while our guarantee is that the government will be run by farmers, labourers, backward classes, Dalits and tribals."

Rahul Gandhi said, "We transfer money into the pockets of the poor. They put it in Adani ji's pocket. We put it in your pocket. The Congress party will conduct a caste census survey in Rajasthan. As soon as the Congress government comes to power in India, we will start the caste census that day. As long as there is a backward population, we will hand over that many rights to the backward people of India, the backbone of India."

Rahul Gandhi also counted seven guarantees of the Congress and said, "We have given you seven guarantees in the elections. First Rs 10,000 annually will go to one woman in every family. A cylinder worth Rs 500 for poor people will be provided, insurance of Rs 15 lakh, English medium schools for all children, free laptops for those studying in government colleges and then we will make it a law for legal guarantee of OPS



"Wherever BJP leaders go, for government employees. Also we they spread hatred. They will make will buy cow dung from the village people at Rs 2 per kg." He asked the crowd at the rally if they wanted a government of Adani or of farmers and labourers?

"The government has done a lot of work for you here. OPS has been given to people. You remember one thing, if the BJP Government comes, whatever we have done for you, be it pension scheme, health scheme,

gas cylinder of Rs 500, giving Rs 10,000 to women every year, the BJP will end all this and help the billionaires. If the Congress government comes, the poor will benefit.

Shiv Sena (UBT) deputy leader nabbed in Rs 7.50cr bank loan case

(News Agency) - Shiv Sena (UBT) deputy leader Advay Hire, who was arrested from Bhopal on Wednesday in connection with an alleged bank loan fraud case of Rs 7.50-crore, was remanded to five days' police custody by a Malegaon Court, here on Thursday. Hire, an ex-Bharatiya Janata Party leader, has been accused of getting the loan from the Nashik District Central Cooperative Bank (NDCCB) allegedly on the basis of forged documents, and then failing to repay the amount. The Economic Offences Wing of Nashik Rural Police was probing the matter and was on the trail of Hire who had gone into hiding but was tracked down by the Bhopal Police and handed over to the Ramzanpura Police Station of Malegaon on Thursday. He was presented before the Additional District Sessions Judge U.S. Baghele who ordered his police custody till November 20. Arguing for Hire's custody for seven days, the Additional Government Pleader Mahendra Phulpagare said that no instalments of the bank

loan were paid through an amount of Rs 1.78 crore received from the sale of a mortgage mill and land.

From the total loan amount,



an amount of Rs 6 crore was transferred to a private Venkatesh Bank, and the police needed to probe why this was done, what was done with the money and who benefited from it. However, Hire's lawyer contended that the investigations into the case were over, all the documents had already been taken and hence there was no

need for police custody. In 2013, as the then Chairman of the NDCCB Hire had availed loans of nearly Rs 7.50 in the name of Renukadevi Yantramaag Women's Industrial Cooperative Society, a weaving mill, against mortgage, which was headed by his wife, Smita Hire. Over the years, the amount had swollen to Rs 32 crore after which the bank lodged a complaint with the police in April 2023 to recover the debts, and since the amount had gone beyond Rs 25-crore, the case was transferred to the EOW, Nashik.

Anticipating arrest, Hire had applied for anticipatory bail which was rejected by the lower and Bombay High Court, after which he was reported to be on the run till he was nabbed by the Madhya Pradesh Police in Bhopal. Shiv Sena (UBT) top leaders Sanjay Raut and Sushma Andhare have slammed Hire's arrest, terming it as 'political vendetta' unleashed by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's government as he (Hire) was a political rival of PWD Minister Dadaji Bhuse.

India-Sri Lanka joint military exercise 'Mitra Shakti' commences

(News Agency) - The ninth edition of the annual India-Sri Lanka joint military exercise "Mitra Shakti 2023" commenced on Thursday in Aundh (Pune), the Defence Ministry officials said on Thursday. Both sides will practice tactical actions such as raid, search and destroy missions, heliborne operations, etc. In addition, Army Martial Arts Routine (AMAR), combat reflex shooting and yoga will also form part of the exercise curriculum, the official added. The Ministry of Defence said that the 'Exercise MITRA SHAKTI - 2023' will also involve employment of drones and counter unmanned aerial systems, besides helicopters. Drills to secure helipads and undertake casualty evacuation during counter-terror operations will also be rehearsed jointly by both sides. Collective efforts will focus on achieving an enhanced level of interoperability among the troops and reduce the risk of life and property while keeping the interests and agenda of the UN at the forefront during peacekeeping operations. According to the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the exercise is being conducted from November 16 to 29, 2023. The Indian contingent of 120 personnel is being represented mainly by troops from the Maratha Light Infantry Regiment. The Sri Lankan side is being represented by personnel from the 53 Infantry division. As many as 15 personnel from the Indian Air Force and five personnel from Sri Lankan Air Force are also participating in the exercise, the MoD official added.

ED issue fresh summons to Neville Roy Singham in NewsClick case

(News Agency) - The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has issued fresh summons to Shanghai-based millionaire Neville Roy Singham for allegedly funnelling funds to media portal NewsClick. Singham - a US citizen currently located in Shanghai - was issued fresh summons to record his statement

New Delhi's Saket linked to Prabir Purkayastha, editor-in-chief of NewsClick, in connection with its money laundering probe against the news portal. The property worth Rs 4.52 crore attached under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) was allegedly part of the proceeds of crime. ED is probing "fraudulent" foreign funds infusion of over Rs 86 crore into the company that runs the portal. The probe agency had raided Purkayastha's premises in September 2021.

As per ED officials, the company claimed "receiving export remittance" of Rs 76.84 crore, Rs 1.61 crore, Rs 26.98 lakh, and Rs 2.03 lakh from Justice and Education Fund Inc USA, The Tricontinental Ltd Inc USA, GSPAN LLC USA and Centro Popular De Midas, Brazil, from March 2018 until the 2021



with the central agency last month through the Ministry of External Affairs with the Chinese authorities, a source said. Earlier last year, the Chinese authorities had reportedly refused to serve summons to Singham. The ED is probing how Singham's media company was promoting Chinese propaganda in India. Notably, the Delhi Police had arrested NewsClick founder Prabir Purkayastha and the company's HR Head Amit Chakravarty last month on charges of alleged anti-India activities.

As part of its inquiry, the ED had attached a flat in

raids.

Officials said the agency has not found any evidence of exporting of services to these entities. ED is also probing at the foreign direct investment (FDI) transfer of Rs 9.59 crore in April 2018 by way of subscription of shares of PPK NEWSCLICK Studio Pvt Ltd from a company named Worldwide Media Holdings LLC, USA (a Delaware Limited Liability Company). They said the company shut shop soon after this transfer of funds. ED suspects the funds routed through Justice and Education Fund Inc USA belonged to Singham.

Fraudsters open fake account using UP man's documents to deposit ill-gotten money

(News Agency) - A gang of online fraudsters opened an account here using a man's documents and then used it to deposit the money which the gang members had earned

the matter, he was shocked to know that some persons had not only opened a bank account in his name, but had also deposited their ill-gotten money in it. Rishabh said he



through online fraud. The incident came to light when victim Rishabh Singh from Aliganj in the state capital got an ATM card from a bank where he did not have any account. When Rishabh inquired into

the matter, he was shocked to know that some persons had not only opened a bank account in his name, but had also deposited their ill-gotten money in it. Rishabh said he had applied for a credit card at a private bank in Hazratganj and was interviewed by one Palak Khan, Sushil Singh and a woman on April 25. Later, Rishabh got a call from one Anil Sharma who asked him to send the photocopy of his mother's Aadhaar card. "After some days Anil contacted me again and asked me to forward an OTP which was sent on my father's mobile phone. Without suspecting any foul play, I forwarded the OTP to Anil," Rishabh said, adding that a couple of weeks later, he received an ATM card from a bank in Krishna Nagar where he did not have any account and then he turned suspicious. "Sushil, Palak, Anil and others had opened a bank account in my name. They misused my credentials in committing the crime," the victim said. SHO, Hazratganj, Vikram Singh said that an FIR under IPC sections 420 (dishonesty) and 406 (criminal breach of trust) and IT act has been lodged against the accused.

Minor girl ends life after facing obscene video threat in UP

(News Agency) - A 14-year-old student from a madrasa ended her life by consuming poison in Uttar Pradesh's Shamli district after alleged molestation and threat to circulate her obscene video. The police said that the accused, 24-year-old Talib, a resident of the same village, had been pressurising the girl to give a statement in his favour in court. Disturbed by this, the girl took the extreme step. Last year, the girl's family had filed a molestation complaint against Talib, who was granted bail after spending nearly a month in jail. Shamli ASP O.P. Singh, said that the accused has been arrested and put in jail, with a case under section 306 (abetment for suicide) of the IPC registered against him. The charges of creating an obscene video and molestation are currently under investigation. The girl's father, a labourer in Panipat, received a distress call from his daughter on Tuesday. She informed him that the accused had recorded a video of her bathing and attempted to blackmail her by threatening to make it public. Hours later, she chose to end her life. Family members rushed the girl to a nearby hospital, where doctors pronounced her dead.

UP boy dies while bursting crackers in steel glass

(News Agency) - A 14-year-old boy in Uttar Pradesh, who was bursting fire-



crackers inside a steel glass, died after it exploded and its pieces struck the boy in the stomach and legs. The boy, Shaurya Singh, passed away in a hospital due to excessive blood loss. After the freak incident, Shaurya initially tried to hide his grievous wounds from his parents. Once his family came to know of it, they rushed him to the local private hospital.

The class 7 student succumbed while he was being referred to a higher medical centre in Moradabad. SHO of Noorpur, Sanjay Kumar, said: "The incident took place at Morana village in Bijnor. We went to the village to investigate but the boy's family did not file a police complaint."

Flushing Out Afghan Refugees: Is Pakistan Ready for Aftershocks?

At a time when the world is busy dealing with crises in Ukraine and Palestine, Pakistan's all-powerful security establishment has created one of the worst humanitarian crises in the region. It is using the caretaker government to expel millions of Afghans living in various parts of Pakistan. Owing to the rugged terrain, porous border and strong ethnic bond across the Durand Line, Pakistan has historically been a preferred destination for Afghans during any crisis they would face.

The mass exodus, which started after the Soviet invasion in 1979, did not stop completely owing to the continued instability and insecurity in Afghanistan. Be it the post-Soviet civil war, the emergence of Mullah Omar's Taliban, America's war on terror or the re-emergence of Taliban under Hibatullah Akhundzada, poor Afghans continued to cross the Durand Line to save their lives. With Pakistan threatening to forcefully deport 'illegal'/undocumented people living in the country beyond November 1, 2023, around 200,000 Afghans are being pushed back to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. There are around 4 million Afghans in Pakistan, of whom, only 1.4 million have some form of formal registration.

Although the government is talking about targeting only those having no formal documents, caretaker interior minister Sarfaraz Bugti on November 1, in a TV talk show, underlined that even registered Afghans would be sent back to their country, but in the first phase, the government was focusing only on 'aliens' with no formal documentation or travel history.

In another talk show on November 3, he stated that Pakistan has had shared 'bread-butter and social fabric' with these Afghans for the past four decades. These people came here during the war and now they should go back as there is no war now, he said. Contrary to these claims, there are reports of the security forces targeting even those who have legal documents. A BBC report mentions the plight of Abdullah's 22 family members who were forced to leave despite having Afghan Citizen Cards and IDs issued by Pakistan.

Due to a number of reasons, public reaction over the issue is largely subdued in the country. However, people in general and human rights activists in particular have opposed the move. A number of political leaders and activists have approached the Supreme Court and challenged 'mass deportation' of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers by the caretaker government. As far as the mainstream political parties are concerned, Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam-Fazlur (JUI-F), and Pakistan Muslim League (N) are openly airing their concerns, whereas PPP is taking a

balanced approach.

Maulana Fazlur Rahman of JUI-F is opposed to the deportation by force. To him, the issue of Afghans living in Pakistan is a bilateral issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan and it should be resolved amicably through dialogue. He underlined the fact that in the name of deporting 'illegal' people, even the Afghans residing legally in Pakistan are also being targeted, harassed and blackmailed. He has alleged that such inhuman and merciless approach has been adopted to occupy their land and other belongings. He is of the view that the government should take Afghan Taliban into confidence and find out a way out.

On November 1, PML-N leader and Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed in a TV talk-show termed the policy of forceful deportation as arbitrary and not part of a well-thought-out plan. He was of the view that at a time when Pakistan does not enjoy good relationship with Afghan Taliban and Pakistani Taliban is making a forceful comeback, it could create a new Mukti Bahini like situation (that led to the creation of Bangladesh). It is important to note that majority to those being targeted are Pashtuns who enjoy brotherly ties within the Pashtun community of Pakistan. If not addressed properly, the issue could go out of control, as cautioned by the PML-N Senator.

Not very long ago, Pakistan used to boast proudly about hosting a large number of Afghan refugees documented or otherwise. Why has there been a sudden change of heart? One can find at least four prominent reasons that could have led Pakistan to change its approach.

Firstly, the resurgence of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has put the security establishment in a tight spot. Ever since Taliban 2.0 came to dominate the State of Afghanistan (from August 2021), TTP is pushing aggressively for an Afghan-Taliban style regime in Pakistan. It has remodeled itself from a ragtag militia to a far more organised group with an administrative and operational hierarchical structure like the one adopted by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The TTP has mounted relentless attacks against the armed forces of Pakistan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and elsewhere. Despite repeated requests and threats by Pakistan's security establishment, Afghan Taliban have refused to help Pakistan rein in the TTP. Zabihullah Mujahid, the official spokesperson of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, on 8 November tweeted his statement in which he argued that Afghanistan was not responsible for maintaining peace in Pakistan and instead of blaming Afghanistan, Pakistan should solve its internal problem.

What Did The Biden-Xi Meet Really Achieve?

The Biden-Xi meeting in San Francisco on the sidelines of the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) summit hasn't, on the face of it, produced any path-breaking results. If the objective was to bring about stability in ties, it is doubtful if that has been achieved. The deep differences between the US and China on the political, economic, technological, and strategic fronts cannot be bridged so easily.

Stability cannot be achieved through verbal positions. Policy changes are required. It is difficult to foresee China changing its approach to sovereignty issues, be it Taiwan, the South China and East China Seas, or elsewhere. It is not going to curb its Belt and Road initiative that brings more and more countries into its economic and political fold. It will continue to expand its influence in various parts of the globe to become a rival power to the US. It is not going to slow down its naval expansion. It plans to expand its nuclear arsenal, develop new capabilities to push back the US navy from its coast as far as possible, retain control over some critical raw materials and technologies to buttress its power ambitions, and so on. It is already eating into US influence in various critical geographies, as, for example, in West Asia, which raises increasing geopolitical challenges to American power. China's declared ambitions with time lines to become central to global governance by 2049 will not be abandoned.

The US, too, is not going to step back from its strategy at political, technology and military levels to curb China's threatening rise. Its policy of strengthening alliances in the western Pacific will continue. It will continue to arm Taiwan. The Indo-Pacific concept, the deepening of the Quad, or the Aukus alliance will continue to underpin its Asia

policy with the objective of deterring China.

The US will continue to pursue a policy of denying China access to highly advanced technologies such as semi-conductors, building domestic capabilities to reduce

dependence on China in critical areas, prevent intellectual property theft, restrict Chinese investments in sensitive areas and push Europe in this direction, create trusted and resilient supply chains as an alternative to dependence on China, do "friend-shoring" etc.

Stability in US-China ties also depends on more stability in the global system. The ongoing Ukraine conflict, the US sanctions on Russia that distort ties between third countries and Russia and impinge on the global financial system, the growing strategic closeness between Russia and China, the fall-out of the dangerous conflict erupting in West Asia, the ineffectiveness of the UN Security Council create instabilities that also put strains on US-China ties.

On both sides some tactical adjustments can, however, be made, and this was the purpose of the Biden-Xi meeting. The US has long sought to put some guardrails in place and prevent its differences with China on Taiwan and the South China and East China Seas

from escalating into an actual military conflict. Given the number of incidents of dangerously close contact between the naval ships and planes of the two countries in this region, the US has been pushing for the resumption of military contacts cancelled by China in August 2022. China had also suspended talks with the US on climate change. The US wanted to resume them as engaging China as the world's largest carbon dioxide emitter was essential to addressing climate change issues.

(Contd. on page 9)



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How Hubris Is Coming Home to Roost for AAP



We had heard and known about governments-in-exile normally formed by ousted dictators or revolutionaries, but in what promises to be a first, Delhi faces the prospect of being ruled by a government from behind bars.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), whose instinct for drama and bravado remains undiminished despite being in the grip of an existential crisis, announced with its usual flourish that if its supreme leader and Delhi chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal, is arrested in connection with the alleged liquor scam, he will not resign and continue to govern his "people" from jail. Not only that; if necessary, the whole cabinet will move to Tihar lock, stock, and barrel in solidarity. All party MLAs reportedly unanimously decided that since the chief minister continued to enjoy the people's mandate, he should continue to run the government from inside the jail in case, as widely speculated, he ends up there.

The party claims there is no legal bar on his continuing to act as CM while in custody until he is convicted. "There is no provision in the Constitution that mandates the resignation of the chief minister if they are placed in jail for a trial," his loyal lieutenant and cabinet minister Saurabh Bharadwaj told reporters.

Yet, to give it the appearance of public legitimacy, the party has announced a nationwide public referendum on the issue. Confusion and panic appear to have gripped the party at the prospect of the CM's arrest. The truth is that what we are watching is its slow-motion demise with most of its top leadership caught up in alleged corruption cases and the party supremo himself now in the Enforcement Directorate's crosshairs.

Many will find it puzzling how a party, which made a headline-grabbing debut barely a decade ago and was once hailed as a breath of fresh air and predicted to upend the old ways of doing politics, is now hovering on the brink of collapse. It is a morality tale of betrayal and hubris: the party's betrayal of its avowed fundamental principles and the arrogance of its leaders, principally Kejriwal.

It was not too long ago that AAP boasted of arguably the most diverse support base comprising middle-class professionals, Left-wing intellectuals, progressive

academics, humble autorickshaw drivers and factory workers, Dalits, Muslims, slum-dwellers, and residents of gated communities.

The only other party which could once claim a similar feat was Congress in its heyday. It was the erstwhile Congress support base that shifted almost wholesale to AAP contributing to its dramatic rise. Ironically, the dial is now shifting in the other direction.

Typically, it has blamed the BJP for its troubles and while it is true that there has never been any love lost between the two, the fact is that it's a victim of its own missteps. Although AAP has lurched from crisis to crisis ever since its inception in 2012, this time it looks more serious. And with a general election looming, its timing couldn't have been worse for a party with such a highly centralised organisational structure and lacking a second line of credible leadership.

It's an open secret that the AAP is a one-

man show and if Kejriwal's troubles mount further it would be left with a rump of rookies and chancers whose ability to hold it together is seriously in doubt. Kejriwal is his party's only nationally recognisable public face and it doesn't require special insight to imagine the potentially debilitating effect of his absence on the party. His control over all aspects of party affairs is so total that without him it is hard to think of anyone who could steer it through the crisis.

Party sources admit that the possibility of the Delhi CM's arrest has prompted serious concern with no obvious senior functionary in sight who can take control of the party and the government, especially when the Lok Sabha elections—crucial for AAP's expansion plans—are barely months away.

Even if Kejriwal continues to be around, he is likely to struggle to explain away the liquor case and undo the damage it has done to its image. Even as there is as yet no evidence of a smoking gun, there is simply too much smoke around to ignore it—especially after the Supreme Court ruling dismissing former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia's bail plea. It noted that there was evidence that "tentatively" supported the ED's charge with regard to the "excess profit" of Rs 338 crore to distributors under the now-scrapped excise policy.

The Aam Aadmi Party's future hangs by the slender hope that voters will be persuaded by its claim to be a victim of the BJP's plot to "destroy" it because it sees AAP as a threat. Kejriwal's last-minute decision to defy ED's summons calling them "vague, motivated and unsustainable in law" and instead go off to Madhya Pradesh for electioneering appeared to be part of the party's strategy

to take the fight into the "enemy" camp. In the coming weeks, the party faces a public test of this narrative. The fact that so many of its top leaders are facing corruption charges has led many of its supporters to question the party's claim to be squeaky clean and different from other parties.

It is hard to escape a deep sense of betrayal among AAP's supporters that a party born out of an anti-corruption movement and which came to power promising an honest and transparent system of governance should find itself so deeply embroiled in corruption cases. The AAP leadership is already trying to manage expectations about the party's performance in the coming assembly elections, pointing out that it is going into the campaign with its hands tied behind its back because of BJP's "vendetta" politics. As its Rajya Sabha member Raghav Chadha said in a statement on the ED's summons to Kejriwal, "When a party's top leadership is jailed, how will it fare well in elections?" Meanwhile, irrespective of the cause(s) of the crisis, the question that is being asked is: is it finally, the end of the road for AAP in its present form in case the Delhi CM too ends up in jail? But AAP's obituary has been written many times before—only for it to bounce back after each crisis. And anecdotal evidence suggests that it still enjoys a fair degree of goodwill, particularly among working classes, a fact grudgingly acknowledged even by its critics. Quite possibly, reports of AAP's imminent demise may once again turn out to be exaggerated, but the blunt truth is that it is living on borrowed time and the clock is ticking away faster than Kejriwal might think.

What Did The Biden-Xi Meet Really Achieve?

(Contd. from page 8) The US read-out of the Biden-Xi meeting shows the limited results achieved. Even allowing that Biden had to appear tough in his exchange with Xi to ward off accusations by the Republicans that he is weak on China, and also appear responsive to the anti-China mood in the American public, the read-out does not suggest any re-set of bilateral ties.

Biden has insisted that the US and China are in competition and that the US will invest in sources of strength at home and align with allies and partners, but that the US wants to manage competition responsibly in order to prevent conflict and avoid confrontation. He reaffirmed support for a free and open Indo-Pacific, peace and stability in the South China Sea and the East China Sea, freedom of navigation and overflight, and underlined America's iron clad commitment to defending its allies. He warned against any unilateral change of status quo in Taiwan and called for Chinese restraint. He mentioned China's unfair trade practices and non-market economic practices. He was clear on preventing advanced US technologies from being

used to undermine America's national security, though without unduly limiting trade and investment. He also spoke of America's international human rights commitments and specified concerns about human rights in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong.

On a more positive side, the US has been successful in restoring the high level military-to-military cooperation with China. The US-China Defence Policy Coordination talks, the Maritime Consultation Agreement meeting,

telephone communication between theatre commanders will be resumed. On the flow of Chinese produced Fentanyl through Mexico to the US, the two sides have agreed to cooperate in addressing global illicit drug manufacturing. US and China will also address risks of advanced AI systems and improved AI safety.

What Xi said at his meeting with Biden and to the US CEOs shows that while the Chinese President adopted a conciliatory tone and avoided getting into a robust spat with Biden - like in Alaska between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and China's

Communist Party foreign affairs chief Yang Jiechi in March 2021 - his pushback on some issues was politely firm. Taiwan was non-negotiable, he said, and affirmed that it will inevitably become part of China. He asked the US to stop arming Taiwan and support peaceful reunification. He also cautioned that military communication between the two countries would be on the basis of equality and mutual respect. He noted that US actions were stifling China's development and that the US should not scheme to suppress or contain China. Both sides should understand each others' bottom lines. He asked the US not to interfere in China's internal affairs. The fundamental question was whether the US and China were rivals or partners, Xi said. If the US considered China as its biggest rival, the most significant geopolitical challenge and an ever pressing threat, then wrong policies, wrong actions and wrong results will follow. Xi expressed China's willingness to be a partner and a friend to the US. There were the usual references to win-win cooperation, meeting each other half way and handling differences calmly.

India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, China and the West Asian Crisis

Written By: Kanwal Sibal

The timing of the India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue on November 10 has sent its own political message. That both the US Secretary of State and the US Defence Secretary did not postpone the meeting despite their preoccupation with the dangerous situation developing in West Asia shows the importance the US attaches to maintaining the momentum of growing ties with India.

The US has moved two aircraft carrier groups and a Marine unit into the eastern Mediterranean both to deter Hezbollah from opening a northern front against Israel in connivance with Iran and to take military action if required. The US is already involved in a conflict over Ukraine with Russia in Europe. A potential conflict in the Western Pacific with China is brewing. On top of these two, the US is now facing a serious possibility of getting embroiled militarily in a third area of conflict, in West Asia.

India has stakes in all these conflicts. Its ties with Russia remain very important for bilateral and geopolitical reasons. These have come under pressure from the West because of the Ukraine conflict. In West Asia, India has critical energy, financial, manpower and geopolitical interests with the Arab countries, while also developing very substantial ties with Israel, to the point of opening up real possibilities of India-Arab-Israel cooperation in the region. India's relations with China have become adversarial, just as US-China relations, creating a strong basis for a close partnership to counter China's expansionist rise and its hegemonic ambitions. In this background, other than the consolidation of India-US bilateral ties, the 2+2 Dialogue assumed timely importance.

The US has been reaching out to China in recent months with the declared intention to manage the increasingly adversarial relationship by putting guard rails in place to avoid the eruption of an actual military conflict. It has now been announced that a Biden-Xi meeting will take place in San



Francisco at the time of the APEC summit there. There has been intensive planning for this meeting, with a spate of high-level US visits to China in advance. This too makes the timing of the 2+2 Dialogue significant.

If, on the one hand, the US sends signals of constructively engaging China within a defined strategic matrix, a signal is also being sent to China through the 2+2 Dialogue in advance of the Biden-Xi meeting that the Indo-Pacific strategy, the Quad and the strengthening ties with India in the context of China's assertiveness remain a cornerstone of US strategy in Asia. The joint statement issued on the occasion of the 2+2 Dialogue emphasises "the important role of the Quad as a force for global good for the peoples of the Indo-Pacific". It looks forward to India hosting the next in-person Quad Leaders' Summit in 2024, but this will hinge on President Biden attending the R-Day celebrations as Chief Guest. It is noteworthy that Defence Minister Rajnath Singh stated during his bilateral meeting with his US counterpart that India and the US are increasingly in agreement on key issues, such as countering China's aggression. The US Defence Secretary, in his media briefing, stated that both sides talked about the rising security challenges that are posed by China.

For the US it would have been

important that Ukraine figured in the joint statement, as its omission would have been interpreted as declining US focus on Ukraine in view of the conflict emerging in West Asia (referred to as the Middle East in the joint statement). For India, it was a question of remaining within the bounds of its established position, especially as doubts have arisen in the US, Europe and Ukraine itself about external support for sustaining the conflict. The joint statement limits itself to the humanitarian consequences of the Ukraine conflict, and its impact on the global economic system, predominantly on the Global South. Rather prematurely, the joint statement speaks of post-conflict reconstruction in Ukraine. That would require ending the conflict first. On Israel, both sides reiterated that they stood with Israel against terrorism, but also called for adherence to international humanitarian law, including with regard to the protection of civilians (a call obviously directed at Israel as a State and not Hamas as a terrorist outfit). While calling for an immediate release of all remaining hostages, the need for providing humanitarian assistance to meet the urgent needs of Palestinian civilians in Gaza has been stressed. The US, which opposes a ceasefire in Gaza and is only willing to support humanitarian pauses, has obtained India's support for its position which is actually increasingly at odds with that of

the Global South. At the Peace Conference organised by France on November 9 in Paris, President Macron's position in support of humanitarian pauses "while working for a ceasefire" is one with which India could associate, because with the mounting civilian casualties in Gaza, especially of children, opposing a ceasefire is becoming politically untenable. India has to take note of the hardening position of the Arab world on the conflict and find some common ground with it, without going as far as the declaration of the Arab/OIC summit in Riyadh which, besides calling for a ceasefire, urges the International Criminal Court to investigate "war crimes and crimes against humanity that Israel is committing" in Palestinian territories. The UN Secretary-General has also urged an immediate ceasefire.

Despite the uncertainties that have developed in West Asia with the Israel-Gaza conflict and its highly negative fall-out in the Arab/Islamic world, the joint statement nonetheless has rather optimistically "appreciated the ongoing efforts of the I2U2 countries to enhance food and energy security and improve the movement of people and goods across hemispheres", besides also noting "that the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor will enhance connectivity between Asia and Europe and will unlock new potential for economic growth in the two continents".

On the defence side, the joint statement reaffirms the commitment to further deepen the multifaceted defence partnership through military exercises of increasing complexity and sophistication, accelerated joint projects initiated under the June 2023 Roadmap for India-US Defence Industrial Cooperation and expanded collaboration in emerging domains, such as space and artificial intelligence. The progress in cooperation in Maritime Domain Awareness is noted, with a decision to explore technology sharing to meet various maritime challenges, including in the undersea domain. The last is an area of special interest to India in view of the increasing movement of Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

The joint statement notes that negotiations for a commercial agreement between General Electric (GE) Aerospace and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to manufacture GE F-414 jet engines in India have begun. India is interested in co-developing and co-producing ground mobility systems (the Stryker infantry combat vehicle with radar capability carrying javelin missiles for which the US has made an initial offer). India is interested in further developing its maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) sector, encompassing aircraft maintenance and mid-voyage repair of US naval vessels.

The finalisation of a Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA) to facilitate the integration of the defence industrial ecosystems of both countries while strengthening supply chain resilience is viewed as important. The India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X), launched in June 2023, had its first Investors Strategy Session in New Delhi just before the 2+2 Dialogue. This initiative is aimed at mobilising capital for funding innovation in cutting-edge technology.



Eyeless in Gaza: The Never-Ending War

By: **Makarand R Paranjape**

The title of this column is inspired by a novel by Aldous Huxley, whose 60th death anniversary is coming up on November 22. The first part of this reflection is inspired by its evocative title *Eyeless in Gaza*, which seems so telling in our times. The second part of this essay, which is to follow, will consider another of Huxley's works, his later novel, *Devils in Loudun* (1952).

Eyeless in Gaza is a ponderous tome that few remember, and no one seems to read these days. Published in 1936, it is Huxley's longest, over 600 pages long, and, some would say, his most ambitious novel. But the title

actually refers to a much older work, John Milton's dramatic poem, *Samson Agonistes* (Samson the Champion), written over 250 years ago. Says Samson: "Promise was that I/ Should Israel from Philistian yoke deliver;/ Ask for this great deliverer now, and find him/ Eyeless in Gaza at the Mill with slaves...." The tragic closet drama recounts the fall of the Jewish hero, Samson. He is betrayed by Delilah, his identified with Samson, the source of his strength, his uncut locks. When he is asleep, she cuts off his hair and hands him over to his enemies, the Philistines. Delilah, who hails from the Valley of Sorek, is also extreme, even suicidal, religious a Philistine. The valley, called Na'al Sorek in Hebrew or Wadi

al-Sirar in Arabic, still exists, a picturesque place between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. In the



Book of Judges in the Old Testament, where the story occurs, it serves as the border between the Philistines and the Jewish Tribe of Dan.

Betrayed and bound, his eyes gouged out, Samson is put to work, John Milton's dramatic poem, *Samson Agonistes* (Samson the Champion), written when asked to perform in the temple of the Philistines, he pulls down the pillars. As the structure collapses over those trapped underneath, Samson also perishes, himself dying with his enemies. Milton, lonely and ageing, with failing eyesight and the collapse of the Commonwealth, probably identified with Samson, the Biblical hero and champion. Delilah, as the perfidious femme fatale, embodies his abiding misogyny. It is, however, the play's exhibition and extolling of violence and vengeance, all sanctioned by the Hebraic God,

which has evoked the most fierce— and divided—contemporary responses. These, quite

predictably, are usually along present political lines. With the fighting in Gaza, the play is, once again, relevant in ways that Milton would not have foreseen.

I for one, when I read it for my MA forty years ago, quickly realised that not only was the Israel-Palestine problem thousands of years old, but that it was unlikely to be resolved easily. Worse, as in any war, one had to

take sides. One could not remain a fence-sitter forever. Reading Milton's play those days, my sympathies were on the side of the Philistines. What did they do wrong? What was their sin? Why were they always to be blamed? Just because they did not follow the God of the Jews? But today the opposite seems to be the case. The Philistines were supposedly "pagan," worshipping "false" gods. Not that that is sufficient justification for their slaughter. But with the advent of Islam, isn't that fundamental difference also erased? Isn't the God of Abraham also the God of Muhammad? Then why the

internecine war between the Muslims and the Jews? Who, then, is eyeless in Gaza? Who is the champion of God, who is the seductress and betrayer of his trust? Is Hamas the false traitor who deceived and attacked Israel? No, it is not easy to superimpose the Biblical story of Samson and Delilah on today's Israel-Hamas war. Neither theologically, politically, nor strategically, let alone ethically, is it easy to take sides. But one thing is clear. Would those asking Israel to stop today do the same if the equation were reversed? How many Arabs would allow Israel to exist if they had the upper hand militarily? Without accepting the right of both Israel and Palestine to that small slice of planet Earth, how can we even talk of coexistence, let alone peace? The Abraham Accords were an important beginning in moving towards commonality and concurrence, but now they lie shattered and scattered with the renewed hostilities between Jews and Muslims. Who is to blame? For in any conflict, responsibility must be assigned. It is not for us to judge, but we cannot help asking: if the Hamas manifesto demands the liquidation of Israel, how can there be peace? Perhaps, we are all trapped and eyeless in Gaza, unable to see clearly any way to peace. I am reminded of the nostrum attributed to Mahatma Gandhi via Louis Fischer, his biographer. Richard Attenborough's 1982 Oscar-winning biopic also popularised it: "An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind. The reference is to the ancient Hebraic law: "An eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" (Exodus: 21.24). As Hindu Sanatanis we must ask, "Is there another way?"



How Pakistan is Using Afghan Refugee Crisis to Arm-Twist Taliban

By: Arun Anand

In a surprising move on October 3, Pakistan's interim government issued a 28-day ultimatum to what it referred to as "illegal immigrants" to leave the country, with forced deportations slated to commence on November 1. This decision primarily targets the 1.73 million Afghans residing in Pakistan who have not been able to secure formal refugee status.

The UNHCR estimates that Pakistan currently hosts 3.7 million Afghan refugees, including 700,000 who fled Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover in August 2021. Apparently, roughly 1.73 million of these refugees are deemed to be residing in Pakistan



saving façade in the form of crackdown on innocents Pashtuns. Incidentally, this is not the first time that the Pakistani government, acting under the influence of its powerful "deep state," has employed such measures against Afghan refugees. In 2016, under a similar decree and narrative, thousands of Afghans were forcefully deported to Afghanistan against their will. The deportation process then was marred by coercive actions by Pakistani law enforcement and paramilitary forces.

However, interestingly, such measures in the past did not yield any noticeable improvement in Pakistan's economy or internal security situation, as earlier professed and currently being peddled to the Pakistani populace. In fact, Pakistan has consistently received financial aid from the United States and European countries for the resettlement of Afghan refugees in its territory. In fiscal year 2022 alone, the United States provided nearly \$60 million (over PKR 13 billion) in assistance to refugees and host communities in Pakistan.

Considering historical precedent, it is unlikely that Pakistan's security situation will improve after the departure of all undocumented Afghans. It is because those who have joined the ranks of the TTP have already organized their documents for seamless movement within the country, avoiding the suspicion of security agencies. The deportation is more likely to adversely affect law-abiding Afghans and Pashtuns in the area and may indeed trigger a



without proper documentation, leaving them with little legal protection or avenues for seeking asylum.

The Pakistani government's stringent stance against undocumented Afghans within its borders has not gone unnoticed by Taliban ministers and officials, who have vociferously criticized the decision. On October 5, Taliban Defence Minister Muhammad Yaqoob decried Pakistan's expulsion of Afghans as "unjustifiable and inhumane". International agencies, including the United Nations, also express deep concerns about the potential humanitarian crisis that may result from Pakistan's forced deportations. The Pakistani government's justification for the deportations stems from its claim that 14 out of 24 suicide bombings in the country this year were carried out by individuals holding Afghan citizenship. However, since making this announcement, Pakistan has failed to provide any concrete evidence to

substantiate its allegations. Sources in the knowhow of things indicate that the matter is not what's stated and is much more than meets the eye. It could very well be a case of indirect messaging to the Taliban interim government to act against the TTP and other groups undertaking attacks in Pakistan soil and arrest cross border smuggling.

Based on an in-depth study, it comes out that, in reality, this move by the Pakistani government has little to do with undocumented Afghans perpetrating terror attacks on Pakistani soil, especially when approximately 70% of these so-called "illegal immigrants" consist of women and children. Instead, the measure appears to be a strategic move aimed at exerting pressure on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to align with Islamabad's geopolitical interests, and draw international attention back to the region, particularly from the United States. The reality is that initial jubilation in the Pakistani security establishment

upon the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan was at best a short-lived marriage of convenience. Pakistan's expectations of an indebted regime in Kabul were dashed when the Taliban released hundreds of Pakistani TTP (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan) fighters who had been imprisoned in Afghanistan, instead of extraditing them to Pakistan. Among those released were high-ranking TTP commanders wanted by the Pakistan Army. This event marked the beginning of a gradual deterioration in relations between the Pakistan government and the Taliban interim government.

The surging violence by TTP is also causing huge embarrassment to the Pakistani security establishment, as its narrative at international level has fallen flat. In the past, it has been presenting



dossiers of alleged involvement of Indian agencies and Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security in the violence in Pakistan. That is no longer valid. The mounting casualties of Pakistan's armed forces at the hand of separatists forces in Khyber Pakhtunwaha, Balochistan and Sindh have forced the 'deep state' within Pakistan to seek an immediate face

humanitarian catastrophe, exacerbating the security situation along the Afghan-Pakistan borders. This, in turn, could further strain Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. This also could be a case of new modus operandi to seek more aid for humanitarian efforts from world organisations and negotiated dealings.

How 2024 is the Year of Reckoning for India, Indians and Indian Politics

By: Utpal Kumar

Minhaz Merchant stands out for his journalistic neutrality. It is indispensable for him in journalism “to not only be politically neutral” but also “seen to be politically neutral”. So much so that he makes it a point not to follow any politician on a social networking site. Even when Prime Minister Narendra Modi followed him on ‘X’, he refused to return the compliment.

One may not agree with the premise of his argument, for following a politician, more so a Prime Minister, doesn’t mean any compromise in one’s journalistic neutrality. In today’s world, following politicians or celebrities means you don’t miss out on any of their statements, observations—a prerequisite for basic journalism. Still, Merchant’s stand is laudatory, especially at a time when one is tempted to crawl when asked to bend by those in power.

It is this nature of Minhaz Merchant to vigorously pursue journalistic neutrality, besides his long, illustrious innings in the media sphere, that makes his latest work, *Modi: The Challenge of 2024* (Amaryllis, Rs 899), a must-read book. It needs to be clarified at the very outset that this is not a biography of Modi. The book, instead, covers his two terms as prime minister and explains why 2024 is going to be a watershed year. He calls it “the year of reckoning” that would witness the “battle for India”. The book starts with the author meeting Modi “for the first time in 2012”, when the latter was the chief minister of Gujarat. What struck Merchant then were Modi’s eyes. “They (eyes) bore into you. The gaze is unflinching.” A year later, Merchant found himself in Gandhinagar. Modi was “in high spirits”. He had just won a landslide third term as Gujarat chief minister. In that meeting, Modi asked Merchant if he would be willing to write a biography on him, given “so much misinformation” about his life, “especially over the Godhra riots”. Merchant politely refused, saying: “One prime ministerial book is enough.”

Merchant had already written a



biography of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. Interestingly, the author, after declining the offer, suggested the name of British author Andy Marino for the job. “I then suggested that if he (Modi) wanted a neutral and completely objective examination of his life and work, perhaps a foreign author could be invited to write the book. Modi liked the idea.” Coming to *Modi: The Challenge of 2024*, it does an objective analysis of the major achievements of the Modi government—from helping India take a big digital stride forward, to putting the country on the high lane of infrastructure development. Unlike the Left-‘liberal’ commentators, he doesn’t shy away from talking about the good works done by the Modi dispensation. And, he is equally upfront about the failures and weaknesses of the Union government.

He, for instance, is wary of the growing trend in the BJP towards Prime Minister Modi’s deification, reminding the readers of the delusional Indira-is-India narrative of the 1970s. He is equally concerned about the growing “yes-man” culture in the current dispensation, though he reiterates that Modi detests sycophancy and appreciates honest feedback. Merchant is also unhappy over the fact that the “government’s tentacles

have... grown, not receded” on matters of economy. He writes, “The prime minister won his mandate on the promise of minimum government, maximum governance. The opposite has been the case.” Still there is no decline in the personal popularity of Prime Minister Modi. Merchant

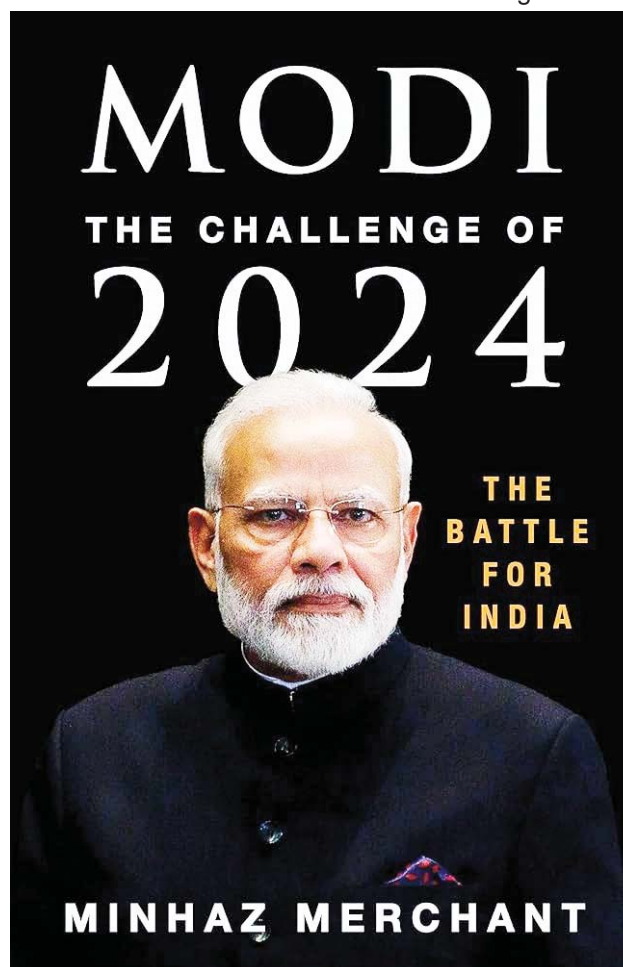
over other politicians. Add to it the prime minister’s personal probity and he becomes an almost invincible force in Indian politics. Modi believes that the people are willing to forget and forgive mistakes if the government’s intent is right. It is Modi’s success in conveying the earnestness of each of his initiatives that makes him and his government anti-incumbency-proof. Demonetisation is a case in study. People suffered. They were not sure if it was carried out competently and if it could achieve its desired results. But people on the whole never doubted Modi’s intentions. Demonetisation didn’t hurt Modi a bit, electorally or otherwise.

So, is 2024 a done deal for the BJP? While reading the book one gets the sense that the party is comfortably placed in the race, and can easily secure 300 Lok Sabha seats if things remain the way it is today, but it would be suicidal to think it’s a done deal for the saffron party. All depends, Merchant writes, on how smartly Opposition parties stitch their alliances across the country. Also, the BJP should be wary of complacency creeping in among its leaders and cadres after two consecutive Lok Sabha wins. Merchant believes that the 2024 elections would be a make or break election for not just

get intense in coming years.

Interestingly, the author doesn’t stop at 2024 and makes a forecast for 2029. He believes Modi will “step aside in 2029 after 15 years as prime minister”. Merchant’s assessment seems rather convincing. Politicians in India tend to cling on to power as long as they can. But Modi is made of different stuff. He writes, “...Modi had wandered in the Himalayas for two years after walking out of his Vadnagar home in Gujarat at the age of 17. Modi lived in caves and ate with monks. He told me during our several meetings that he did not have a meal at the same place more than once. Modi lived like a rishi.” Merchant adds a rider, though. “Modi would have to first win the 2024 Lok Sabha election before even thinking of 2029. Modi is not given to long-term projections. He lives in the present.” The author also delves into the post-Modi phase in the chapter ‘Modi: The New Vajpayee?’. While recalling how in the 1990s and the early 2000s, the ‘liberal’ Vajpayee was projected against ‘hardliner’ Advani, Merchant exposes the same farce being played up in the media as the country approaches another general election early next year. “Ironically, the harshest critics of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who have vilified him since 2002 now look fearfully at Amit Shah and Yogi Adityanath... The prospect of Amit Shah or Adityanath as Prime Minister unnerves them so much that they are prepared to put up with Modi 3.0 as the new Vajpayee—internationalist, moderate, statesmanlike.” Interestingly, in a later chapter, Merchant further narrows down upon Modi’s successor as he writes on how Yogi, “a hard taskmaster”, is feared the most by “the Congress-Left opposition”.

Minhaz Merchant’s *Modi: The Challenge of 2024* is one of the best and most dispassionate accounts of Narendra Modi and his two terms in New Delhi. What makes it worth a read is its sheer scrupulousness in etching out why 2024 is the year of reckoning for India, Indians, and Indian politics—and, of course, the way forward.



believes this has to do with Modi’s understanding of the Indian mind. “His teenage wandering in the Himalayas, eating and living with monks, sadhus and ordinary villages, gave him rare insights. During a varied career in the RSS—from doing menial jobs to fixing organisational issues—Modi learnt much about human nature.”

This innate understanding of the Indian mind gives Modi an edge

the BJP and the Congress but also the county. It, after all, “could determine the course of Indian politics for the next decade”. He adds, “With India set to be the world’s third largest economy by 2026-27 behind the United States and China, 2024 could be a historic turning point.” More so given the fact that China’s hegemonistic challenge and the US-led West’s good cop-bad cop attitude vis-à-vis India would only



Trump-Biden Rematch Exposes Broken US Politics

By: Minhaz Merchant

The unthinkable might happen: despite several criminal cases filed against him, former United States President Donald Trump may be president once again following the US presidential election scheduled to be held on November 5, 2024, in a deeply polarised country.

A new opinion poll conducted by The New York Times-Siena College projects that if the presidential election pitting Trump against US President Joe Biden was held today, Trump would win a comfortable majority.

Crucially, in five out of six battleground swing states — Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Arizona, Georgia and Nevada — Trump leads Biden by a significant margin. Biden has a narrow two percentage point lead only in Wisconsin.

The poll spells trouble for Biden who turns 81 on November 20, 2023. Voters worry that Biden, if elected, will be 86 years old at the end of his second term as president in January 2029.

Trump at 77 is no spring chicken but Republican voters aren't worried about his cognitive abilities. Biden in contrast often slurs his words, forgets to shake hands with other dignitaries (he did so

famously with Brazilian President Lula da Silva) and is unsteady on his feet. It is a sign of the broken state of American politics that no Democrat or Republican is strong enough to challenge either Biden or Trump as their parties' presidential candidate.

Republican challengers like Ron DeSantis and Nikki Haley have faded. Tech millionaire Vivek Ramaswamy's campaign has sputtered. Among Democrats, no one dares challenge Biden simply because there is no one else in the party with a global profile.

The only credible alternative Democratic candidate would be Vice-President Kamala Harris but she is unpopular with the party rank-and-file.

The Democrats' hard Left, led by the "squad", has divided the party further. Biden is seen as a safe pair of hands — so long as his health holds out.

The US Constitution allows candidates to run for president even from jail. In a hearing last week at the New York Supreme Court in a civil fraud case that could dismantle Trump's business empire, Justice Arthur Engoron told Trump tersely: "Just answer the questions, no speeches. This is not a political rally." Trump is the first former

US president in over a century to stand trial in court. And yet, that doesn't bother the Republican faithful. Outside the courtroom, Trump told reporters that the cases against him amounted to "election interference". He added grimly: "It's a very sad situation. It usually takes place in third-world countries and banana republics."

Trump was closer to the truth than he imagined. The US is increasingly looking like a third-world country. Its political system is deeply polarised, its civic infrastructure is crumbling, gun violence has soared, the family unit is broken, and racial divisions are widening.

GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

The outcome of the Biden-Trump electoral battle has serious geopolitical implications. A Trump victory would spell bad news for Europe. Trump may not carry out his campaign threat to pull the US out of NATO. But he will cut back on US military aid to Ukraine.

Russia will welcome a Trump victory. Trump has often said that the US mishandled its relationship with Moscow by allowing NATO to creep ever closer to Russia's border. Trump favours a more balanced approach to Moscow. He will

likely bring the Russia-Ukraine war to a swift, negotiated end. China would be impacted by a Trump victory in two apparently contradictory ways. On the one hand, Beijing blames Trump as the US president who started a trade war against China which Biden has deepened. On the other hand, Beijing also sees Trump as being more politically flexible than Biden.

Trump says he is against wars. In his first term, he pointed out, the US did not invade any other country. It only targeted the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq. But it is the Middle East which will cause Trump the most worry. Like all US presidents, America's support for Israel is bipartisan and cast in stone.

Trump, however, has close personal relations with Saudi Arabia's Mohammad bin Salman. That could help build momentum towards a two-state solution for Palestine and Israel as per the 1993 Oslo Accords. The Accords are backed by moderate Arab states. But both Israel and Hamas have ignored them.

THE ISRAEL FACTOR

Dealing with Israel will be difficult for both Trump and Biden. The Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, not only left over 1,400 Israelis dead. It exposed Israel's intelligence agency Shin Bet as

incompetent and the Israeli army's initial response as sluggish.

For a country that prides itself on its intelligence gathering and disciplined military, the initial humbling by Hamas will leave permanent scars on Israel's society's consciousness.

To counter mounting Western criticism on civilian deaths in Gaza due to incessant Israeli bombing, Tel Aviv put out a list of civilians killed by Western military action since World War II.

According to The New York Times, "Israel's goal is to help justify a campaign against Hamas that is claiming thousands of Palestinian lives. In those earlier conflicts, innocent civilians paid the price for the defeat of enemies. In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as many as 2,00,000 civilians perished after the US dropped atomic bombs to force Japan's surrender. In Iraq, hundreds of civilians were killed in Fallujah as US forces fought Iraqi insurgents, and thousands died in Mosul in Iraqi and US battles against IS."

Would India prefer a second-term Biden or a second-term Trump? Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been careful to make India's relationship with Washington immune to partisan US politics.

With Trump, Modi plays the transactional leader leveraging India's economic potential. With Biden, he focuses on the geopolitical importance of the India-US strategic partnership. China's growing threat as a technological, economic and military power to rival the US makes India an indispensable ally for the West. In private, European and American leaders grumble about India's neutrality over Ukraine, robust support for a Palestinian state, and independent leadership of the Global South. In public, they echo Western business leaders who queue up to do business in India.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin were upbeat after their 2+2 strategic dialogue with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in New Delhi on November 10. Biden or Trump, India remains a guru and friend to all.

Significance of Diwali from an American Adoptee of Hindu Dharma

By: Sean Bradrick

Sanatana Dharma provides various multicultural paths to religion, philosophy, metaphysics, and altruism. Not only through the vast beauty of Hindu Dharma but through its sister religions. Deepawali is a truly magnificent and magnanimous celebration of the divine and of our divinity in the form of light. It is not limited to the adherents of one spiritual tradition, but many. It is a Hindu festival also celebrated by Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Western yogis, and other spiritual seekers. For non-Hindus, it can simply be a celebration of light, brilliance, or whatever illuminates. We take this time to let more light and all good qualities inward while removing that which no longer serves our higher or more spiritual pursuits in a world that is largely material and in a time of much strife.

Different narratives from different regions of Bharat and its cultural realm abound. Many share the common theme of dharma overcoming adharma, good overcoming evil, and light overcoming darkness. This makes Deepawali all-inclusive. Even many thousands of Indian Muslims and their mosques light diyas. This does not mean non-Hindus can make Deepawali into anything they like. It means all of humanity shares a similar existential struggle of redemption and virtue vs vice. All of humanity needs light to see. Even a blind man can sense or sense the light of Surya. The universal nature of Sanatana Dharma indeed reigns supreme.

For Hindus, Diwali reminds us of the assurance that truth, light, dharma, and knowledge always prevail over darkness, ignorance, and adharma. Just as a spark or a small flame peers outward and penetrates many square miles of prior darkness. During Deepawali, we are also reminded of the epic battle won over Ravana. Afterwards, Sita, Rama, and Lakshman reached their true home of Ayodhya, after 14 years of banishment.

During Deepawali, we also give



our obeisance to Goddess Lakshmi. We are drawn to the image of the goddess rising from the ocean of milk, churned by the Devas and Asuras. The devotee churns his or her own mind, containing both light and darkness. Ultimately, we find that abundance of the purified mind, enlightenment, and the atma or true self. An inner light, not separate from Goddess Lakshmi. In this image, she represents and awakens this aspect of ourselves, from within and from without. She is both transcendent and immanent, esoteric and material. Being the Deepawali season, I'd like to write more about light, specifically inner light. The word 'enlightenment' has lost much definition, and is used by many who unfortunately do not understand its meaning. It is not something we just read about in Eckart Tolle's books. It is an attainable reality.

One Vedic path towards enlightenment is simply being with nature. The five elements of matter correspond with our five senses and affect our mental state. Energy and brahman as pure consciousness, correspond to our sixth sense, which is the mind itself. The Vedas also speak of the essential psychological and psychic forms of matter, light and energy known as ojas, tejas and prana. Physical, mental and holistic or spiritual health, all rely on becoming aware of them and balancing them within one's being.

The Sanatani also holds dear the great wisdom of Lord Krishna. In the Bhagavad Gita, we find the roadmaps to life through jnana, karma, and

bhakti yoga. Krishna does not seem to focus on raja yoga or the path to enlightenment through Ashtanga or the eight limbs that lead to meditation and samadhi. However, this is also an important and attainable path in this age. Remember, true and comprehensive yoga is fully Hindu. One doesn't need



to be Hindu to benefit from it, but every Hindu should know it as Bhagwan's gift to us and it is our gift to the world. This is especially true of the indigenous Hindustani. Long ago, the rishis and yogis of Vedic times recognised the existence of 'chitta' or subconscious mind. The Sanskrit word 'chitta' means mind-stuff or conditioned consciousness. They found that during meditation, what seemed to be foreign and forgotten thoughts, memories, emotions, fears, impulses and desires, would bubble up or suddenly start to seep from chitta, the subconscious mind, into manas or the normative mental field. They found that this kept them from reaching higher states of consciousness or 'chitt', the transcendent conscious mind, or unconditioned consciousness. They called these impressions

'samskaras', meaning substance abuse, violence, or other compulsive behaviours. They theorised that meditation is, after all, a modality for overall health found within a larger school of practical metaphysics and holistic medicine (Ayurveda). Meditation is to be respected for the powerful effects it can have, and not taken for granted. It's no wonder that the end result of meditation is historically known to be what we call 'enlightenment'. When we trace the word 'enlightenment' back to its Sanskrit origins, we find quite a few etymological terms. One is the word 'bodhi'. Bodhi means 'awakened intellect' or more simply 'clear perception'. It is where we get the word 'Buddha'.

By practising meditation, we can gain this clear perception. We can learn to discern between what is true, constant and eternal, as opposed to what is fleeting or limited by time and space. This is not about being in a so-called 'eternal now' or in the present moment, which does not persist even for an instant. It is about being mindful of the presence itself. It is a matter of paying attention to what is, and as a result, we can see that which is not. Sanatana Dharma represents the world's most ancient continuously practised, indigenous spiritual and philosophical tradition, which focuses on inner knowledge over outer belief and finds its basis in timeless truths and natural law. These truths have been recorded in the great scriptures of Bharat, throughout the ages. The wisdom of the Vedas comes from the ancient rishis, nagas and yogis who observed nature and the mind in various states of consciousness, including the state of samadhi or super consciousness.

Regular practice of meditation can relieve the pressures of life. As such, meditation can take the power out of stressful situations, though it isn't meant to replace addressing the underlying causes of our various issues. It can help us cope with certain situations by allowing us to respond to them in a more effective and efficient manner. It can make us less impulsive and less likely to turn to anger, rage,

can appear at any time. A verse in the Upanishads says "This mind is like a chariot yoked to wild stallions". These stressors can be more easily dealt with in mindful and meditative states than in anxious states or chaotic situations. These pressures can erupt in an emotional meltdown, or they can be released after the mind has had time to calm and quiet down.

This Deepawali, I want to wish the world spirit, joy, health, wealth and peace. I am an American Sanatana Dharmi. Hindu Dharma is my religion. Sanatana Dharma is my way of life. I thank the indigenous Hindus of India and its cultural realm.

The Sleep of Reason And Delhi's Deadly Smog

For instance, in the present scenario, abuse of language allows politicians to evade tough measures like the removal of lethal subsidies and freebies to make agriculture more profitable and curb rural decay; they just have to make a few platitudinous remarks glorifying annadatas and offer some sort of largesse to keep farmers in good humour. Unfortunately, this strategy has serious pitfalls, one of them being stubble burning—a practice that farmers in Punjab, Haryana, etc, stubbornly refuse to give up. To solve this problem, the Supreme Court last week talked about the carrot-and-stick policy. While welcoming financial penalties, it said that there “there has to be a punitive element in the policy. For instance, anyone who uses farm fires will not get subsidies...Something like this will have to be done. You do it, however you want. We are not saying follow this solution, or that.” It went on to say, “We want farm fires stopped, we want air quality to get better, and we want long-term measures for crop replacement. All governments are responsible. It’s your business how it occurs.”

The apex court’s views are oriented around common sense and reason: punishment should follow crime. But in the fantasy world that politicians and public intellectuals have created, farmers are not normal human beings who are involved in an economic activity; they are annadatas—gods or demigods. You don’t punish gods; you can only propitiate them with offerings—subsidies and freebies in this case—and look the other way when they indulge in wrongdoing, be it blocking roads or burning crop residue. The problem with gods is that they are not reasonable. There are innumerable instances in Hinduism showing that gods are easily pleased by demons, with deplorable consequences. Similarly, the unreasonableness of modern gods, the farmers, is wreaking havoc on all of us.

The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters: this is the name of a work of art by the Spanish painter Francisco Goya. The title succinctly describes the present situation in north India: today, the smog monster is torturing people; some time back, the farmers’ stir tormented commuters in Delhi-NCR.

The polluted language of Indian politics—replete with beti, naunihal, annadata, et al—has resulted in such perversion of public discourse that reasonable discussion on any subject, especially on agriculture, has become almost impossible. Myths appear as facts, shibboleths attract new adherents in droves, and cant rules the roost.

And discredited policies get perpetuated. What agriculture needs is a strong dose of economic reforms. Subsidies, freebies, and other statist measures choke the sector. The Narendra Modi government did try that in 2020 with three good farm laws, but the hasty manner in which these were brought became problematic. The much bigger problem, however, was the sentimentalism-infested public discourse that torpedoed the laws, forcing the government to withdraw them a year later after a long agitation. So, the ancien regime survived with all its abominations, including the ‘bechara kisan’ folklore. Folklore continues to abuse language, the conventional system that people use, among other things, to communicate with each other, express facts and ideas, and thereby solve problems they face. The perverted language becomes a tool in the hands of politicians, intellectuals, and activists who pursue their own agendas—at the expense of people.

Jailed in Pakistan, Imran Khan also arrested in Toshakhana, Al-Qadir corruption

Former prime minister Imran Khan, who is already imprisoned in Adiala Jail in the cipher case, has also been arrested by Pakistan’s top anti-corruption office in the Al-Qadir Trust case and Toshakhana gifts case, media reports said on Tuesday.

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) arrested Khan on Monday after Accountability Court Judge Mohammad Bashir ratified the arrest warrants and directed the Adiala Jail superintendent to execute them, the Dawn newspaper reported. “Khan was arrested in Al-Qadir Trust case also on Monday when a NAB team, led by Assistant Director Muhammad Asif and Waqarul Hasan visited District Jail (Adiala), Rawalpindi, and executed arrest warrants through the jail superintendent,” The News International reported.

It said the execution of the arrest warrants meant that Khan, former Prime Minister and chief of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, was also arrested in Toshakhana, Al-Qadir cases. He would be investigated in jail by a NAB team after obtaining his physical remand from a court of law. Khan, 71, has been lodged in the Adiala Jail in connection with the cipher case, months after his arrest in August. The Ali-Qadir Trust case is about the settlement of 190 million pounds, about Rs 50 billion, which the UK’s National Crime Agency sent to Pakistan after recovering the amount from a Pakistani property tycoon.

Khan being the prime minister then, instead of depositing it in the national kitty, allowed the businessman to use the amount to partly settle a fine of about Rs 450 billion imposed by the Supreme Court some years ago. Reportedly, the tycoon in return gifted about 57 acres of land to a trust set up by Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi to establish the Al-Qadir University in the Sohawa area of the Jhelum district of Punjab.

During the hearing on Monday, the judge had earlier asked the NAB prosecutor about the status of Khan’s pleas to revive his bail petitions in the two cases, to which he replied that the pleas were pending in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) and there was no restraining order issued so far, the Dawn report said.

The court had also issued Khan’s arrest warrant in the Toshakhana gifts case, which is a different case from the one he was convicted in August and arrested but later granted bail. That case was filed by the Election Commission of Pakistan for hiding the proceeds of sale from the gifts he got from the Toshakhana.

The latest arrest warrant was issued in the case filed by the NAB, which approached the court to issue arrest warrants against Khan because he needed to complete an investigation in the two cases.

The court accepted the plea and directed the superintendent of Adiala jail, Rawalpindi to ensure compliance.

Canadian man who mowed down 4 of family was 'hunting for Muslims to kill'

A Canadian man was “hunting for Muslims to kill” when he slammed his pickup truck into a family out on an evening stroll, the prosecution said in closing arguments on Tuesday. Nathaniel Veltman, now 22, is on trial for wiping out three generations of the Afzaal family in June 2021 in London, Ontario. He pleaded not guilty to four counts of murder, which prosecutors say were premeditated, as well as one count of attempted murder. The case marks the first time a Canadian jury has been asked to consider a terrorist motive related to white supremacy. While acknowledging Veltman’s responsibility for the killings, the defense said he should be convicted of a lesser charge of manslaughter.

Prosecutor Fraser Ball told the jury they have “everything you could possibly need to convict in this case,” including the defendant’s confession to police. He said Veltman had penned a “terrorist manifesto,” found on his computer, in which he espoused white nationalism and described his hate for Muslims. The accused “dressed like a soldier” wearing body armor and a helmet, and “pumped himself up” before the attack. “He was hunting for Muslims to kill,” Fraser said.

‘PEDAL TO THE METAL’

When Veltman passed the Afzaal family on a London street, the Crown attorney said, he turned his pick-up truck around and accelerated “pedal to the metal,” jumping the curb as he drove into them. Bodies flew into the air. Salman Afzaal, 46, his wife Madiha Salman, 44, their 15-year-old daughter Yumnah and her grandmother Talat Afzaal, 74, were killed. A nine-year-old boy orphaned in the ramming suffered serious but non-life-threatening injuries.

Veltman was arrested in a nearby parking lot and told police he wanted to “send a strong message” against Muslim immigration. Ball said that the message was “brutal and terrifying: Leave this country or you and your loved ones could be next.” Defense lawyer Christopher Hicks argued that Veltman suffered from mental disorders and childhood traumas that led to “depression and anxiety.” He also consumed three grams of hallucinogenic psilocybin mushrooms prior to the attack that, according to Hicks, left him feeling detached or disconnected from reality “as if in a dream or surreal state, a state of extreme confusion wherein his brain was in turmoil.”

“He is responsible for the deaths of these people,” Hicks concluded, but added that Veltman did not have the necessary “mental acuity for planning and deliberation” for murder or terrorism.

Veltman faces up to life in prison if convicted of first-degree murder. Manslaughter carries a maximum penalty of seven years in prison.

New York Governor signs legislation, makes Diwali a public school holiday

New York State Governor Kathy Hochul said that the legislation to designate Diwali as a New York City school holiday is “an opportunity for our children to learn about and celebrate traditions from across the world.”

(By Our Staff Reporter) In a historic move, New York State Governor Kathy Hochul signed legislation making Diwali a school holiday for New York City public schools.

“New York City is rich in different religions and cultures, and we’re taking an important step to recognise and celebrate this diversity in the school calendar,” Hochul said Tuesday.

The legislation requires that all public schools in New York City be closed on the “15th day of the eighth month of the Indian calendar in each year, which is known as Diwali,” a press release issued by Hochul’s office said. Hochul said that the legislation to designate Diwali as a New York City school holiday is “an opportunity for our children to learn about and celebrate traditions from across the world.” Hochul signed the legislation during a special reception at the Hindu Temple Society of North America in Flushing, New York to commemorate



The press release said that the legislation amends the education law to declare Diwali a holiday for New York City public schools.

“Many people of the Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist faiths in New York City and throughout the state observe the festival of Diwali and more than 1 billion people around the world celebrate this

Jenifer Rajkumar, who is the first Indian-American and first Hindu elected to New York State Office and led efforts to make Diwali a school holiday in New York City, said generations of New Yorkers to come will now observe Diwali, the Festival of Lights.

“By signing my bill, we say to over 600,000 Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist New Yorkers, ‘We see you, we recognise you, and Diwali is an American holiday’”, Rajkumar said.

Rajkumar said she was proud to lead and win the fight for the Diwali School Holiday this year.

“Today, my historic Diwali bill is officially signed into law,” she said as she thanked Hochul for signing “my momentous bill.” Rajkumar noted that for over two decades, the South Asian community has lobbied for the Diwali holiday.

“With the signing of my bill, we have lit an everlasting lamp in the hearts and minds of all New Yorkers. This is an achievement that will outlive me,” she said.

New York State Senator Joseph Addabbo said that in this time of “local and global racism and anger”, Diwali’s

message is critically important and needed.

“Diwali is a joyous occasion that holds immense significance for millions of people around the world and in our state. As we come together to commemorate this festival, we are reminded of the Diwali holiday’s message - the triumph of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and good over evil,” Addabbo said.

“The Diwali celebration not only represents the rich cultural heritage of our diverse community but also serves as a reminder of the values that bind us together. It reminds us of the importance of compassion, kindness, and understanding in our interactions with one another,” he said.

Addabbo voiced appreciation for Hochul’s approval to acknowledge Diwali as a school holiday and commended Rajkumar for her initiative in passing the legislation in the Assembly and working with his legislative team in passing the bill in the Senate. New American Voter Association President Dr Dilip Nath said in the release he is proud to see Hochul finally fulfilling a long past Diwali recognition holiday into law. “On the day of the Diwali so no student will have to choose between celebrating with their family or their school obligations.”

Indian Diaspora Council International President Ashook Ramsaran termed the signing of the legislation as a “significant achievement following decades of grassroots efforts” in New York.

Ramsaran said in the press release that Diwali is the ‘triumph of light over darkness, of good over evil’ and its lessons are more relevant as turmoil, inhumanity and divisiveness impact many people worldwide.”

Bangladesh Puja Ujjapan Parishad New York President Bhajan Sarker said the 300,000 New Yorkers who celebrate Diwali will now be able to celebrate it with their entire families without being forced to forgo sending their children to school.”

Nepali Community Leader and Executive Member of the Hami Nepali Nabaraj KC said, “On behalf of the Nepali Community we are profoundly grateful to our beloved Governor Kathy Hochul for recognising the Hindu community and Diwali festival of lights.”



Diwali.

In a post on X, Hochul said that she believes a celebration of light should not be commemorated in the dark.

“That’s why tonight, we took action to bring people together. As we gathered to celebrate Diwali, I was proud to sign historic legislation making Diwali a New York City public school holiday!” According to the New York City Department of Education, there were 1,047,895 students in the NYC school system, the largest school district in the United States, in 2022-23. Of those students, 16.5 per cent were Asians. There are 1,867 schools within the Department of Education as of Fall 2022, including 275 charter schools.

holiday,” the release added.

New York State Assemblywoman



Biden seeks to calm relationship with Xi amid global crises

President Joe Biden, beset by conflicts around the world, is seeking to steady his fraught relationship with Chinese President Xi Jinping so the White House can instead focus its energy on Israel, Ukraine and the upcoming reelection campaign, according to three senior administration officials.

The two will hold their high-stakes meeting Wednesday — their first face-to-face meeting in a year, and likely their last before the U.S. presidential election — amid a growing threat of military conflict between the world's two largest economies and a deepening mistrust that has pushed relations to their lowest point in a half century. Adding to the tension: Biden is expected to press Xi on China's ties with Iran, including how the Chinese leader can use his influence with Tehran to prevent Iran and its proxies from turning the Israel-Hamas war into a wider regional conflict, according to the officials, who were granted anonymity to discuss international deliberation and strategy.

"Both sides need to avoid blowing each other up," former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Rick Waters, the inaugural coordinator of the State Department's China House, said about the rising risk of conflict between the two countries. "That's the type of signal

three separate airstrikes on those groups' Syrian-based facilities.

Biden also plans to focus on climate cooperation, China's role in the U.S. opioid overdose epidemic and Beijing's alignment with Russia's war on Ukraine, according to the officials.

During Monday's White House briefing, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan



said Biden "sees this not just as a one-off meeting but as an important moment to be able to establish the kind of basis upon which we can proceed out into the future."

Xi will urge Biden to "respect China's concerns and legitimate right to development, rather than emphasizing its own concerns at the expense of China's," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said on

State in the Obama administration and now the CEO of the U.S.-based Asia Group consultancy.

Biden had hoped to come to the summit from a point of strength, presenting the U.S. as the reliable leader of a regional alliance of democracies — all aligned against Beijing. But domestic politics are threatening that narrative. Biden is

relationship to where it was in Bali, before tensions escalated. "It's not an auspicious time for American compromises toward China," said Susan Shirk, former deputy assistant secretary of state and current chair of the 21st Century China Center at the University of California San Diego. The Chinese are also "not really energized to produce major deliverables."

But there will likely be some successes. The White House plans to announce a new commitment by Beijing to stem the flow of chemicals to Mexico that cartels process into fentanyl. One of the officials said that communication between the two nations — including working toward setting up the San Francisco meeting — had grown easier in recent weeks. One

scheduled to arrive late Tuesday night in San Francisco as congressional lawmakers struggle to pass a government funding bill, and disputes between the White House and senior Senate Democrats are threatening to derail Biden's signature trade agreement that was slated to be unveiled at the APEC summit. That opens up an opportunity for Xi.

"Xi can use APEC as a forum to present China as a compelling alternative" to U.S. global leadership, said Craig Singleton, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a nonprofit research institute. "And this message occurring at the same time as the U.S. is grappling with government funding negotiations, it feeds the narrative that the U.S. is unreliable and China represents an alternative."

Biden will need to convince Xi that the U.S. and China still have wiggle room to cooperate. That's a hard sell considering Biden calls Beijing a threat to the "rules based international order," accuses it of committing genocide in Xinjiang against predominantly-Muslim Uyghurs, and has waged a three-year campaign to rally partners into coalitions that counter China's growing diplomatic, economic and military muscle.

The U.S. is pursuing "comprehensive containment, encirclement and suppression against us," Xi declared in a March speech to Communist Party officials.

The biggest accomplishment may be that the two men are talking at all, according to two of the officials. In many ways, the U.S. hopes are modest: restore the bilateral

highlight could involve the resumption of high-level military-to-military ties, an administration official told reporters last week. Beijing suspended those links as a reprisal for then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit in 2022 to Taiwan. There are few unifying issues in a divided Washington, but being hawkish on Beijing has created some bipartisanship. And lawmakers in both parties agree that the state of U.S.-China ties demands more from the meeting than just vague rhetoric.

"We have to see action that matches the words," said Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi of Illinois, top Democrat on the House Select Committee on China, specifically referring to China's "incessant hacking, the incessant theft of intellectual property, the dumping of economic goods" in the U.S.

Biden will likely also face pressure from others at the forum. "U.S. allies are telling Biden 'You've got to put a floor under this — you cannot allow your relationship with China to deteriorate,'" said David Rank, former chargé d'affaires at the U.S. embassy in Beijing during the Obama administration.

In just the past two weeks, U.S. and Chinese officials have met in locales including Beijing, San Francisco and Washington to discuss matters including climate cooperation, rights of people with disabilities, nuclear nonproliferation, maritime issues and economic ties. Beijing is "ready to strengthen communication and dialogue with the United States at all levels," Chinese Vice President Han Zheng said last week. Their leaders will test that rhetoric on Wednesday.



you need from a meeting like this." The meeting — on the sidelines of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in San Francisco — comes as the U.S. seeks to avoid a potential government shutdown. China, meanwhile, is struggling to emerge from a severe economic downturn following countrywide shutdowns during the pandemic and shrinking foreign investment.

China's ties to Iran have become a more urgent priority given what the Pentagon calls near-daily attacks on U.S. forces in the Middle East by Iran-backed militants. The U.S. has responded with

Monday. The two leaders have had no direct contact since they last met a year ago at the G20 meeting in Bali, Indonesia, and pledged to cool tensions. But the presence of an alleged Chinese spy balloon over the continental U.S. in February, Beijing's increasing saber rattling toward Taiwan, and new U.S. high-tech export restrictions targeting China have further soured the relationship.

The pair need to show a "clear ability to manage tension in a way that doesn't spill over into crises that neither country wants to get into," said Nirav Patel, former deputy assistant secretary of

UK top court declares government's plan to send migrants to Rwanda as 'illegal'

Five justices on the UK's top court ruled unanimously that asylum-seekers sent to Rwanda would be "at real risk of ill-treatment" because they could be returned to the home countries they'd fled.

(News Agency)-Britain's Supreme Court on Wednesday said that the government's contentious plan to send some migrants on a one-way trip to Rwanda is illegal, striking a major blow to a key policy of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's government that has drawn international attention and criticism.

Five justices on the country's top court ruled unanimously that asylum-seekers sent to Rwanda would be "at real risk of ill-treatment" because they could be returned to the home countries they'd fled. Sunak, who has pledged to stop migrants reaching Britain in small boats across the English Channel, said the ruling "was not the outcome we wanted."

But he added, "we have spent the last few months planning for all eventualities and we remain completely committed to stopping the boats." Refugee and human rights groups welcomed the decision. Charity ActionAid U.K. called it a vindication of "British values of compassion and dignity." Amnesty International urged the British government to "draw a line under a disgraceful chapter in the U.K.'s political history."

Britain and Rwanda signed a deal in April 2022 to send some migrants who arrive in the U.K. as stowaways or in boats to the East African country, where their asylum claims would be processed and, if successful, they would stay.

Britain's government argued that the Rwanda policy would deter people from



risking their lives crossing one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, and would break the business model of people-smuggling gangs. Opposition politicians, refugee groups and human rights organizations said the plan was unethical and unworkable. No one has yet been sent to the country as the plan was challenged in the courts.

Reading the unanimous decision, President of the Supreme Court Robert Reed said Rwanda could not be relied on to keep its promises not to mistreat asylum-seekers sent from Britain.

He cited the country's poor human rights record, including enforced disappearances and torture, and said Rwanda practiced "refoulement" – sending migrants back to unsafe home countries. The judges concluded there were "substantial grounds

for believing that asylum-seekers would face a real risk of ill-treatment by reason of refoulement in the event that they were removed to Rwanda."

The U.K. government has argued that while Rwanda was the site of a genocide that killed more than 800,000 people in 1994, the country has since built a reputation for stability and economic progress. Critics say that stability comes at the cost of political repression. The court's judgment noted multiple rights breaches, including political killings that had led U.K. police "to warn Rwandan nationals living in Britain of credible plans to kill them on the part of that state." They said Rwanda has a 100% rejection record for asylum-seekers from war-torn countries including Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan.

"The evidence establishes substantial

grounds for believing that there is a real risk that asylum claims will not be determined properly, and that asylum-seekers will in consequence be at risk of being returned directly or indirectly to their country of origin," the judges said. "In that event, genuine refugees will face a real risk of ill-treatment in circumstances where they should not have been returned at all." The ruling leaves in tatters a policy that has cost the British government at least 140 million pounds (\$175 million) in payments to Rwanda, without anyone being sent to that country. The first deportation flight was stopped at the last minute in June 2022, when the European Court of Human Rights intervened.

In December, the High Court in London ruled that the Rwanda plan is legal, but that the government must consider the individual circumstances of each case before putting anyone on a plane.

The Court of Appeal in June backed a challenge by asylum-seekers from countries including Syria, Vietnam and Iran. The court ruled that the plan was unlawful because Rwanda is not a "safe third country." That was challenged at the Supreme Court by the government, which argued at a hearing last month that it had thoroughly assessed the risks and would ensure that Rwanda's government abides by its agreement to protect migrants' rights. It's unclear whether the British government will try to keep the policy alive.

US House passes spending bill to avert government shutdown

(News Agency)-The US House of Representatives on Tuesday passed a temporary spending bill that would avert a government shutdown, with broad support from lawmakers in both parties. The legislation, which would extend government funding through mid-January, now heads to the Senate, where Democratic and Republican leaders have voiced support.

To prevent a shutdown, the Senate and Republican-controlled House must enact legislation that President Joe Biden can sign into law before current funding for federal agencies expires at midnight on Friday. The 336-95 vote was a victory for House Speaker Mike Johnson, who faced down opposition from some of his fellow Republicans, in the first consequential vote of his tenure. Johnson was elected to the post less than three weeks ago, following weeks of tumult that left the chamber without a leader. With a slim

221-213 majority, he can afford to lose no more than three Republican votes on legislation that Democrats oppose. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat, said in a statement on



Tuesday night after the vote that he was pleased the bill passed "with a strong bipartisan vote," adding that he would work with his Senate Republican counterpart, Mitch McConnell, to pass it "as soon as possible."

The stopgap spending bill would extend government funding at current levels into

2024, giving lawmakers more time to craft the detailed spending bills that cover everything from the military to scientific research. Some Republicans on the party's right flank said they were frustrated that it did not include the steep spending cuts and border-security measures they sought. The bill passed with 209 Democratic and 127 Republican votes, while 93 Republicans and two Democrats voted against it.

Johnson's predecessor as speaker, Kevin McCarthy, was ousted by a handful of Republicans after a similar vote in September that relied on Democratic votes to avert a shutdown.

But hardline conservatives said they were not turning against Johnson. "We don't support it. But we do support him," said Representative Bob Good.

Other Republicans said it was better than

other options.

"This isn't ideal," Republican Representative Mike Garcia said. "But a shutdown is a far worse world to be in." Johnson's bill would extend funding for military construction, veterans benefits, transportation, housing, urban development, agriculture, the Food and Drug Administration and energy and water programs through Jan. 19. Funding for all other federal operations - including defense - would expire on Feb. 2.

Congress is in its third fiscal standoff this year, following a months-long spring impasse over the more-than-\$31 trillion in U.S. debt, which brought the federal government to the brink of default.

The ongoing partisan gridlock led Moody's on Friday to lower its credit rating outlook on the U.S. to "negative" from "stable," as it noted that high interest rates would continue to drive borrowing costs higher.

China's Xi Jinping in US on first visit in 6 years, to meet Biden to thaw ties

Chinese President Xi Jinping began his first visit to the United States in six years on Tuesday, after President Joe Biden said he aimed to restore normal communications with Beijing.

(News Agency)-Chinese President Xi Jinping began his first visit to the United States in six years on Tuesday, after President Joe Biden said he aimed to restore normal communications with Beijing and his top diplomat stressed the need for freedoms that Washington says Beijing is undermining in the Asia-Pacific region.

Xi is on his first visit to the US since 2017. He is due to meet Biden at an undisclosed location in the San Francisco Bay Area on Wednesday morning and then attend the annual summit of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. Xi's summit with Biden will be the first face-to-face meeting between the US and Chinese leaders in a year and has been billed by US officials as an opportunity to reduce friction in what many see as the world's most dangerous rivalry.

Xi waved from the steps of his Air China plane upon arrival and descended to meet US officials on the tarmac, including Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and US Ambassador to China



Nicholas Burns. He then got into his Chinese Hongqi, or "Red Flag," limousine and departed the airport into San Francisco, where demonstrations were expected both for and against his visit.

Less than two hours earlier, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken addressed ministers of the 21-member APEC and stressed the US believed in "a region where economies are free to choose their own path ... where goods, ideas, people flow lawfully and freely."

Blinken did not mention China by name, but his language echoed US rhetoric in recent years in which Washington has accused China of bullying smaller

countries in the Indo-Pacific and trying to undermine what the US and its allies call the "rules-based" order.

US Trade Representative Katherine Tai, who with Blinken opened the APEC ministerial session, said the San Francisco meeting came at a time of "great uncertainty and challenges" for the region. She noted increasing geopolitical tensions, fragile supply chains and a worsening climate crisis. Earlier, Biden said he aimed to improve the relationship with China after a period of strained ties and would seek to resume normal communications between the two superpowers, including military-to-military

contacts.

White House national security spokesperson John Kirby told reporters that Biden and Xi would also talk about the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza as well as US efforts to support Ukraine in its fight against the Russian military.

Economic issues will be high on the agenda.

Biden said the US does not want to decouple from China, but wants to change the economic relationship for the better.

His administration has made a push to "de-risk" some critical US supply chains from China as the two countries' economic and military competition has grown. Biden has been careful to assure countries in the region, including China, that the US does not seek complete economic separation, a notion that has fueled concerns among Washington's partners and allies of a superpower showdown that would upend the global economy.

China severed military-to-military contacts with the US after then-House of

Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited democratically governed but Chinese-claimed Taiwan in August 2022.

Restoring the contacts is a top US goal to avoid miscalculations between the two militaries. Washington also hopes for more cooperation from Beijing in combating production of the potent synthetic opioid drug fentanyl, which has become a scourge in the United States and particularly in San Francisco. Sino-US relations worsened after Biden ordered the shooting down in February of a suspected Chinese spy balloon that flew over the United States. Top Biden administration officials have since visited Beijing and met with their counterparts in an effort to rebuild communications and trust. Several hundred mostly pro-China demonstrators carrying Chinese flags gathered outside the Chinese delegation's hotel ahead of Xi's arrival in the US. Larger protests, including by rights groups critical of Xi's policies in Tibet, Hong Kong and towards Muslim Uyghurs, are expected near the summit venue on Wednesday.

Italian man who stabbed his partner 57 times freed due to jail's poor diet

(News Agency)-Dimitri Fricano, who was given a 30-years jail term for killing his girlfriend, was released from jail after a court ruled that the high-calorie diet served to him in the prison could kill him. A 200 kg Italian man, convicted of killing his girlfriend by stabbing her 57 times, has been released from prison after a court ruled that the high-calorie diet served to him in the prison could kill him. As per the New York Post, the man, identified as Dimitri Fricano (35), was convicted by a local court for killing his girlfriend Erika Preti (25) by stabbing her over 57 times after she chided him for leaving too many bread crumbs on the bed. The incident happened in 2017, when the duo were vacationing in Sardinia, Italy. He was nearly 118 kg when he was sentenced to 30-years imprisonment by The Turin Surveillance Court in 2019 for murder. However, he started his jail term in April 2022 due to delays caused by Covid-19. Over the past year, Niella's weight ballooned to 200kg, leading the



court to release him from prison on medical grounds.

In the ruling, the court said that Fricano cannot remain in prison as he is "incompatible with the prison regime" due to his weight, which makes it difficult for him to get around without a wheelchair or crutches. Fricano, who is also a chain smoker, cannot be put in jail as the officials

are unable to provide the low-calorie diet he needs to shed his weight, the court added in their verdict. As per the court's order, Fricano will serve the rest of his sentence under house arrest at his parents' home near Milan, where he can get access to a low-calorie diet. However, the victim's family condemned the move and termed it as "shameful". Speaking to a local

newspaper, Preti's father, Fabrizio Preti, said, "No one will give me back my little girl. But for us, the pain is still too strong for him to be released so soon."

"It was like receiving a stab to the heart," he added.

WHAT HAPPENED IN 2017

Fricano and Preti had been vacationing in San Teodoro on the island of Sardinia in June 2017 when they got into an argument about his sloppy eating habits.

He claimed that Preti hit him with a paperweight, prompting him to grab a knife and plunge it into her body for as many as 57 times. Initially, he blamed his girlfriend's killing on robbers, but eventually confessed to his crime during questioning by the police. "She insulted me for the bread and then hit me in the head, so I killed her," Fricano was quoted as telling the police. As per his counsel, Fricano is suffering from several medical conditions, including anxiety-depressive bulimia syndrome, personality disorder and sleep apnea.

Children, elderly people among 70 killed in Burkina Faso village massacre

Assailants in northern Burkina Faso killed about 70 people, most of them children and the elderly people, in a village massacre earlier this month.

(News Agency)-Assailants in northern Burkina Faso killed about 70 people, most of them children and the elderly, in a village massacre earlier this month that remains under investigation, authorities said Monday.

Prosecutor Simon B Gnanou said the attack took place in the village of Zaongo, located around 60 kilometers (37 miles) from the city of Boulsa.

"At the current stage of our findings and the testimonies collected, the perpetrators of these atrocities remain unknown for the moment," Gnanou said in a news release. The West African nation has been grappling with a jihadi insurgency linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group for years. Thousands of people have been killed and more than 2 million internally displaced. On Sunday, the European Union placed the death toll from the village massacre at nearly 100. Investigators were meeting with families of the victims and expected to then update the provisional death toll of 70 people, Gnanou said.



It took two days for local law enforcement to alert others of the attack and four more days before a team of investigators could reach the scene where they found dozens of homes burned, he said. An attack on the convoy of investigators also had to be repelled at one point, he added.

"In these painful circumstances, my prosecution presents its most saddened

condolences to the grieving families and its wishes for a speedy recovery for the injured," Gnanou said. The jihadi violence in Burkina Faso has led to two coups, with the current junta seizing power in September 2022. The junta, led by Capt. Ibrahim Traore, has been accused by rights groups of committing abuses against civilians and cracking down on civil liberties in the name of securing the

country.

Earlier this month, the junta enacted an emergency law against perceived dissidents to expand its crackdown, according to a report by Human Rights Watch. The junta notified at least a dozen journalists, civil society activists and opposition members that they would be conscripted to participate in government security operations across the country, the report said.

In its attempt to stem the jihadi threat, the government has enlisted tens of thousands of volunteer fighters, but civilians say the volunteers indiscriminately kill people suspected of working with the jihadis. Many communities say they are more afraid of the volunteers than the extremists.

In a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, last week, Molly Phee, head of African affairs at the U.S. State Department, said she was "shocked and saddened" by the news of the killings in Zaongo and urged authorities to investigate and hold those responsible to account.

Hamas demands release of 194 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons



sible prisoner swap

He also said that if there was any such development, the government would directly inform the people. Meanwhile, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant on Thursday said that the only way for the Hamas to release hostages that it captured following its massive assault on October 7, is to exert more military pressure on the terrorist group.

According to Israeli authorities, 238 people are being held captive in Gaza, including Israelis and foreign nationals. Some media reports have claimed about 30 of the hostages are children. Since the war began, Hamas has released four civilian hostages, while a female soldier was rescued by the Israeli forces. On Tuesday, Israeli sources confirmed that a soldier captured by the Hamas had been killed. The terrorist group claimed that she was among of 57 hostages killed in the ongoing Israeli airstrikes in Gaza.

(News Agency)- The Hamas militant group has demanded the release of 194 Palestinians currently being held in Israeli prisons in exchange for Israeli hostages. Sources in the Israeli Foreign Ministry, who are currently in mediating efforts in Qatar, told IANS that the Hamas's demand is especially for the women and children languishing in Israeli jails on various charges. But the Israeli government has not approved to any such demand, informed officials said. The Qatari mediators, according to the sources, have put forward a suggestion of releasing 50 hostages kidnapped from Israel on October 7. But the Israeli side has not agreed to it. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed the development, saying it was just rumours and that no discussions had taken place on a pos-

Church of England backs services for gay couples

(News Agency)- In a first, parishes under the Church of England will allow special services for gay couples, which will include the wearing of rings, prayers, confetti and a blessing from the priest, but not formal weddings. Although the Church of England's official teaching is that marriage is only between one man and one woman, an amendment to back the services on a trial basis passed in the General Synod -- the Church's legislative body -- by one vote on Wednesday, reports the BBC. The passing of the vote means that the distinct services of blessing could now be allowed, rather than simply prayers within a normal church service. While there is no set timeframe for temporary trial services to begin, it is understood these could be authorised in the coming weeks with the first services in the new year.

The Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Rev Stephen Croft, who has campaigned for a change

in the Church's stance, said he was "delighted". Noting the services would not be official weddings, he added: "I hope there will be a similar joy and affirmation and those that come to receive these prayers will feel fully welcomed into the life of the church." The Church of England's official position on marriage is at odds with its Anglican equivalent in Scotland -- The Scottish Episcopal Church -- and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, which both allow same-sex weddings, the BBC reported. The Anglican Church in Wales has provided an authorised service of blessing for gay couples but does not allow same-sex weddings in church. Earlier this year, bishops refused to back a change in teaching which would have allowed priests to marry same-sex couples, but said they would allow prayers of blessings for people in gay relationships as part of wider services.

'Maldives is too small to be...': President-elect says 'going to work with India, China'

Around 70 Indian military personnel maintain New Delhi-sponsored radar stations and surveillance aircraft. Indian warships help patrol Maldives' exclusive economic zone.

(News Agency)The incoming president of Maldives, Mohamed Muizzu, who promised to remove Indian troops from the island nation after taking office, said his country is too small to be entangled in geopolitical rivalry. He added that the Maldives is going to "work together with all the countries, including India and China."

In a recent interview with news agency AFP, Muizzu said, "Maldives is too small to be entangled in geopolitical rivalry. I am not very much interested



to engage the Maldivian foreign policy in this." The 45-year-old leader, who will be sworn in as Maldives President on Friday, said, "We are going to work together with all the countries, India, China and all other countries as well." In October, Muizzu, in an interview published by

Bloomberg News, had said that Maldives has started negotiations with India to remove its military presence. Removing Indian troops was a key campaign pledge by Muizzu, who ousted President Ibrahim Solih last month. Around 70 Indian military personnel maintain New Delhi-sponsored radar stations and surveillance aircraft. Indian warships help patrol Maldives' exclusive economic zone. Muizzu's election success in September hinged on a sustained campaign against

India's outsized political and economic clout in the Maldives, and specifically his pledge to eject Indian forces.

However, he had said that asking India to remove military personnel in no way indicated that he was going to allow China or any other country to bring their military troops to Maldives.

Muizzu was regarded as a proxy of pro-China former president Abdulla Yameen, who had shifted the country heavily into Beijing's orbit till his 2018 defeat.

Sri Lanka top court says Rajapaksa brothers guilty of worst economic crisis

Sri Lanka's Supreme Court on Tuesday said that the powerful Rajapaksa brothers, including two ex-presidents, were guilty of triggering the island's worst financial crisis by mishandling the economy.

(News Agency)- Sri Lanka's Supreme Court on Tuesday issued a symbolic ruling that the powerful Rajapaksa brothers -- including two ex-presidents -- were guilty of triggering the island's worst financial crisis by mishandling the economy. The case was filed by corruption watchdog Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) and four other activists against top former officials, including former presidents Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Mahinda Rajapaksa. It also included their younger brother, ex-finance minister Basil



Rajapaksa, two former central bank governors and other top treasury officials. "We sought a declaration from the court that the mishandling or inaction on the economy by the former heads of the state and senior officials did violate the fundamental rights of people," Transparency International lawyer Nadishani Perera told AFP. "We have received that. It is now up to the citizens to take any

further action."

A five-member bench ruled 4-1 that the group were responsible for economic mismanagement between 2019 and 2022, ordering them to pay just over \$450 (150,000 rupees) as legal costs to the petitioners.

"Given that petitioners came to court in the interest of the public and did not seek compensation for themselves, the court was not inclined to order compensation other than costs incurred by petitioners," Transparency International said in a statement. The financial crisis sparked months of public protests with

dire shortages of food, fuel and medicines, which eventually toppled Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Rajapaksa centralised power after taking office in 2019 by removing independent oversight from the police, judiciary and election authorities.

But his administration stumbled when a critical foreign currency shortage left Sri Lanka unable to import vital goods.

Rajapaksa has since returned to Sri Lanka and is living under armed protection, despite calls for his arrest and prosecution on a raft of corruption charges.

Foxconn founder Terry Gou to run for Taiwan president

(News Agency)-Terry Gou, the billionaire founder of major Apple supplier Foxconn, has collected three times the amount of signatures needed to qualify to run in Taiwan's presidential elections, the government said on Tuesday. In a statement, Gou thanked his backers for their "enthusiastic support" and vowed to work hard to achieve "peace across the Taiwan Strait".



Gou announced his bid in August, saying he wanted to unite the opposition and ensure the island did not become "the next Ukraine", blaming the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) for taking Taiwan to the brink of war by antagonising China which claims the island as its own territory. Gou, who stepped down as Foxconn chief in 2019, had to gather around 300,000 voter signatures by Nov.

2 to qualify as an independent candidate, according election regulations. The election commission said he got more than 900,000 valid signatures.

Gou, 73, is one of four candidates in the election. Opinion polls show he is the least favoured candidate, well behind front-runner, Lai Ching-te of the DPP and who is currently vice president.

13th Hockey India Senior Men National Championship 2023 begins in Chennai on Friday

The 13th Hockey India Senior Men National Championship will commence on November 17 in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. The tournament will see twenty-nine teams, divided into eight pools, vying to make it to the final on November 28. Notably, the National Championship will be held at the



same venue that saw the Indian Men's

Hockey Team clinch the Hero Asian Champions Trophy Chennai 2023 earlier this year. Pool A will consist of defending Champions Hockey Haryana, Chhattisgarh Hockey, and Hockey Gujrat. Hockey Unit of Tamil Nadu, Hockey Himachal and Assam Hockey are placed in Pool B. Pool C will feature Hockey Karnataka, Hockey Bihar,

Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu Hockey. Pool D comprises Hockey Maharashtra, Hockey Punjab, Hockey Uttarakhand, and Tripura Hockey. Hockey Bengal, Hockey Madhya Pradesh, Hockey Jammu & Kashmir, and Manipur Hockey will battle it out in Pool E. Pool F will see Hockey Jharkhand go up against Hockey Chandigarh, Hockey Andhra Pradesh, and Goans Hockey. Pool G is made up of Uttar Pradesh Hockey, Le Puducherry Hockey, Kerala Hockey, and Hockey Rajasthan. Meanwhile, Pool H will feature Delhi Hockey, the Hockey Association of Odisha, Telangana Hockey, and Hockey Arunachal. The

table topper from each pool will qualify for the Quarter-Finals, the victors of which will advance to the semifinals, scheduled for November 27. The winners of the Semi-Finals will go toe to toe in the Final on 28th November. A total of 31 players from the National Core Group will be participating in this tournament.

Fischer's departure triggers melancholy in Union Berlin



thought it was the right time to go, and for the club to use the time to make a change. The departing coach has undoubtedly left his mark, taking the side to the Bundesliga along with the first

Three free days announced by Union Berlin president Dirk Zingler appear like a time of mourning at the club following the dismissal of head coach Urs Fischer. While the days off are possible due to the current international break, the story might give proof of how much the sacking of the 57-year-old Swiss has disturbed the club, reports Xinhua. "We haven't been talking about a successor. We will do that over the coming days, but not today," Zingler said about the action following a 14-match winless run across all competitions. The Union official praised Fischer's quality as a coach, and revealed that he had initiated his sacking as he

Champions League qualification in the club's history.

Zingler announced the team will be coached temporarily by U-19 coach Marco Grote and 2010 Women's Champions League winner Marie-Louise Eta. The 32-year-old is the first woman to take a coaching job in men's football in Germany. "We didn't talk to any coach. You can't do that while you are backing your current coach. Therefore, we needed an interim solution," the president added. Sitting bottom of the Bundesliga, Union are considering new arrivals for the squad in the upcoming winter break, most likely in collaboration with a new head coach.

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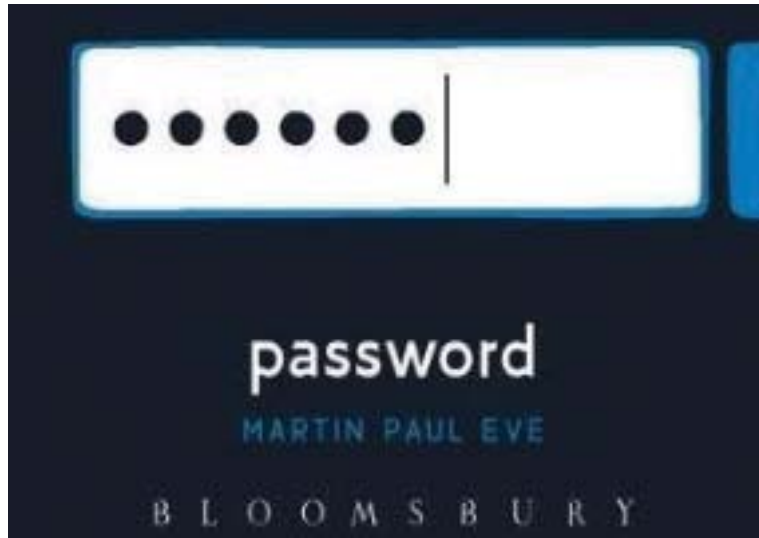
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'123456' most common password among Indians in 2023: Report



Words that refer to a specific location were also found in people's passwords. Internet users globally frequently search for country or city names, and India is no exception, with 'India@123' ranking high on the country's list.

The word 'admin', which, most likely, is one of the passwords that people do not bother changing, made it among this year's most common passwords in India and many other countries, the report found. Last year's global winner 'password' did not leave Internet users' passwords. In India, 'password', 'Pass@123', 'Password@123', and similar variations appeared among the

most common passwords this year.

To find out about passwords Internet users employ for different platforms, researchers analyzed a 6.6 TB database of passwords, exposed by various stealer malware, which experts consider a huge threat to people's cybersecurity.

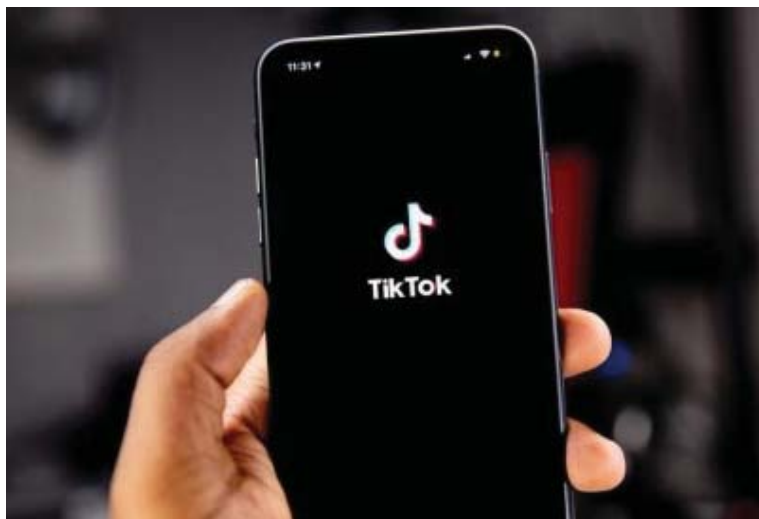
"The scariest part is that victims might not even realise that their computer is infected. Bad actors tend to hide malware in well-crafted phishing emails, imitating a legitimate organisation, such as your bank or your company," said Tomas Smalakys, CTO at

NordPass. Almost a third (31 per cent) of the world's most popular passwords consist of purely numerical sequences, such as '123456789', '12345', '000000', and others.

According to the report, as many as 70 per cent of the passwords in this year's global list can be cracked in less than a second. Researchers suggested Passkeys as a new form of authentication for better security. "This technology will help eliminate lousy passwords, thus making users more secure. However, as with every innovation, passwordless authentication will not be adopted overnight," Smalakys said.

New Delhi : In 2023, '123456' password management solution company NordPass, word among Indians and world- people used the weakest pass- wide, a new report said on words for their streaming ac- Thursday. According to the counts in 2023.

14% US adults now regularly get news on TikTok: Pew report



same in recent years, according to a new poll from Pew Research.

"TikTok has become especially popular among teens -- two-thirds of whom report ever using the platform -- as well as young adults," the report noted. Among adults, those ages 18 to 29 are most likely to say they regularly get news on TikTok. About a third of Americans in this age group (32 per cent) say they regularly get news there, a higher share than in years before. This compares with 15 per cent of those ages 30 to 49, 7 per cent of those 50 to 64 and just 3 per cent of those 65 and older. More of TikTok's adult users are getting news there as well.

In just three years, the new report has shown. A growing share of US adults say they regularly get news from Chinese short-form video platform TikTok has more than quadrupled -- from 3 per cent in 2020 to 14 per cent in 2023, a

new report has shown. A growing share of US adults say they regularly get news on TikTok. This is in contrast with many other social media sites, where news consumption has either declined or stayed about the

Microsoft unveils text-to-speech avatar tool in deepfake era

Microsoft has introduced a new text-to-speech feature with vision capabilities, that enables users to create talking avatar videos with text input, and to build real-time interactive bots trained using human images. Called Azure AI Speech text and available in public preview, it allows customers to create synthetic videos of a 2D photorealistic avatar speaking. "The Neural text to speech Avatar models are trained by deep neural networks based on the human voice model," the company said during the

'Microsoft Ignite' event late on Wednesday. With text to speech avatar, the users can create more engaging digital interactions. They can use the avatar to build conversational agents, virtual assistants, chatbots, and more. The text-to-speech avatar is designed with the intention of protecting the rights of individuals and society, fostering transparent human-computer interaction, and counteracting the proliferation of harmful deepfakes and misleading content. "For this reason, custom avatar is a Limited Access feature available by registration only, and only for certain use cases."

Just 26% of Indian firms fully prepared to deploy, leverage AI

Only 26 per cent of organisations in India are fully prepared to deploy and leverage Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered technologies, a new report showed on Thursday. Indian companies are racing against time as 75 per cent of those surveyed said they have a maximum of one year to deploy their AI strategy or else it will have a negative impact on business, according to Cisco's 'AI Readiness Index'.

The research found that while AI adoption has been slowly progressing for decades, the advancements in Generative AI, coupled with public availability in the past year,



are driving greater attention to the challenges, changes and new possibilities posed by the technology. "As companies rush to deploy AI solutions, they must assess where investments are needed to ensure their infrastructure can best support the demands of AI workloads," said Liz Centoni, Executive Vice President and General Manager, Applications and Chief Strategy Officer, Cisco. "Organisations also need to be able to observe with context how AI is being used to ensure ROI, security, and especially responsibility," Centoni added.

Alia reacts to 'wipe it off' controversy on 'Koffee With Karan'

Bollywood actress Alia Bhatt, who graced the latest episode of the popular chat show 'Koffee With Karan' along with her sister-in-law Kareena Kapoor Khan, reacted to the "wipe it off" controversy surrounding her actor husband Ranbir Kapoor. A few weeks ago, Alia Bhatt mentioned that Ranbir asked her to wipe her lipstick off because he doesn't like her wearing lipstick. This led to a huge controversy on social media with a section of the Internet users

calling Ranbir an "apparent red flag" and a "toxic" partner. Some people also called Alia "blinded by her love" for Ranbir. However, now Alia has reacted to the controversy saying that her husband is the exact opposite of what the people have perceived him to be.

The 'Udta Punjab' actress told

the show host Karan Johar, "I have a very candid way of speaking. So when I talk about anything in my life, I like to



imitate the person, give anecdotes, and make it personal. I feel a lot of things get picked out of context, which happened recently with the video. My team told me 'Ye kuch out of hand jaa raha hai'. I was like, okay theek hai jaane do". She continued, "Then I realised that there were serious articles

written about how he was a toxic man, and I thought, 'are we serious?' There are many issues in the world to give more attention to."

She further mentioned that there was a line that was crossed but there was nothing that could be said about it. "As long as your movies are doing well please don't complain sitting in your apartment in Bandra," she added. Meanwhile, Alia registered a

massive success with her last film 'Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani'. Ranbir is currently gearing up for his upcoming gangster film 'Animal' which will clash with his 'Sanju' co-star Vicky Kaushal's 'Sam Bahadur' on December 1. 'Koffee with Karan' Season 8 streams on Disney+ Hotstar.

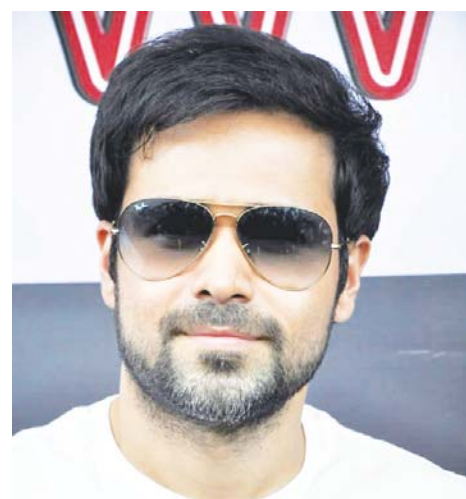


Emraan Hashmi: 'Delighted that people loved Salman, my showdown'

Actor Emraan Hashmi is happy that people are loving his showdown with superstar Salman Khan in 'Tiger 3'. He said that he relished the opportunity to play an anti-hero. Emraan said: "I'm thrilled

anti-hero and what could be better than going toe to toe with the biggest action superstar of our country, Salman Khan! I'm delighted that people have loved our showdown and that's great validation for me." YRF's Tiger 3 has recorded an astounding 169.75 crore nett and 272 crore gross worldwide in just 4 days and is on course to record another huge weekend from Friday! Emraan is thrilled with the love that people are pouring on him and Tiger 3!

He added: "I have always wanted to entertain people with my choice of films and playing an anti-hero liberated me to explore shades that I have never ventured into before. I'm



with the response to Tiger 3 and how people have showered love on my performance. We have started on a very good note and I expect the film to entertain audiences globally." "I relished the opportunity to play an

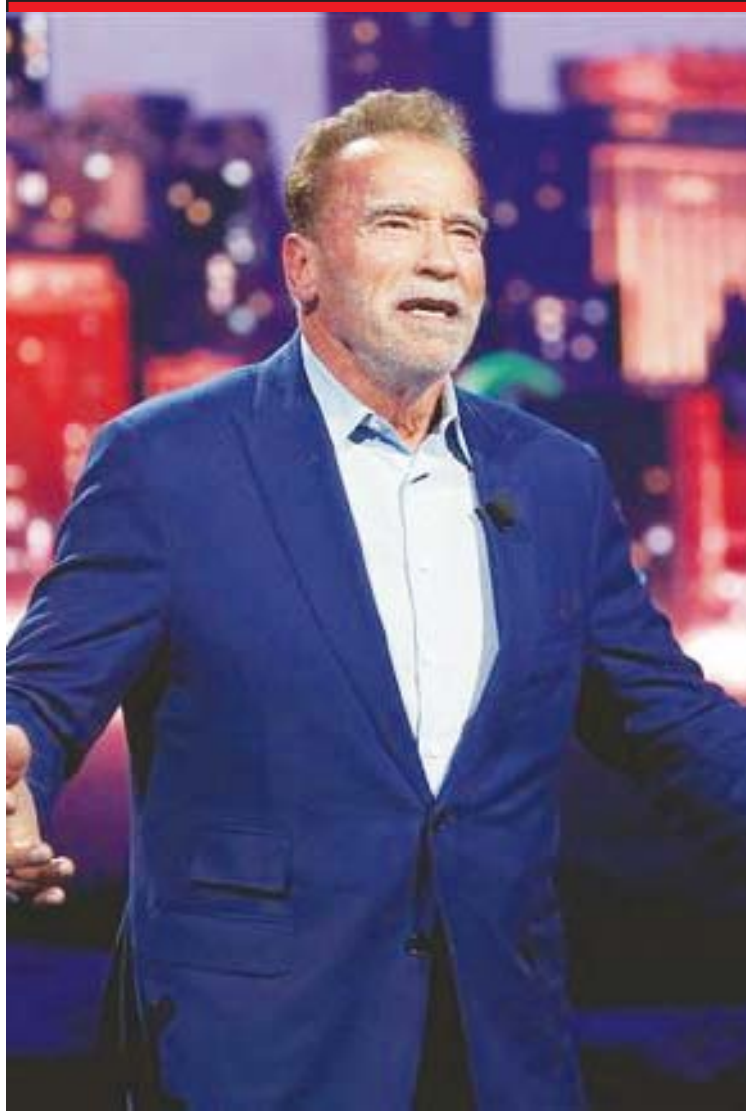
thankful to people for loving my villainous turn and for making Tiger 3 a successful film at the box office." Produced by Aditya Chopra and directed by Maneesh Sharma, 'Tiger 3' is running successfully in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu languages.

'Bigg Boss 17': Ankita Lokhande says she took pregnancy test in show

In the latest episode of 'Bigg Boss 17', actress Ankita Lokhande, who has been facing ups and downs in her married life with Vicky Jain in the show, shared that she missed her periods, took a pregnancy test inside the house and is now waiting for the result. It happened right after the house change, where Ankita remained in the "Dil" house and Vicky was shifted to "Dimaag". This caused a turmoil in their relationship. However, in the latest episode of the show, the couple was seen sitting in the garden area having a conversation, which once again led to a fight. Ankita then said, "Mein thak gayi, mein sach mein thak gayi, mentally. Mereko lag raha hain mein bimar hu, mereko feeling aa rahi hai andar se. I am not well. Mujhe period nahi aa raha hain, mujhe ghar jana hain." Vicky then said that she claimed she got her periods a day before, to which Ankita said that she went for a blood test. "I have gone through blood tests to check whether I am pregnant. I had the test yesterday and today, they did my urine test. My emotions are going up and down, I am going through something which I can't explain. I am confused and I am not blaming you for it."



Arnold Schwarzenegger slapped with lawsuit by woman left 'permanently disabled' after car crash



Los Angeles-Hollywood star Arnold Schwarzenegger is facing a legal problem following his alleged reckless driving. A few months after being involved in a nasty four-car accident, the actor has been slapped with a new lawsuit by a woman, who claims she was left "permanently disabled" due to the car crash. On Wednesday, November 15, Cheryl Augustine submitted the legal documents in Los Angeles County Superior. In the court papers, which were obtained by 'The Blast' and 'Radar Online', she claimed that she was left "permanently disabled" following the accident, which took place at Sunset Boulevard and Allenford Avenue in January, 2022, reports [aceshowbiz.com](#). Cheryl accused the actor of driving his Yukon SUV "recklessly." She wrote, "At said time and place, defendants, and each of them, so negligently, wantonly, unlawfully, wrongfully and recklessly drove, operated, serviced, maintained, entrusted, repaired and managed said vehicle to cause said vehicle to collide with plaintiff's vehicle and to proximately cause the hereinafter described injuries and damages to the plaintiff." In the legal document, Cheryl also elaborated that she suffered "injury to her body and shock and injury to her nervous

system and person all of which have caused and continue to cause plaintiff great physical and nervous pain suffering."

She was "required to, and did, employ physicians and surgeons to examine, treat and care for her," which needed "medical and incidental expenses, the amount of which is presently unknown" to her. Cheryl additionally explained that she "suffered out-of-pocket property damage, loss of use of her automobile, and incurred other out-of-pocket expenses in an amount not known." She alleged that she spent more than \$25,000 in damages, including "general damages... all medical and incidental expenses...all loss of earnings" since she couldn't go to work following the collision. The amount of money also included all damages to her car. In the legal documents, Cheryl also elaborated that she suffered "injury to her body and shock and injury to her nervous system and person all of which have caused and continue to cause plaintiff great physical and nervous pain suffering." She was "required to, and did, employ physicians and surgeons to examine, treat and care for her," which needed "medical and incidental expenses, the amount of which is presently unknown" to her.

Kerry Katona re-enacts iconic Pam Anderson scene, sizzles in bikini

Los Angeles-British singer Kerry Katona set social media on fire as she stripped down to a thong for her latest upload, sending her fans wild. She looked sensational as she posed up a storm in a picture taken while she was on holiday in sunny Spain, reports [Mirror.co.uk](#). However, it wasn't the scenery that delighted her dedicated followers as they flocked to compliment the 43-year-old. Warrington-born Kerry could be seen putting her gym-honed figure on display for all to see as she posed in front of the stunning mountains which appeared in the background of the shot. As per [Mirror.co.uk](#), the



former Atomic Kitten songstress looked sensational in a tiny red thong and matching bra. The former 'I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!' champion had her curves and muscular body on display as she flashed a smile while looking to the side as her blonde tresses cascaded freely down her back. Captioning her post, Kerry wrote: "Good morning," alongside a red lip emoji. Her upload which has racked up over 1,400 likes on X, formerly Twitter, left her fans speechless as they descended on the comments section.



Lizzo has 'trust issues with the world' amid sexual harassment case

Los Angeles-Singer Lizzo has talked about what she has been up to over recent months, saying that she has been working on her music and her body. "Hi. I'm working... on music, myself, relationships with people and food, my anxiety, my body, my business, and my trust issues with the world.. but they are deep now, deeper than they've ever been," Lizzo wrote on Instagram alongside a mirror selfie. Earlier this year, the popstar said that she's been forced to take her exercise regime more seriously since she



became a singer. The 'Truth Hurts' hitmaker explained that her on-stage performances demand a certain level of physical fitness, reports [aceshowbiz.com](#). Lizzo said on TikTok, "I have a very high-performance job. For 90 minutes a night, I have to do choreography, I have to sing, I have to dance, I have to rap, and I have to play the flute. And I have to emote,

and hype a crowd in very tight clothes, sometimes clothes where it restricts my breathing." Lizzo loves performing for her fans, but she's also aware that she needs to maintain a good level of fitness in order to do her job. The singer explained, "It's fun. I love my job. It takes a lot of physical endurance to do what I do, and I used to be very rockstar lifestyle, used to throw myself around on the stage. As I got more professional in my career, I started to take the physical part more seriously."

iPhones will support rich communication services in late 2024, confirms Apple

Apple has announced to support the RCS (Rich Communication Services) messaging standard on iPhones, used by most Android devices, in later 2024. In a statement to 9to5Mac, the tech giant said that RCS will offer better interoperability for cross-platform messages.

"Later next year, we will be adding support for RCS Universal Profile, the standard as currently published by the GSM Association. We believe RCS Universal Profile will offer a better interoperability experience when compared to SMS or MMS," an Apple spokesperson was quoted as saying.

This will work alongside iMessage, which will continue to be the best and most secure messaging experience for Apple users, said the company. Apple's decision came amid pressure from regulators, like European Union's Digital



Markets Act (DMA), and competitors like Google and Samsung. RCS brings iMessage-style features to cross-platform texts. The iPhone adopting RCS could enable support for encryption,



read receipts, typing indicators, high-res images and videos while sending texts between iPhone and Android devices. Apple will let users share locations in text threads and RCS messages will be

green, like SMS messages. However, Apple is not opening up iMessage to other platforms but instead replace SMS and MMS and "exist separately from iMessage when available."

In September, the European Commission opened up an investigation into iMessage to determine whether it should be considered a "core platform service."

Apple argued iMessage isn't popular enough in Europe for the rules to apply. Google and Samsung have been pushing for Apple to add support for RCS. "Everybody should have secure and modern messaging without worrying what kind of phone they're texting to. So glad to see Apple joining our ongoing work with the GSMA on RCS to make texting better for all," Google SVP of platforms and ecosystems, Hiroshi Lockheimer, posted on X.

Amazon partners Hyundai to start selling cars online next year



Amazon, which started with selling books to finally conquer the vast e-commerce space, will now sell cars online, partnering with South Korean automaker Hyundai to begin with. The e-commerce giant and Hyundai announced to start selling vehicles on its website in the second half of 2024. Hyundai vehicles will be sold on Amazon's US online store with other brands following later in the year, the companies announced during the '2023 LA Auto Show' late on Thursday. Amazon already sells car accessories and operates an "Amazon Vehicle Showrooms" site that allows manufacturers to advertise, but not cars, trucks or SUVs.

Amazon said that the shopping experience "will create another way for dealers to build awareness of their selection and offer convenience to their customers," reports TechCrunch.

Mike Sullivan, the president and owner of several LA-area dealerships, said, "We're now partnering with one of the world's leading digital retailers".

"Amazon also brings massive reach and marketing power to connect to more customers. We can't wait to get started," he was quoted as saying in the report.

Hyundai also said that it will use Amazon Web Services (AWS) as its preferred cloud provider and will integrate Alexa voice assistant in its future vehicles, according to the report.

Tim Cook, Elon Musk greet Xi Jinping at gala dinner



From Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk to Apple chief Tim Cook, top tech honchos and corporate leaders met Chinese President Xi Jinping during a gala dinner here during his state visit. Xi received standing ovations from more than 300 corporate leaders and top officials, including Cook and Blackstone's Steve Schwarzman.

Musk on Friday posted his photo with the Chinese President on X, saying, "May there be prosperity for all".

The gala dinner was hosted by the US-China Business Council and the National Committee on US-China Relations. "Whatever stage of development it may reach, China will never pursue hegemony or expansion, and will never impose its

will on others," the President told the gathering. Earlier, US President Joe Biden told his Chinese counterpart that they should keep their communications lines open and get to understand each other so as "to ensure that competition (between their countries) does not veer into conflict".

Xi reiterated his opposition to describing the relationship as competition saying it "is not the prevailing trend of current times". Biden said that the US is not trying to "decouple" from China, but pursuing better relations with its assertive rival. Xi arrived in San Francisco this week for a summit with Biden, and to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting.

How Indians Settled Abroad Are No Longer Apologetic About Showcasing Their Hindu Roots

By: Biswadeep Ghosh

Twenty-three-year-old all-rounder Rachin Ravindra, a Hindu boy born in Wellington to parents of Indian origin, wears the Black Cap on the cricket field. Rachin, whose first name is a portmanteau of Rahul (Dravid) and Sachin (Tendulkar), hit the headlines after sharing a video that went viral on social media. The gifted cricketer met his grandmother in Bengaluru during the ICC Cricket World Cup. In the video, he is sitting in an old-fashioned chair in what seems like a living room. The elderly lady is performing the 'nazar utarna' ritual (an age-old Hindu ritual performed to ward off the evil eye) to ensure the well-being of her grandson, who has distinguished himself in the prestigious tournament.

The caption accompanying the video read: "Jai Shree Ram. Blessed to have such an amazing family. Grandparents are angels whose memories and blessings stay with us forever." What was evident was the cricketer's respect for his grandparents and his Hindu identity, which he shared with his followers on social media. Many appreciated the youngster's attachment to his cultural



and religious roots despite living in distant Wellington, whose distance by flight from New Delhi is more than 12,500 kilometres. Much has changed since the not-so-distant past when many well-known Hindus from all walks of life resorted to plain fakeness, or at least partial hypocrisy, during any focus on their identity. They preferred to blow their pseudo-secular trumpets from the rooftops

for the world to hear. Avenues for self-expression have increased since then, and so has the desire to proclaim one's deep-rooted attachment to one's identity without being evasive, uneasy and diffident.

In a video shared by the World Hindu Congress's X (formerly Twitter) handle, off-break bowler Keshav Maharaj, a South African Hindu cricketer, has

expressed his support for the World Hindu Congress 2023 (WHC 2023) to be held in Bangkok, Thailand, from November 24-26. Born in Durban and married to Lerisha Munsamy, a kathak dancer of Indian origin like him, Maharaj has expressed his disappointment at not being able to attend the event because of the World Cup in which his team South Africa has stormed into the semifinals. He wished the organisers well and concluded with 'Jai Shree Ram.' Maharaj's great-great-grandfather had migrated to South Africa from Sultanpur in Uttar Pradesh. Born in Durban generations later, his sense of pride in his background is evident. Rishi Sunak, the United Kingdom's first Indian Prime Minister, made news after taking his oath as a Member of Parliament on the Bhagavad Gita. Well-known for his commitment to his faith, Sunak visited the Akshardham temple with his wife Akshata Murty ahead of the visit of G20 leaders this year. He reportedly said, "My wife and I were delighted to visit Swaminarayan Akshardham for darshan and puja this morning."

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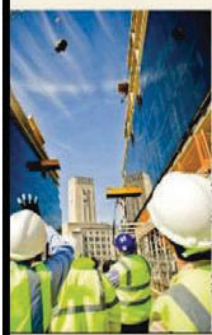


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Joe Biden's Middle East Mess

The Biden administration thought it could ignore the bad in the Middle East. Now his Middle East doctrine is collapsing.

By GREGG CARLSTROM

Speak to any Israeli official these days, and there is a good chance they will mention the conceptzia. The term traces back to the commission of inquiry after the surprise Yom Kippur war of 1973, a way to describe not just operational failures of intelligence but conceptual ones. Now as then, Israel's vaunted security services had built policy on a flawed assumption: this time, that Hamas was focused on preserving its grip on Gaza and had lost interest in large-scale confrontation with Israel. The concept made sense — until Hamas proved it grimly wrong by killing more than 1,400 Israelis on Oct. 7.

By now everyone in Washington has had a chuckle at Jake Sullivan, the president's national security adviser, who said in a speech on Sept. 29 that "the Middle East region is quieter today than it has been in two decades." His words aged poorly, to say the least. But they should have raised eyebrows even if Hamas had not carried out its violent attack.

Outside of the Gulf Cooperation Council, a club of stable petro-monarchies, the region is an arc of failed or failing states. Four countries are mired in civil war. Egypt, the most populous Arab country, is teetering on the brink of default, while Lebanon is enduring one of the worst economic crises in modern history. The list of calamities goes on, and the Middle East only looks quiet if one ignores it. But that is exactly what the Biden administration has tried to do.

American officials have struggled to articulate a "Biden doctrine" in the region, but Sullivan came closest in his September speech: "We want to depressurize, deescalate and ultimately integrate the Middle East region," he said. To do that the administration relied on three strands of policy: promote Arab-Israeli normalization, pursue diplomacy with Iran and push efforts at economic integration. These strands were meant to reinforce one another. They would ease the tensions of the Trump years, forge a new security alliance in the region and lock everyone in a virtuous circle of stability and growth. Everything else was shunted aside. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was ignored. Key diplomatic posts went unfilled: The administration did not bother to appoint an ambassador to Egypt until this March. Last year I asked an American diplomat to describe his country's Syria policy. He shrugged and laughed. His job, he said, was to keep the Middle East off Biden's desk,



echoing words I have heard repeatedly from American officials since 2021. This was America's flawed conceptzia. It thought expanding the Abraham Accords and reaching a truce with Iran would allow it to disengage from the Middle East. But a conflict that America tried to ignore has now pushed the Middle East to the brink of broader war, fueled by Iran and its proxies. The new Arab-Israeli security alliance is nowhere to be found: Most Arab states are too weak to play a role in the crisis, leaving America to rush troops back to a region it wanted to leave. "[Their] job was to keep the Middle East away from Biden's desk by supercharging all the 'good' tracks in the region, while pushing away the 'bad' stuff," was how one acquaintance, who works on Middle East policy, put it shortly after the Hamas attack. "Job well done."

The central focus of Biden's policy has been Arab-Israeli normalization, an idea he inherited from Donald Trump's administration and enthusiastically embraced. His team has spent many hours talking with Saudi and Israeli officials about a three-way deal that would see the Saudis recognize Israel and join the Abraham Accords.

A few boosters tried to argue that the accords could help Palestinians by giving Arab states greater leverage over Israeli decision-making. That was wishful thinking (witness their lack of influence today). The more plausible argument for the deal was that normalization would help cement a new security architecture in the region.

The first two countries to recognize Israel in 2020, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, shared Israel's antipathy toward Iran. So does Saudi Arabia. America's hope was that this sense of mutual threat would cement a military-and-security

alliance. If Arab states and Israel could integrate their missile defenses, for example, they could protect the region from Iran and its proxies without having to rely on American help. Perhaps one day they could go further and form an "Arab NATO".

That was always a fantasy. Weeks after the UAE recognized Israel, Anwar Gargash, a foreign-policy adviser to the UAE's president, said it was not meant to create an alliance against "this country or that party," a not-so-veiled reference to Iran. "The Abraham Accords were about advancing our interests, and war with Iran isn't one of them," a Gulf diplomat told me last year.

Sure enough, over the past few weeks, the Gulf states have not closed ranks with an Israel fighting a growing list of Iranian proxies. They are nervous that the Gaza war could spiral into broader regional conflict. The Saudis remember attacks on their oil fields in 2019, which temporarily knocked out half of their production; the UAE is still jittery after a drone attack on Abu Dhabi last year, which killed three migrant workers and rattled the country's image as an oasis of stability. Both were carried out by Iranian-backed groups. Since Oct. 7 America has rushed two aircraft-carrier groups to the eastern Mediterranean, deployed missile-defense batteries across the Middle East and dispatched planeloads of troops. Gulf states, meanwhile, have tried to stay neutral. The Saudis have signaled that they are still committed to the détente they struck with Iran in March. Emirati leaders have been publicly sympathetic to Israel and, in private, they are enthusiastic about the idea of toppling Hamas. But they too have sought to avoid taking sides in any regional conflict. Forced to choose

between America's desire for a regional security alliance and their own immediate self-interest, Gulf states opted for the latter. Diplomacy with Iran now looks naïve as well. The Biden administration hardly deserves all the blame for failing to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the nuclear deal Trump ditched in 2018. Much of that should accrue to Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's arch-conservative government, or to Trump, whose exit from the JCPOA soured Iran's clerical regime on the idea of negotiating another one.

When that failed, though, the Biden administration sought a "mini-deal" with Iran: money for quiet. Months of talks brought an undeclared halt to the tit-for-tat bombardments between pro-Iranian militias and American troops in Iraq and Syria. In September Iran released five American citizens held on bogus charges in exchange for \$6 billion in frozen oil revenue. And then, less than a month later, an Iranian-backed group plunged the region into conflict.

Despite the protestations of Republicans, there is no link between the prisoner deal and the Hamas assault. In interviews over the past few weeks, senior Israeli military and intelligence officials stressed that Iran and its proxies were surprised by Hamas's actions. There is no credible evidence to suggest that Iran approved or authorized the attack in Israel. Still, Iran has invested billions of dollars in building the network of proxies that attacked Israel and menaces the broader region. The logic of the JCPOA was that Iran's nuclear program was a bigger threat than those proxies — that choosing to restrict the former while ignoring the latter was a defensible trade-off. Biden ultimately settled on a policy that could constrain neither of them.

Even many of the administration's lesser economic initiatives now seem like folly. In October 2022, with much fanfare, it oversaw the signing of an agreement between Israel and Lebanon. The deal, which saw the two warring states agree to demarcate their maritime border, was a pet project of Amos Hochstein, the president's energy adviser. It was supposed to bind Israel and Lebanon in a web of mutual economic interest. The agreement would allow foreign energy firms to start looking for oil and gas in Lebanon's territorial waters, not far from where Israel had already found huge gas deposits. If both countries stood to profit from offshore fossil-fuel extraction, they would have a strong incentive to avoid war.

Swastika: A Symbol of Peace Turned into Fascist Hate Propaganda

By: Vijita Singh Aggarwal

Cries can be heard on the streets of Maryland, USA. Crowds marching together, holding signs, protesting that their religious expression is taken away. Hindu American foundations have been painstakingly organising campaigns across the United States to educate the American public on the true meaning of the Swastika. They have been holding rallies and doing interviews to explain that Swastika is a historic symbol of peace and has nothing to do with the Nazis.

Unfortunately, they have a long road ahead. Their pleas have fallen on deaf ears. The United States of America (Maryland House Bill 0418) was passed recently banning all images and recreations of the Swastika as hate speech and hence illegal. This would greatly impact all existing temples, Hindu associations, and even the household pujas.

To move towards taking away rights from Hindus to peacefully practice their religion is nothing new. The US is not the only country to have banned the Swastika. Australia's ban on any sale of items of Nazi symbols includes the Swastika, effectively stifling the religious freedoms of Hindus, and classifying anyone wearing the Swastika as an anti-social element. These bans are not something new. In fact, the US and Australia are only the two most recent countries to have passed laws banning the use of the Swastika due to its association with the Nazi party. Such bans can be found in nearly all parts of the world including Brazil, Japan, Korea, France, Spain and many more. As per the last count, nearly 20 countries

across the world have laws banning the Swastika. One might say that this is, in fact, right. We should not continue the use of symbols that have caused so much pain to the people.

However, is the world trying to overcorrect to essentially further victimise innocent individuals? Without going into the real issue, what is currently happening is that a community is being made a scapegoat for the misdeed of the other.

These lawmakers say that the banning of the Swastika is important due to it being used in the Nazi flag. This sentiment is still propagated by the Western media. As of June 2023, an article by the BBC describes the Nazi swastika as a derivative of an ancient hooked cross motif which remains a sacred symbol in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Let us look into the history of this statement. Is the Nazi cross the same as the Swastika? Why would the Nazis, who openly believed in the superiority of the white race, want to associate with cultures from the east? To understand this strange paradox, we would first have to look at the history of how the Nazi cross came to be.

The Nazi cross is considered one of the most recognisable symbols from Hitler's regime (from 1933 until his death in 1945). It was found in all sorts of Nazi paraphernalia. Be it the Nazi flag, arm bands, school uniforms. If the cross could be added, it was added.

Symbols and motifs are often recycled from history as they already have certain associations to meaning or cultural collective consciousness. Here is where it becomes very curious. Hitler had

made no secret of his belief that some races were better than the rest. Various instances from his life and speeches suggest that Hitler considered Hindus and Indians, at large, to be a low race. He often proclaimed the superiority of the white race and considered the British race superior to that of the Indian race and stated that the colonising of India was a good thing.

Considering his lack of favour towards Indians, it makes it very curious as to why he would go out of his way to adopt the Hindu Swastika as the face and base of his political might? In his book 'Mein Kampf', Hitler used the word 'Hakenkreuz' eight times. This word has been translated to mean Swastika but its true meaning is understood by breaking down the combination word. The breaking of the combination word leaves us with Haken and Kreuz. Alternatively read and understood as the Hook Cross. The Hook Cross has an extensive history and symbolism of its own. It has been used by various countries in the past. For example, Finland's Air Force used this symbol from 1918 to 2020 and Britain's County Council bore it in 1939. A 1913 yearbook from Westfield High School in the US referred to this symbol as 'Gammadion'.

A German archaeologist named Heinrich Schliemann found the remains of the ancient city of Troy in 1875. He documented that such symbols were found in the remains of buildings and sculptures. In 1885, he published a book called 'Ilios' and used the word Swastika to describe this symbol. In this book, he stated that Swastika meant the cross. This misleading confluence was challenged by many of his peers.

Max Muller being one of them. Muller, who had extensively studied Indian cultures, was adamant that the Swastika originated in India and did not mean the cross. If the word Swastika was used to describe similar-looking symbols that did not hold the same meaning, it would only lead to misunderstanding and confusion among the larger public.

It is not uncommon for similar-looking symbols to be used throughout history. However, they should not be confused with one another if their meanings aren't the same. After extensive research, it was clear that the Hooked Cross was referred to by different names such as 'Fylfot'. Similarly, in Greek, it was often referred to as 'Gammadion'. At that time, it was assumed that the name was a combination of the Greek letter Gamma and the number 4.

Some scholars have suggested that Gammadion as a symbol represents stability or foundation. This meaning is inferred as it looks like a cornerstone. When extrapolated into a religious sense, it can also be used to refer to Jesus Christ.

According to the Bible, Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of Christianity. God is often shown to refer to Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of his people. In this interpretation, Gammadion becomes a sign of Christianity itself. This could explain why so many historical monuments and churches retain this symbol. A few examples are found in the Church of Ireland, Hagia Sophia Church of Istanbul, 10th-century Christian manuscripts, and the Church of Lalibela.

Hitler was known to have been active in his local church growing

up. This local church had this Hooked Cross carved eight times into its architecture. Due to his close association with the church, it is assumed that he used the cross he saw in church windows, which were visible from his childhood home, rather than for its relevance to other religions or cultures. To corroborate this claim, we can refer to his speech given in Munich, Germany on October 25, 1930. During this speech, Hitler called 'Hakenkreuz' a part of the Christian tradition. A symbol of the struggle against Jews, Marxists, and Bolsheviks.

In 1920, the Nazi Party of Germany also published a 25 points propaganda on German religion. Point number 24 stated that the Nazi party was based on Christianity. Hitler also considered Jesus as a great warrior and this symbol's association with Christianity and Christ himself may have been a major reason for its popularity. Having traced the history of the Hooked Cross, it is evident that it is not associated with the Hindu Swastika. Unfortunately, the carelessness of the Western media and their constant reference to the Hooked Cross as Swastika has led to the degradation of a sacred symbol standing in peace and life cycle.

Considering India's extensive record showcasing its value for peace and protection, how did the Swastika, present in nearly all pujas and ceremonies, become associated with the domination of the Jews? To understand this clever sleight of hand, we must look into the role of the media in misleading the public.

Qatar's Double Standards Diplomacy in Israel-Hamas War

By: Jajati K Pattnaik and Chandan K Panda

The ongoing Israel-Hamas war has passed thirty days since its tragic beginning on 7 October 2023 which witnessed a sinister unleashing of violence by Hamas killing 1,400 and taking more than 200 as hostages. This gruesome attack has been responded to with a retaliatory offensive by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). The IDF retaliation to eliminate Hamas makes civilians in Gaza collateral.

The UN resolution called for an "immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities" in Gaza. Much to the chagrin of many, the global fora failed to condemn the 7 October Hamas-orchestrated massacre. This contradiction keeps the world divided on the present imbroglio.

However, there is no denial of the fact that innocent civilians from both sides lose their lives because of the Israel-Hamas War. Knowing Hamas' demonstrative hostility towards Jews, there seems no solution to this



Qatar funnels money to Gaza in the guise of humanitarian efforts which Hamas uses for terrorism, intricate tunnel building and weapon stockpiling for its war against Israel.

To assume that Qatar had no inkling of the 7 October attack by Hamas whose leadership enjoys the best facilities to zero in on Israel's doomsday at Doha is to feign

in declaring Qatar a major non-NATO ally and has conferred on it the role of a broker-in-chief. With this layer of privilege and distinction, Qatar does everything it can do even to the extent of funding terror groups in West Asia and elsewhere.

Its deep camaraderie with Al Qaeda, Houthi, Hamas, etc is not a guarded secret. Its open support of the radical Islamists and suspicious activities with intentions more diabolic in West Asia invited ire from its Gulf neighbours which imposed diplomatic isolation and economic blockade on Qatar in 2017. It continued for four years until it was finally lifted in 2021. Against these restrictive actions against Qatar, the US came to its immediate rescue and made trade deals to give Doha some respite from the regional pressures. This brings the question as to why the US handles Qatar so softly. The US also has a very powerful military base in Qatar namely the Al-Udeid Base. It needs Qatar to secure its presence in West Asia knowing its volatility, complexity, shifting geopolitics and energy resources. This compulsion of the US has been most effectively used by Qatar to maximise its importance in the region and beyond. Its aspiration is also to become an impactful leader of the Islamic world among a host of competing others that include Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Its all-weather partnership with the US has given it the necessary immunity against the Arab Spring in 2011 that championed the idea of democracy and regime change in the Arab world. The regime change policy did not affect Qatar, its quota of kingship, autocracy and despotism whereas this historical churn dented some of the Arab states with irreparability. It enjoyed and continues to enjoy protectionism from the US. Therefore, its ambition and appetite for power have increased exponentially over a few decades

despite being a very small country equal to the land size of the Indian state Tripura. Its population is just 2.7 million and GDP per capita is \$235 billion. Its economy depends on the export of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). It has money but no power and is geographically sandwiched between two major powers in the region Saudi Arabia and Iran. Qatar uses its soft power strength and American partnership to guard against regional and international opposition. It deploys cunning, deception and Machiavellian modalities to rise to power. For this, it does what it should and also what it shouldn't. It has built a sanctuary for the radical groups and the notable instances include its platforming of Hamas and Al Qaeda. It has taken up the US's proxy role to rush to the places and people where the latter does not qualify for any admittance to tread.

This brings the major question of whether the US uses Qatar for its relevance and effectiveness in the shifting geopolitics of West Asia or whether the latter uses the former to secure a seat at the global diplomatic high table. The go-to role that Qatar has occupied in striking deals with antithetical parties will experience a litmus test in the current Israel-Hamas war. The irony is Doha was unequivocal in its condemnation of Israel on the 7 October incident whereas it felt no moral urgency to deride Hamas. The same Doha has been given the responsibility of brokering with Hamas for the hostage crisis.

This suggests how little this brokering process will help Israel. It is equally paradoxical to notice that the sponsor of the conflict is going to resolve it. Israel in the past has given Doha the space for a partnership for trade and related activities but the latter holds no sense of commitment in securing Tel Aviv's interest. It has on the contrary not done anything that helps Israel in a significant way. This may have been Israel's compulsion because the US has a definitive say in Israel's matter.

However, the role of a broker that Qatar has taken up with its shady track records has bagged praise in some quarters but from several other quarters, there has emerged serious doubts about its double dealing in the past and now. This time Doha's one solution to all crises through diplomacy may not work. The scale of horror that was unleashed by Hamas on Israel on 7 October does not seem to go unpunished. Of course, the hostage crisis is a major bottleneck that the IDF is going to experience.



protracted conflict. Now, there is a growing demand for an immediate ceasefire. The question, therefore, arises: who will broker this negotiation of releasing the hostages from the Hamas captivity? The only name that comes to everyone's imagination is Qatar. Qatar's duplicity and hypocrisy are incomparable.

The US and Iran ran to Qatar for possible negotiations with Hamas for both a ceasefire and the release of hostages. All eyes are on Qatar because it has emerged over a decade or so as a broker between opposing parties. The notable cases include Ukraine and Russia, the US and Taliban, the US and Iran and Hamas and Israel.

Hamas' top leadership stays in Doha in a luxury hotel and plans the forthcoming tunnel war with the IDF.

ignorance. These circumstances present the impression that Doha had some sense of what was imminent but didn't share the intel with Israel for the obvious reason that bordered on an overwhelming sense of antisemitism. This shifts the spotlight on Qatar as to why it does what it does. Iran's role in bankrolling Hamas was not a secret. It is open and as clear as daylight. What is murkier is Qatar's role. It has crafted an image globally as pro-western and different from the theocratic Arab states through its soft power mechanisms and a global television network Al Jazeera.

Al Jazeera is critical about everything that happens elsewhere but it goes hypocritically ultra-soft when it comes to Hamas and other terrorist outfits in the region and their ideological affiliations. The US has gone overboard

By: Raja Muneeb

On October 7, the world woke up to the horror that was unfolding in Israel. Thousands of Hamas fighters penetrated the Israeli defence forces in Gaza in one of the worst terror attacks that was being unleashed in front of the world. The attack came at a time when Israel was celebrating Yom Kippur, their most important annual festival. What unfolded in the next 72 hours was a ghoulish massacre that the world hasn't witnessed since 26\11 when Pakistani terrorists of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) unleashed a similar massacre in Mumbai.

Hamas fighters, many with mounted GoPro cameras, recorded the systematic hunt down they carried out on innocent civilians in Israel. From crashing into a rave party and massacring 260 young Israelis, going door to door carrying out their frenzy and recording it simultaneously for their audience the world over, shooting point blank to using pick axes to beat their victims to death, to blowing up people using RPGs and hand grenades, to burning down people alive, they used all beastly methods to carry out the macabre. The bodies of men, women, and children — young as well old — lay in tatters around Israel due to the bestiality unleashed by Hamas. As the Israeli defence forces absorbed the initial shock and started the counter-offensive, more than 1300 people lay dead, more than 3,000 were injured and 240 people were carried back to Gaza and taken hostage.

Hamas emerged on the political landscape of Palestine in 1987 as a breakaway group of the Palestinian Chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood. Muslim Brotherhood is a socio-political Islamic group that aspires to set up a state as per Islamic laws, commonly known as Sharia law. The group seized power in Egypt after the Arab Spring. It won several elections in Egypt in 2011 and in 2012, it won the presidential elections in Egypt. Mohammad Morsi became the first president of Egypt after winning the elections. Within a year, he was overthrown by the Egyptian military after mass demonstrations and protests took place against the Muslim Brotherhood government. The group was subsequently banned in Egypt and declared a terrorist organisation. Saudi Arabia and the UAE followed suit and declared it as a terrorist organisation. As of today, the group primarily operates out of Turkey and Qatar, though it has several other wings operating in Western countries predominantly in the US, UK and Germany. Muslim Brotherhood members participated in the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948 alongside the Arab armies. Its stated goal is to establish an Islamic Palestinian state in place of Israel. Hamas' current chairman of the political bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, resides in Qatar. Hamas carried out its first act of terrorism in 1993, five months before the Oslo Accords 1 was to be signed between the Palestinian Liberation Organisation leader Yasir Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in Washington. A



Blurred Lines:

The Definition of Terrorism Cannot Be Diluted

suicide bomber blew himself up, killing 15 people in Jerusalem. Since then, Hamas has carried out numerous attacks targeting Israeli civilians and military alike. Though Hamas' striking capability was low in the initial years, they built up their fighting capability slowly and steadily.

After they won local elections in Gaza in 2006, Hamas suddenly became a force to reckon with. Behind Hamas' rise was a silent hand of the Muslim Brotherhood. Hamas charter openly rebuked the peace proposal based on the two-state solution, called for the annihilation of Israel as a state and acknowledged the Muslim Brotherhood as their parent organisation. Hamas only disassociated itself from the Muslim Brotherhood in 2017 after it revised its charter. As the Israelis started the retaliation against Hamas, the blurring of lines started emerging. The Western world saw the emergence of large rallies in support of the Palestinian cause and in many cases, in support of Hamas. The common narrative was the echoing of the thought that the Hamas action wasn't a result of a vacuum. Universities, academia, journalists, and politicians echoed these lines in unison. Pro-Palestinian rallies were held in many parts of the world calling for the termination of Israel and brazenly displaying anti-Semitism. The most shocking response came from the United Nations which refused to condemn Hamas' action while holding a vote within the UN members on calling for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.

While the Israelis are battling Hamas, the opinion of the world remains sharply divided on the Hamas action of 7/10. Much of the credit for this goes to the Muslim Brotherhood which over the years has spun a web of yarn around the Palestinian cause, especially in the Western part of the world. The success of the Muslim Brotherhood could be gauged by the fact that the vociferous response to the Palestinian cause was much larger than some Asian countries which are home to a large Muslim population, including India. Though the presence of the Muslim Brotherhood was largely in the Arab region since the 1930s, it panned out in the Western world 1950s onwards. Mostly students and early immigrants structured mosques as community centres. Following the organisational model given by its founder Hasan Al Bana and funded both by public and private donors of Arab Gulf countries, they established rights groups, schools and think tanks. Over time, they set up a multitude of organisations in education, finance, and public charity, as well as political lobbying for their cause worldwide including that of Palestine. Western democracies allowed them to carry out activities which the Arab Muslim countries had banned them from. In 2020, they established their headquarters in Brussels for their pan-European umbrella organisation under the banner of the Council of European Muslims. Similarly, they set up their offices in the UK, US, France, and Austria.

In the US alone, they run multiple organisations that defend and promote their ideology of political Islam. Some of the prominent organisations with links to the Muslim Brotherhood in the US include the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and Northern American Islamic Trust (NAIT). These organisations and their leaders are heavily invested in the academia of various colleges and universities in the US. The administration under President Barack Obama was known to be extremely sympathetic towards the members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Similarly, in the UK, it established secretive organisations and the same modus operandi as that in the US and Europe. They set up many student bodies and societies in colleges and universities across the UK including Harvard University. Their political influence also grew considerably. The UK Labour Party has been an open advocate for their causes in Palestine. Though the UK government launched an investigation into the Muslim Brotherhood in 2015, one of the senior leaders of Hamas, Mohamed Qasim Sawalha, continues to reside in London. Given the influence and political depth the Muslim Brotherhood and its like-minded organisations have created over the years, it should hold no surprise as to why the world was bewildered when anti-Semitism was openly displayed on college and university campuses as well as on streets of the Western countries.