



# INSIDER



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## A Ticking Economic Time Bomb

Government aid propping up the economy could soon disappear, schools are scrambling their plans and new shutdowns are slamming businesses-just before a key stretch of the general election.



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# Home Business Auto Insurance

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# Relief for students as US rolls back visa rule



(News Agencies) Under the policy, international students in the US would have been prohibited from taking all their courses online this fall. New visas would not have been issued to students at schools planning to provide all classes online, which includes Harvard. The US has withdrawn a rule that required international students, including hundreds of thousands of Indians, to leave the country if their schools held classes entirely online amid the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) restrictions — a move that was welcomed by students

who were at risk of being deported, their families, and universities that had vehemently opposed the decision. The Trump administration on Tuesday conveyed its decision to a federal US district court that was hearing a challenge by Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), joined by hundreds of other schools and colleges, and some states. Under the policy, international students in the US would have been prohibited from taking all their courses online this fall. New visas would not have been issued

to students at schools planning to provide all classes online, which includes Harvard. Students already in the US would have faced deportation if they didn't transfer to schools with in-person instructors or leave the country voluntarily amid the pandemic. The US is the worst-hit country by the infectious disease, with the virus infecting more than 3.5 million people and killing about 140,000. "The government has agreed to rescind the July 6 2020 policy directive and the frequently asked questions, the FAQs, that were released the next day

on July 7," district court judge Allison D Burroughs said just as the hearing started. "They also agreed to rescind any implementation of the directive," the judge added. According to a recent report of the Student and Exchange Visitor Programme (SEVP), 194,556 Indian students were enrolled at various academic institutions in the US in January. The issue was raised by Indian foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla during an online meeting with US undersecretary of state for political affairs David Hale. Foreign students earlier said international travel restrictions in place

due to the pandemic made it increasingly difficult for them to return to their home countries, while those outside America were uncertain if they will be able to travel back. On Tuesday, US district judge Allison Burroughs said federal immigration authorities agreed to pull the July 6 directive and "return to the status quo". With the policy rescinded, the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will revert to a directive from March that suspended typical limits around online education for foreign students.

# After intel briefings, Biden warns of election interference

The presumptive Democratic presidential nominee wasn't specific and offered no evidence while addressing a virtual fundraiser with more than 200 attendees.

(News Agencies) Joe Biden said Friday night that he's begun receiving intelligence briefings as he warned that Russia, China and other adversaries were attempting to undermine the upcoming US election in November. The presumptive Democratic presidential nominee wasn't specific and offered no evidence while addressing a virtual fundraiser with more than 200 attendees. But, in the process, he confirmed receiving classified briefings after saying as recently as late last month that he wasn't getting them but might request one

about reports of Russian bounties being offered on US troops in Afghanistan. "We know from before, and I guarantee you I know now because now I get briefings again. The Russians are still engaged, trying to delegitimize our electoral process. Fact," Biden said Friday. "China and others are engaged as well in activities designed for us to lose confidence in the outcome." The White House and National Security Council didn't immediately respond to requests for comment on Biden's statement. Reached by phone, a Biden spokesperson did not immediately provide

further details. US intelligence agencies say Russia meddled in the 2016 election with the goal of swaying the contest toward Donald Trump, and officials have warned that there remains a threat of foreign interference in the 2020 contest. Throughout his presidency, Trump has questioned the intelligence community's findings about the 2016 Russian interference and called investigations into whether his campaign had any connection to the meddling a "hoax." Biden received intelligence briefings while vice president but

told reporters he wasn't getting them as of June 30. He said then that President Donald Trump's administration had not offered classified briefings, even though they are traditionally provided to major-party nominees once they win the primary.



## Steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick

**FOLLOW THE STEPS BELOW:** If you are sick with COVID-19 or think you might have it, follow the steps below to help protect other people in your home and community.

### Stay home except to get medical care

- **Stay home:** People who are mildly ill with COVID-19 are able to recover at home. Do not leave, except to get medical care. Do not visit public areas.
- **Stay in touch with your doctor.** Call before you get medical care. Be sure to get care if you feel worse or you think it is an emergency.
- **Avoid public transportation:** Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.



### Wear a facemask if you are sick

- **If you are sick:** You should wear a facemask when you are around other people and before you enter a healthcare provider's office.
- **If you are caring for others:** If the person who is sick is not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then people who live in the home should stay in a different room. When caregivers enter the room of the sick person, they should wear a facemask. Visitors, other than caregivers, are not recommended.



### Separate yourself from other people in your home, this is known as home isolation

- **Stay away from others:** As much as possible, you should stay in a specific "sick room" and away from other people in your home. Use a separate bathroom, if available.
- **Limit contact with pets & animals:** You should restrict contact with pets and other animals, just like you would around other people.
  - Although there have not been reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people with the virus limit contact with animals until more information is known.
  - When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick with COVID-19. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with them. See COVID-19 and Animals for more information.



### Cover your coughs and sneezes

- **Cover:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- **Dispose:** Throw used tissues in a lined trash can.
- **Wash hands:** Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.



### Clean your hands often

- **Wash hands:** Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is especially important after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
- **Hand sanitizer:** If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.



### Call ahead before visiting your doctor

- **Call ahead:** If you have a medical appointment, call your doctor's office or emergency department, and tell them you have or may have COVID-19. This will help the office protect themselves and other patients.



- **Soap and water:** Soap and water are the best option, especially if hands are visibly dirty.
- **Avoid touching:** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

### Avoid sharing personal household items

- **Do not share:** Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people in your home.



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[cdc.gov/COVID19](https://cdc.gov/COVID19)

## US state, local leaders should be as forceful as possible on masks: Fauci

(News Agencies) Top US infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci on Friday said state and local leaders should be as forceful as possible on wearing masks to prevent spreading the deadly coronavirus, as the state of Georgia and its major cities tussle over masks.



"I would urge the leaders - the local political leaders in states and cities and towns - to be as forceful as possible in getting your citizenry to wear

masks," Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said in an interview with the Chamber of Commerce Foundation. Nonetheless, Fauci said he was cautiously optimistic that the country is on the road to getting the pandemic under control, noting that a promising candidate for a vaccine will go into an "advanced phase three trial by the end of this month."



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# Maharashtra Government Warns People Of Possible Plasma Racket

"Plasma therapy is proving beneficial for the treatment of COVID-19 patients. However, people have reported frauds related to this. Beware of such frauds," Anil Deshmukh said.



hefty amounts. "Plasma therapy is proving beneficial for the treatment of COVID-19 patients. However, people have reported frauds related to this. Beware of such frauds," the minister said today. Plasma therapy started in the country in May taking cue from the positive experience in other nations. The first trials took place in the national capital Delhi, where Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has started a plasma bank. In June, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray launched the world's largest

plasma therapy trials. The Project Platina is expected to create a huge database for treatment in the disease, which so far has no specific treatment or a vaccine. But donations have proved a hurdle in the state - the country's worst sufferer from coronavirus. In absence of adequate number of donors, critical patients have been left open to fraud and extortion.

"Some potential donors reportedly contacted the relatives of the patients and offered the plasma for lakhs of rupees," said Cyber expert and

advocate Dr Prashant Mali. There is always a possibility of plasma being sold "through the dark web and other illegal channels", he said. "We urge the relatives of patients to undergo treatment only from recognised hospitals and doctors. Maharashtra today had 7,975 cases with 233 deaths. The total number of positive cases in the state to stands at 2,75,640, the state health department said. 3,606 patients were discharged today and the recovery rate in the state is currently 55.37 per cent.

Mumbai: Maharashtra, which started the world's largest plasma therapy trial in June, has now warned about a racket in plasma donation. State home minister Anil Deshmukh today said there have been reports of fraud. There have also been reports that those needing plasma have been made to pay

## Locusts arrive in Gujarat from Somalia via Pakistan

India has faced its worst desert locust invasions in decades this year and prompted the government to deploy helicopters and drones for spraying insecticide.

(News Agencies)A relatively small swarm of crop-eating locusts has arrived in Gujarat's Bhuj from Somalia via Pakistan, Union agriculture ministry's Locust Warning Organisation (LWO) said on Wednesday and added authorities were trying to prevent it from moving to Rajasthan and other surrounding areas by spraying insecticides.

"They may have come with the winds across the Indian Ocean to the Pakistan coast and then from there to Bhuj. We will control the [locust] population in Bhuj. Other swarms may also travel across the ocean in the coming days. There are two possibilities—they can migrate from Somalia to Yemen and then migrate from Yemen to Pakistan and reach the border areas, the other is direct migration across the ocean," said LWO deputy

director KL Gurjar. India has faced its worst desert locust invasions in decades this year and prompted the government to deploy helicopters and drones for spraying insecticide. The Centre has amended rules to allow state governments to use drones at night to help neutralise the locusts. The infestation has not caused much damage to crops.

The kharif, or summer-sown crops, are vulnerable but Gurjar said their efforts to control the locusts have been intensified following FAO's warnings. UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) on Monday warned the migration of locust swarms from Somalia to their summer breeding areas along both sides of the India-Pakistan border was imminent. More swarms were likely to form in Somalia in the coming weeks

and India and Pakistan have been accordingly warned. The summer breeding has commenced along both sides of the border, where numerous swarms are present mainly in Rajasthan. Hatching and band formation will increase during July in Rajasthan and Gujarat as well as adjacent areas of Tharparkar, Nara and Cholistan deserts in Pakistan, FAO has said.

Gurjar said the breeding has begun in otherwise arid Rajasthan as the state has received good rains. "We are trying to control the population through insecticides in the mating stage before they start egg-laying. [If] we do not manage to do that, then we try to control their population in the hopper stage before they start flying. Monsoon rains and maturity of locusts in India have coincided.



The locusts are yellow in colour indicating their maturity and breeding potential," said Gurjar. India Meteorological Department director-general M Mohapatra said the wind direction is south-westerly during the ongoing monsoon season and that is why locust migration can happen from that direction. Desert locusts usually fly with the wind and

can travel up to about 100-150 km daily, according to FAO. They regularly cross the Red Sea, a distance of around 300 km. Crossing the Indian Ocean with the help of monsoon winds is part of the natural migration cycle of desert locusts. One square-km swarm can eat as much crop as 35,000 people in terms of weight in a single day.

## Ex-priest, in jail for raping minor, moves HC for nod to marry victim

(News Agencies)Thiruvananthapuram: Father Robin Vadakkumchery, a former priest of north Kerala's Mananthavady diocese, who was sentenced in 2019 for raping and impregnating a minor girl, moved the Kerala high court on Wednesday to allow him to marry the survivor in a petition jointly signed by the woman who is now a major, and her parents. Vadakkumchery, who was sentenced to a double life term by the Thalassery POC SO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) court in February last year, said in his petition that he needed parole to solemnise the wedding, and expressed his wish to look after his child and establish his parenthood. The court is expected to take up his plea

on July 24. Vadakkumchery, a priest of the Syro-Malabar church, was convicted of raping and impregnating a 16-year-old girl in 2016. The girl gave birth to her child in 2017, and a genetic test confirmed the former vicar's crime. He was later defrocked by Pope Francis. The girl, who was a student of a church-run institute where 54-year-old Vadakkumchery taught, was declared a hostile witness for claiming that she was 18 at the time of the rape. However, her birth certificate proved her age. Her father too claimed responsibility for the crime during the investigation but eventually broke down and named the accused. The scientific evidence against the priest was irrefutable. During the 2018 trial,

Vadakkumchery and the survivor's parents made a similar suggestion of marriage, which the court rejected it before sentencing him to 20 years of concurrent rigorous imprisonment. The trial court had also directed the police to register a case against parents for retracting their statements. Reformists in the church said it was a ploy by Vadakkumchery to have his sentence commuted. "We are sure the judiciary will see through his designs," said Shyju Antony, joint convenor of Save Our Sisters, a reformist body floated in the wake of protest against former Bishop of Jalandhar Franco Mulakkal, who is

accused of raping a nun. The case surfaced in 2017 after the rape survivor gave birth to a baby in the church-run Christu Raja Hospital in Koothuparambha of Kannur district. Attempts were made to hush the matter up, and the child was even put up for adoption. Investigations also revealed that the priest was protected by several Church-run institutions. However, six other persons, including the doctors who helped deliver the child and the superintendent of a Wayanad orphanage were acquitted for a lack of evidence. Vadakkumchery, who was once tipped to become bishop of Mananthavady was arrested near Kochi airport while trying to flee to Canada.



# 24 hours of twists and turns in Rajasthan political drama

Political experts said the Congress was still keen on retaining a senior leader like Sachin Pilot in its fold despite what Ashok Gehlot said.



(News Agencies) Close to 8pm on Tuesday, two sacked Rajasthan ministers, Ramesh Meena and Vishvendra Singh, denied having engaged in anti-party activities and claimed they only raised issues of concern to the people, the first indication of a softening of their stand by Congress rebels led by former deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot.

"We never went against the party. We had some issues, which we raised at the party forum, but they were not addressed," Meena, who was food and civil supplies minister in the Ashok Gehlot government, said in the video posted on the microblogging site Twitter.

Almost at the same time, Singh, who held the tourism portfolio, released a video in which he wondered why the Congress leadership had taken such a harsh decision. "I just drew the attention of the party towards failure to implement promises made in the manifesto... We never indulged in any anti-party activity or made any statement against the party," he said.

The conciliatory mood was reconfirmed by Pilot, who on Wednesday morning, in separate interviews, said he was not joining the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and was still with the Congress. His statement was seen by experts as an attempt to return back to the party-fold

considering that the number of MLAs joining the Pilot camp remained unchanged at 22 even three days after the crisis started. Soon after Pilot's interviews, Congress general secretary in charge of Rajasthan, Avinash Pande, wrote on Twitter: "Party's doors aren't closed on Pilot. May God give him good sense and he realizes his mistake. I pray that he gets out of that BJP's trap," he wrote.

These conciliatory words were, however, short-lived as Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot lashed out at Pilot on Wednesday in the first direct attack on his former deputy.

"You are the deputy CM and PCC {Pradesh Congress Committee chief} and you make deals with (BJP) people. You ask for mobile number and names and are involved in a conspiracy and then they give clarification that there was no horse trading. You were part of the conspiracy and what are you clarifying now," Gehlot said to reporters outside Hotel Fairmont in Jaipur.

The CM had until Wednesday accused the BJP of trying to destabilise

his government by offering up to Rs 20 crore each to Congress legislators. He also said that there was no reason to get upset with the Rajasthan police notice to record a statement by Pilot as it was part of the investigation process. "I have also got the notice," Gehlot said.

Within an hour of Gehlot's interaction with reporters, where close to 100 legislators supporting the Congress government have been staying, Congress's national spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala addressed the media and asked Pilot and other MLAs to return to the party fold after admitting their "mistake".

Sachin Pilot ji and other MLAs have to first come out of Manohar Lal Khattar's (Haryana chief minister's) protection and return to their home in Jaipur. Then only their concerns can be addressed," Surjewala said in a reference to the rebels camping in a hotel in Gurugram.

Political experts said the Congress was still keen on retaining a senior leader like Pilot in its fold despite what

Gehlot said.

"But these (statements) showed that they were willing to return home. The party's statement on Wednesday morning and in Surjewala's press conference also indicated that Congress was still trying to get them back to its fold," said Avadhesh Akodia, a Jaipur-based political commentator.

Prakash Bhandari, another Jaipur-based political analyst, said Wednesday's remarks by Gehlot were the harshest he had made against Pilot. "Gehlot doesn't have the reputation of talking through his hat. If he is saying he has evidence, he sure must be having evidence," he said. Congress leaders said that it was highly unlikely that the party high command will accept Pilot's demand for his return to Rajasthan politics. "There is a possibility that he may get a position in the central Congress team after some time. But his role now in Rajasthan politics would be very less," a party leader said on condition of anonymity.

## Assam floods claim six more lives, death toll climbs to 66

(News Agencies) \Guwahati: The death toll from floods in Assam went up to 66 on Wednesday as six more people drowned while the situation remained grim in the state, where the deluge has affected over 3.5 million people and submerged around 90% area of the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve.

The latest deaths were reported from Sonitpur, Barpeta, Golaghat and Morigaon districts. Another 26 have died in the state due to landslides caused by heavy rains since late May.

Nearly 4,000 people stranded due to floodwaters were rescued on Wednesday and evacuated to safety. The floods have displaced over 36,000 people across the state's 19 districts and they have been sheltered in 629 relief camps.

"The flood situation seems to have peaked and is expected to improve in the next few days

unless there is unexpected heavy rainfall. This is the second wave of floods this season after the first one in May," said Pankaj Chakravarty, state project coordinator, Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA)

Assam witnesses 3-4 waves of floods between May and August each year and almost all parts of the state barring few stretches in the two hills districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao are affected. Over 200 people were killed due to floods last year. The state is witnessing a surge in Covid-19 cases with 18,666 cases reported till Wednesday. A safety protocol has been prepared by ASDMA to maintain safety and social distancing in the relief camps set up for flood affected and district administrations are following it strictly. Rescue personnel are evacuating stranded people wearing personal protective equipment kits.

## Only God can save us from Covid-19: K'taka health minister

(News Agencies) Karnataka health and family welfare minister B Sriramulu on Wednesday said that "only God has to save us from Corona", even as the state edged past Gujarat to report the fourth-highest number of coronavirus disease cases in the country.

Addressing reporters in Chitradurga, the minister said, "Worldwide the number of Corona cases is increasing. All of us should be alert. Whether you are ruling or in opposition, rich or poor, the virus doesn't discriminate. Cases - I am sure one hundred percent - will only go up in the next two months. One can keep claiming government negligence or irresponsibility of ministers or that cases are going up because of a lack of coordination among ministers. All of these

allegations made are far from the truth. Only God can save us from Corona." On Wednesday, the state recorded its biggest

single day spike of over 3000 cases. As many as 3176 new Covid-19 cases were reported, taking the state tally to 47,253. Of these, 18,466 have been discharged from the hospitals after recovery, and 928 deaths. Bangalore continued to account for the bulk of new cases, with 1975 fresh infections on Wednesday. The city currently has 17051 active Covid-19 cases. Bengaluru is under a week-long lockdown till July 22. Meanwhile, Karnataka medical education minister Dr K Sudhakar announced that a Rs 5000 incentive would be provided to plasma donors in the state. Plasma therapy is seen as one of the more promising cures for Covid-19.





# Skill, re-skill, upskill to stay relevant: PM Modi

Modi said the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has changed the work culture and started the concept of work from home. He added young people are acquiring new skills keeping in mind the new work culture and new nature of jobs.



(News Agencies) Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said no matter how educated a person is, one must always be ready to acquire new skills. He said skill, reskilling and upskilling is the only way to remain relevant in the ever-changing market

scenario. Speaking on the occasion of the World Youth Skill Day, Modi said, "The biggest strength of the millennials is their ability to get skilled." Modi said the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has changed the work culture and started the concept of work from home. He added young people are acquiring new skills keeping in mind the new work culture and new nature of jobs. "People ask me business and markets are changing too fast; it is hard to remain relevant. In times of corona [Covid-19], this is even more relevant. My answer to that is to skill, reskill and upskill. To keep learning new skills is to reskill and continuing to scale it up is to upskill," he said. Modi, who has stressed on self-reliance and the need for becoming employment generators, added: "Skill is something which you give yourself and which is timeless and keeps getting better with time. It is unique and makes you different from others." He added it is self-

reliance and also self employability. Modi underlined there is a difference between skill and knowledge and said people often confuse the two. "People get confused between knowledge and skill. You can watch on YouTube or read in books how to ride a bike; this is knowledge, but to ride a bike you need skill," he said. Referring to the work opportunities for skilled people, he said there is a requirement for tens of thousands of skilled people, especially in the health sector. "...That is why we have started skill mapping. Information about which country needs skilled works in which sector will be available."

Modi referred to the portal for skill

mapping of migrant labour that has been recently started. He added employers can connect with the labour at the click of a button. Modi said in today's rapidly changing world, millions of skilled people are needed in many sectors. He also spoke about the skill centres opened by the government and how the number of Industrial Training Institutes was increased. "...skill development of more than 5 crore [50 million] people has been done. And this campaign continues," he said. Modi reiterated that since there is a raging worldwide pandemic, people should remember to stay healthy, maintain social distancing and wear masks, and stop spitting.

## Delhi high court gives police time to go through Sunanda Pushkar's tweets

Sunanda Pushkar, 51, was found dead in a hotel room on January 17, 2014 following which the police charged her husband and Congress MP Shashi Tharoor with abetment to suicide, among other charges

(News Agencies) The Delhi high court on Wednesday gave the police time to go through the Twitter posts of the late Sunanda Pushkar after the city police's counsel said the department had not seen the tweets nor was it relying on them in the case related to her death.

Pushkar, 51, was found dead in a hotel room on January 17, 2014 following which the police charged her husband and Congress MP Shashi Tharoor with abetment to suicide, among other charges.

Justice Manoj Ohri was told

by the Delhi police counsel that her tweets were not a part of the record or the charge sheet filed in the case and if Tharoor wanted to rely on them, they were in the public domain and he can access them.

The court was hearing a plea by Tharoor seeking directions to the Delhi police to preserve the Twitter account and posts on the microblogging site by Pushkar prior to her death.

Appearing for Tharoor, senior advocate Vikas Pahwa submitted that the tweets were part of the electronic record before the trial

court in the form of Pushkar's laptop and mobile phone. He said all the police have to do is put it up as evidence before the court as an indicator of her state of mind prior to her death.

Pahwa also said that Pushkar's cause of death was "inconclusive" and this was relevant because four autopsy reports and three medical board reports had not been able to confirm till date whether it was a case of suicide or homicide.

Pahwa has said that report was not conclusive on the reason for the death, the police had gone



for psychological autopsy in 2017, a process which involves ascertaining the state of mind prior to the death. He contended that if the police relied on the tweets, the case would be closed.

"Instead, they relied on the witness statements, recorded by the police, who has referred to Pushkar's tweets while commenting on her state of mind," he said.

After hearing both sides, the high court gave time to the police to file its submissions along with case law on the issue raised by Tharoor in his plea and listed the matter for hearing on September 18. Tharoor, in his application, said the tweets and Twitter timeline of Pushkar were of utmost importance in the case and as she was not alive, there was an apprehension that they may be deleted, denying him a crucial

right to exonerate himself from the charges levelled against him.

The plea referred to Twitter's policies as per which it can delete the accounts of users who have been inactive for a prolonged period of time.

The police had earlier told the court that Pushkar was suffering from mental agony because of a strained relationship with her husband. It had then charged Tharoor with domestic violence (498A) and abetment to suicide while claiming that Pushkar had a scuffle with her husband and bore various injury marks a few days before her death. Tharoor has consistently denied all charges, calling them preposterous and motivated. When asked for his reaction on Wednesday's hearing, the Congress MP said, "My counsel has already argued for me in the court."

## Highest-ever single-day spike in Covid-19 cases in India, recovery rate at all-time high too

(News Agencies) India on Thursday recorded 32,695 new cases of the coronavirus disease in the last 24 hours which took the country's tally to 9,68,876, according to the Union health ministry website.

The number of active cases in the country stand at 3,31,146, while 6,12,814 have been cured or discharged, according to the health ministry. The death toll reached 24,915 after 606 fresh fatalities were recorded in the last 24 hours. India's Covid-19 tally has been fast heading towards a million mark with spike in the number of cases every day.

Maharashtra continues to be the worst-affected state and has reported a total of 2,75,640 Covid-19 cases and close to 11,000 fatalities. Amid the rise in cases, Bihar has imposed a

lockdown from Thursday till July 31. Except essential services, everything else will be closed in the state during this period. Religious places and offices too will remain closed. The government, meanwhile, announced on Wednesday that a record 20,572 patients recuperated from Covid-19 disease in the last 24 hours (between Tuesday and Wednesday) and the country's recovery rate rose to 63.24 per cent. This is the highest rate of recovery so far, according to the health ministry. Aggressive testing, timely diagnosis and effective management of patients either through supervised home isolation or active medical attention in hospitals have led to a surge in recovered cases which exceed active Covid-19 cases, the ministry said.



# Sheena Bora murder: CBI court denies bail to Indrani Mukerjea

She had drawn the special judge's attention in end-June that SARS-CoV-2, which causes Covid-19, is spreading inside the jail premises and expressed concern about her health condition.



The special Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) court on Wednesday rejected the 45-day interim bail plea of Indrani Mukerjea, one of the prime accused in the Sheena Bora murder case and lodged at Mumbai's Arthur Road Jail, which has emerged as one of the hotspots of coronavirus disease (Covid-19) outbreak.

Mukherjea had moved an interim bail plea owing to the spread of the Covid-19 outbreak among the jail inmates. She had drawn the special judge's attention in end-June that SARS-CoV-2, which causes Covid-19, is spreading inside the jail premises and expressed concern about her health condition.

Though the court rejected her interim bail plea, it will issue a detailed order later explaining the reasons for it.

Mukherjea had stated in her plea that she is suffering from chronic ischemic changes in her brain arteries, which require constant healthcare and monitoring.

She had also referred to the minutes of the High Power

Committee (HPC) of the Bombay high court (HC), which had ruled that undertrials facing a murder charge, are eligible for interim bail. However, special public prosecutor Manoj Chaladan opposed the interim bail plea, arguing that Mukherjea is a foreign national and not entitled to interim bail as per the recommendations of the HC's HPC.

He argued that Mukherjea is not suffering from any major ailment that would put her at risk of contracting the viral infection. He also assured the court that jail authorities would ensure that inmates get proper healthcare facilities.

## India set for pivotal role in Covid-19 vaccine production: ICMR

Balram Bhargava, the head of ICMR, said two India-made Covid-19 vaccines are now being trialled with 1,000 volunteers each, and the focus will be on easing regulatory clearances for the process without compromising on scientific or ethical parameters.

India will play a crucial role in scaling up production of any Covid-19 vaccine that is developed anywhere in the world, the head of India's top medical research body said on Tuesday, citing the size of the domestic pharma industry and expressing hope that the country will be well poised for the production of successful candidates.

The comments come weeks after the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) appeared to rush the trial process of one of the two Indian vaccines by setting an August 15 launch deadline, before widespread criticism forced officials to clarify that a letter mentioning that date was meant to speed up the regulatory approvals process rather than lay down a hard timeline.

"India is well-known as the pharmacy of the world... It also supplies 60% of the world's vaccines, whether it be Africa, Europe, south east Asia or anywhere. So, any vaccine candidate that's produced or developed in any part of the world will ultimately

have to be scaled-up in India or by China because these are the two major vaccine producers of the world," said Balram Bhargava, the head of ICMR, while adding that several developed nations are in touch with Indian entities for vaccine distribution.

Bhargava said two India-made vaccines are now being trialled with 1,000 volunteers each, and the focus will be on easing regulatory clearances for the process without compromising on scientific or ethical parameters. "The two indigenous vaccine candidates have undergone successful toxicity studies in rates, mice and rabbits and their data was submitted to the drugs controller general of India, following which both these candidate vaccines got clearance to start the early phase human trials early this month," he said.

Among the two is Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, which received drugs controller general of India's nod for human trials on June 29. On July 2, a letter sent by Bhargava to hospitals where

vaccine trials were to be done said, "it is envisaged to launch the vaccine for public health use latest by 15th August 2020 after completion of all clinical trials". Criticised for setting an unrealistic timeline that would compromise vaccine safety, the ICMR later backtracked and said international trial protocols will be followed.

Another vaccine candidate is from Zydus Cadila called ZyCov-D, which received the drug controller's approval for human trials on July 2. It was developed indigenously at the company's Vaccine Technology Centre in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

"They have got their sites ready and they are doing their clinical studies on approximately a 1,000 human volunteers each at different sites, some have six and some 12. They are trying to do the early clinical testing for these two indigenous candidate vaccines. Over and above there are pre-clinical experiments for other vaccine being done at National Institute of Virology in Pune, which is trying to



work day and night to do these experiments because it is our moral duty to develop these vaccines as fast as possible," said Bhargava.

The world over, vaccine candidates that have been put on a fast-track are from Russia, China, United States of America and the United Kingdom. "We are making all efforts to fast-track developing the vaccine and it is the moral duty that there should not be a delay even by a day for the regulatory clearances for these vaccines so that we can break the transmission of the virus as soon as possible," said Bhargava.

Dr VK Paul, member, Niti Ayog, in an earlier interview to

HT, also had said that India will take the lead in manufacturing the Covid-19 vaccine when it is developed.

Experts also say that eventually it is the vaccine that will provide the key to break the transmission cycle. "The vaccine will be ultimate to check the disease spread but we don't know when will an effective vaccine be available for use even though all our efforts are being directed towards making it happen as soon as possible. A good vaccine is the most cost-effective way of preventing a disease," said Dr Amita Jain, head, microbiology department, KGMU, Lucknow.

Bhargava was speaking at a briefing organised by the Union government on Tuesday.



# To deal with China, focus solely on economic growth

China is where it is because of its relentless drive for economic power. India needs to make wise choices



Much has been written about China following the clash between Indian and Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley. These discussions have often suggested that the Indian corporate sector should in some way exact retribution on China. The government has, perhaps, with some merit, banned a number of Chinese apps. Others have encouraged consumers to boycott Chinese goods. Neither address the basic issue that needs to be fixed, which was more accurately pinpointed by in jest by a senior Chinese media figure. This gentleman

commented that an economic dispute with China was farcical because there were no Indian goods that the Chinese could boycott. There is a deep resonance in this satirical remark. No mechanism to strengthen India's influence with respect to China can be created without a unidimensional determination to become an economic superpower. There are choices to be made.

India must also, as China has done, build up financial reserves through the creation of industrial powerhouse companies. This requires a combination of cheap

financing for domestic companies and possibly a devalued currency. India must substitute the mental hang-ups that have prevented it from systematically adopting these practices if it is to gain greater economic relevance. Since great economic institutions require capital, we need to relook at the ease of business processes which attract capital. In the case of China, local governments have been incentivised to run their provinces in the manner most likely to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). Those who have done business in China speak of the overwhelming support they get from local governments. These include the identification of land, provision of ready lists of architects and contractors, free legal services, often to the point of providing dosa makers to encourage engineers to work there. The nature of factory inspections tends to be infrequent in contrast to the Indian licence-permit raj. International capital has choices and will naturally flow where it is

made most welcome. China is simply easier to do business in. India has followed a different growth path. That path influences how vigorously we can respond to Galwan. Building economic powerhouses can also mean supporting national champion companies, as Japan and South Korea have done. India has been beset by concerns that such choices are prone to nepotism and the misuse of scarce national resources. It needs to enquire why these negative externalities of national choice were not equally applicable in Japan and South Korea. Even the United States (US), portrayed as a champion of market freedom, selectively awarded contracts for European/Iraqi reconstruction to a handful of chosen American companies. These policies did not result in the preferred companies falling to the lowest common denominator of quality. Instead, they often became world leaders in their chosen industries.

China has systematically sought to develop its soft power through investment, aid to countries, influence over multilateral institutions and the provision of research funding to universities around the world. It has chosen to be the driver behind the creation of banking institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank. While these banks or universities are all professionally-managed institutions, such largesse provides China with a degree of soft influence that others do not possess. Most meaningful infrastructure in Africa is today built by China with quid pro quos in play. These include preferential access to manganese, cobalt and other rare earth metals. China should not be blamed for this, as it is only copying the playbook used by European nations earlier. India is free to also make these choices. We need to introspect why, for instance, Indian apps could not become the world standard.

(Contd on page 33)

# Trump offers denial and delusion as pandemic crisis overtakes his presidency

Rarely has a president shown himself to be so unequal to a tragic national emergency. Hundreds of Americans are dying daily and tens of thousands are getting infected from a once-in-a-century virus. States and cities are closing down again, threatening to trigger a ruinous new economic slump. Doctors and nurses lack sufficient protective gear as they battle the deadly pathogen. And with testing swamped by waves of disease, one top official is warning of the "the most difficult time" ever for US public health this winter.

Yet this is what is on Donald Trump's mind: Joe Biden didn't fix the country's roads and bridges, crowds of bikers and boaters in MAGA hats prove that election polls are wrong, and the border wall is almost finished (except it isn't). Oh, and by the way, where is Hunter Biden?

Trump struck all the wrong notes on Tuesday, as the US set yet another single day record for new coronavirus infections with 67,417. Florida, now the world's coronavirus epicenter, recorded its highest-

ever Covid-19 death toll, and Texas broke its record for new daily cases. Another 900 deaths were reported on Tuesday according to a Johns Hopkins University tally, but the President offered denial and delusion at a White House appearance that even by his standards was a rambling, grievance-fueled mess. What is needed from Trump and his administration is a plan to tackle the most relentless national challenge since World War II, consoling words to memorialize the 136,000 Americans who are already dead and the thousands destined to follow, and the rhetoric to summon the will to triumph over this invisible enemy.

All Trump could offer on Tuesday was self-pity, incoherence and indifference. He came across as a leader living in a different dimension from his people and their fear and suffering and uncertainty about what the coming months will bring.

This is a President who has demonstrably failed to beat back the virus and has long since stopped trying to lead the country out of the darkness. He resorts to boasting about

inconclusive steps he took months ago -- like limiting travel from China -- that have no relevance to the current moment, and he complains he's not getting enough credit for his performance.

He's also mining divisive political seams he thinks helped him in the past. In a CBS interview on Tuesday, he insisted that more White people than Black people are killed in police violence, dealing an insult to the national soul searching about race following the death of George Floyd.

"We could go on for days," Trump said at one point in his Tuesday tirade, and for a while it seemed that he might in the blasting July heat of the Rose Garden, where journalists sat wearing masks, socially distanced and in bemused silence.

Trump veers off his China script. The ostensible point of Trump's Rose Garden appearance was to unveil a barrage of new measures to punish China for its suppression of freedoms in Hong Kong -- which gave the President a new chance to fulminate against Beijing for sending a "plague" to the US



despite his earlier fawning praise for how President Xi Jinping had handled the pandemic.

But it wasn't long before the session turned into the kind of negative, rally-style performance that Trump pines for, with normal campaign events severely curtailed by the pandemic. He slammed Biden for his record on crime, trade, China, infrastructure, the economy, the military, and at one point suggested that hundreds of thousands could be dead by now had the former vice president been in charge when the coronavirus struck. Bizarrely, Trump also slammed the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee for his role in the Obama administration's

mobilization against the H1N1 virus, which was far more efficient and cost tens of thousands fewer lives than Trump's missteps over the past few months.

Trump has been charging that Biden is mentally impaired and is not fit for the Oval Office. But at times, it was the President who appeared to be veering into confusion and incoherence. At one point he appeared to argue that his rival's vow to sign the Paris climate accord would lead to US office buildings being constructed without windows. And he suggested Biden wouldn't even know how to define the word "carbon."

(Contd on page 32)



## Trump's risky nose-to-nose challenge to China in the South China Sea

Donald Trump managed to avoid touching off a forest fire in the tinder-dry forest around Mount Rushmore with his Independence Day fireworks display, but instead his administration seems to be doing its best to set Asia on fire in the South China Sea.

Two aircraft carrier strike groups headed by the USS Ronald Reagan and the USS Nimitz have moved into the South China Sea for the largest military exercises in years just as China has been holding its own drills around the Paracel Islands, which it seized from Vietnam in 1974 in a move the United States has never accepted.

Indeed, there's been considerable concern in the region that China has used international, particularly American, preoccupation with the Covid-19 pandemic, to reinforce its presence on vast stretches of both the Paracel and Spratly Islands and artificial islands built for clearly military purposes. With China having largely brought its Covid-19 surge under control, it has been able to turn its attentions more directly to this region that Beijing considers central to its own security. This has not escaped US and regional military leaders as well as Trump, who has been eager to paint himself as a China hawk, particularly in television attack ads charging his Democratic challenger Joe Biden is soft on China. China, for its part, denies it has any new designs over the vast island groups scattered across thousands of square miles in its offshore waters. "There is nothing to support the claim that China is using Covid-19 to expand its presence in the South China Sea," Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told reporters in May.

Ironically, it's not the first time Trump tried to use an aircraft carrier strike group to intimidate an Asian power. In April 2017, in an effort to send chills up the spine of North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un, the President puffed to one of his favorite interlocutors, Maria Bartiromo of Fox Business, "We're sending an armada. Very powerful," to the waters off North Korea, then elaborated, "He [Kim] is doing the wrong thing. He is making a big mistake." The only problem was that at that very moment, the USS Carl Vinson group was sailing in exactly the opposite direction, headed for joint exercises with the Australian Navy in the Indian Ocean, 3,500 miles away. Eventually, the "armada" turned around. The Paracels include more than 130 small coral islands and reefs scattered across some 5,800 square miles, with a total natural land area of just under three square miles. Together

with the Spratly islands, they represent not only valuable strategic locations, dominating one of the most heavily-traveled shipping routes in the world, but also sit atop or on the fringe of at least 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 11 billion barrels of crude oil, with another projected 160 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 12 billion barrels of oil still undiscovered. China has already invested heavily in building military emplacements, even tourist resorts, at times side by side, but in all cases designed to cement its hold over the region. On Woody Island, the largest in the Paracels, at least a thousand Chinese live alongside a 9,000-foot runway and launch sites for anti-ship cruise missiles with a 250-mile range, particularly the lethal YJ-12B anti-ship cruise missile. In 2017, a colorful artist's rendering titled "China Dream: Paracel Archipelago—Woody Island future development" also showed a vastly expanded island with skyscrapers, parkland, and a passenger jetliner preparing to land on an extended two-runway airfield. A May 2019 Pentagon report identifies at least eight "Chinese-occupied outposts" with 60 other potential outposts in the Spratlys alone.

It's this kind of future for the region that the other nations bordering on and laying quite legitimate claim to these islands—Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Brunei—have long sought to restrain. Since Japan and Taiwan particularly, as well as Australia and Singapore have substantial interest in maintaining free flow of shipping traffic through this region, they have been supportive of American efforts to challenge China in the region and uphold the letter and spirit of international law.

But rarely have the two superpowers come into such direct military proximity with significant naval forces than this week. "The purpose [of the planned exercises] is to show an unambiguous signal to our partners and allies that we are committed to regional security and stability," said Rear Admiral George Wikoff, the operation's commander, adding that the maneuvers would include "round-the-clock flights testing the striking ability of carrier-based aircraft." Indeed, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted a week before exercises opened, "China cannot be allowed to treat the SCS [South China Sea] as its maritime empire." A spokesperson for the fleet confirmed that these exercises had been long planned, and were not in response to global events. China itself began five days of drills near the Paracels on Wednesday.

(Contd on page 32)

## A million cases, and counting

Over a million Indians have now been infected by SARS-Cov-2. Over 25,000 of them have died. India is the third most-affected country in the world by caseload. And Covid-19 is only spreading, hitting a record number of cases almost on a daily basis. New regions are getting affected. Its impact may be different vis-a-vis different groups, but it has affected the old and young, men and women, the rich and the poor. And, notwithstanding the end of the lockdown, it has continued to affect everyday life, economic activity, income levels, social interactions, education, travel and mobility.

India's experience offers key lessons in how to manage the pandemic. The first lesson is that in the absence of a vaccine, there is no alternative to aggressive testing. India's testing rate is 9,323 tests per million people, much lower than other affected countries. There is a simple, obvious logic here, recognised by the government too. Testing is the only way to identify those who may have Covid-19, isolate and treat them, and ensure that they don't become carriers. But by instituting restrictive testing protocols and not using the available testing capacity, India has been slow to do this. It should be clear after a million cases that

not testing will not make the problem disappear. The second lesson is recognising that India is at a community transmission stage. This means that old protocols of limited contact tracing will not be enough in finding the infected; it also means that, through chains and processes that cannot necessarily be traced, the infection has spread far and wide, possibly in rural areas. This, then, requires a far greater investment in district health infrastructure and personnel, medical equipment, especially in states with a weak public health care system.

The third lesson is that as the virus continues to make its way through other parts and other demographic segments, better economic management is essential. The lockdown devastated an already fragile economy, and caused suffering. There may be some bright spots, but the government's economic package did not go far enough in providing the stimulus needed to rev up the growth engine, and its welfare schemes may not be adequate in addressing the humanitarian distress. As India heads towards both more cases (a million more in less than a month is now a real likelihood) and its most severe economic contraction in history, it is essential to get the lives and livelihoods balance right.



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# The big questions, and answers, on Covid-19

**I'm prepared to bet the issues I've raised will keep popping up in our public discourse. If not the government, the media will raise them. When they do, it will help sort out meaningful information from mere detail and guff**



**Karan Thapar**

We've read so much about the coronavirus that our heads are reeling with the information we've taken in. A joke I received the other day puts it cleverly: "My phone has absorbed so much corona it no longer rings but coughs!" Yet there are still areas where we don't have clear answers. This is often because experts cannot agree. But sometimes it's because we're obsessed with statistics that aren't as significant as we're told. So that's my subject today. I can't pretend to have

definitive answers. I'm neither a doctor nor an epidemiologist. But I've raised these issues with multiple experts and their opinions have given me a sense of how to guide us through this labyrinth.

First, are we testing enough? No one in government — politician, bureaucrat or doctor — will give you a straight answer. Independent experts, on the other hand, unequivocally say we're not. But even they don't agree on what's enough. At the moment India is testing 8,191 per million compared

to 122,651 for Spain, 169,945 for the United Kingdom (UK) and 96,836 for Italy. Given India's population is 10 or 12 times bigger, this can't be enough. What is? The best answer came from Soumya Swaminathan, the chief scientist of the World Health Organization. She says India needs to expand its testing till the positivity rate — not just national but in critical hotspots — falls below 5%. In other words, we need to do as many tests as it takes to reduce the rate to the required level. Second, are we in community transmission? With 820,916 cases, and growing at 27,000 per day, it's hard to believe we're not. Independent experts say we are. But the head of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) disagrees: "India is not in community transmission".

Last week, ICMR's former head of epidemiology, Raman Gangakhedkar, gave me an answer that made a lot of sense. In specific areas, such as Delhi, Mumbai or Chennai, we cannot trace the source of the escalating infections. This is community transmission although he preferred to call it localised transmission. His reason was not unconvincing. It's not happening all over the country. In fact, 80% of our cases are in just 49 districts. So, perhaps, localised transmission is more accurate even if it's no different to community transmission. In either case, the strategy for handling the situation is the same.

Third, how significant is our mortality rate? At 16 per million, it's decidedly better than the UK's 658, Italy's 578 and

Spain's 607. Consequently, the government claims we're doing better than many other countries. But how accurately is our rate calculated? Do we really have a perfect idea of the total number of Covid-19 deaths? Certainly, the official number of cases could be a huge underestimate because the unreported ones aren't counted. Even if the first problem is not common to all countries, the second undoubtedly is. So no one's mortality rate is truly reflective of reality. Ours only less so.

A further issue arises when you compare our rate with that of other countries and claim we're doing better. Mortality rates don't take into account age demographics. Ours is a youthful population — 90% are below 60. Italy has an

older population. Only 70% are below 60.

Finally, the recovery rate. This is another statistic drilled into us. The government uses it to suggest we're in control of the situation. However, experts say when we have a clear idea of both total deaths and total cases, everyone's recovery rate will be the same and close to 99%. Harvard's Ashish Jha and our own Raman Gangakhedkar agree. So if everyone's recovery rate will end up the same, why do we make so much of ours? Now I'm prepared to bet the four issues I've raised will keep popping up in our public discourse. If not the government, the media will raise them. When they do, remember what I've told you. It will help sort out meaningful information from mere detail and guff.

## For companies, the end of neutrality

**The Facebook ad boycott shows that companies are increasingly being forced to take positions**



Over the past few weeks, more than 300 advertisers have hit pause on advertising on the world's largest social media network, Facebook, in response to a call to protest the platform's refusal to moderate hate speech. Only a couple of weeks earlier, some Facebook executives publicly opposed CEO Mark Zuckerberg's stance that social media platforms should "not play arbiters of truth", implying that what appears on the platform has nothing to do with Facebook. As the boycott intensifies, Facebook — 98% of its revenues come from advertising — seems to have retreated a

little. It has since said that it will flag all "newsworthy" posts from politicians and political groups that break its rules. The issue highlights the fact that, for the first time, companies are beginning to actively use their business spends to push for change.

The world over, businesses have traditionally shied away from politics and protests, recognising that it may alienate some stakeholders. The view has always been that it's better to stay away from controversy, focus on growth, steer clear of sentiments, and avoid offending anyone. Staying neutral and hedging political bets was the

norm. While the lines between business and politics have largely stayed clear, increasingly businesses are being forced to take a position as they define for themselves a larger purpose, beyond making a profit. Younger consumers, particularly millennials, born between 1980 and 1996, a significant demographic across the world, want to know where companies stand on causes that matter. These range from sustainability, racism, discrimination based on religion, nationality, gender, sexual orientation and colourism, some of which are inextricably linked to politics.

Many global companies are larger than countries in economic heft and scale of impact. Consequently, these corporations have become important elements in shaping culture. The brands they own play a big part in influencing consumer behaviour and moulding opinion. This puts the onus on them to proactively do the right thing, even though it may have short-term

implications on their bottom line. Companies can put their weight behind key causes, and are increasingly being called upon to do so by a "woke" generation. Studies indicate that people want to work for a company that has a deeper reason for being, than only profit. A 2019 Deloitte study showed that "millennials would prioritise the sense of purpose around people rather than growth or profit maximisation". Another survey by Gallup shows that people "look for work that fuels their sense of purpose and makes them feel important". This, together with the pressure from consumers and activists, are making corporations rethink their views on "staying neutral". Though mega corporations are not about to turn altruistic, they are recognising that purpose and profit are interlinked. Businesses that survive and thrive will be those that make a positive impact on the world and create greater prosperity through everything they do. Jim Stengel, a former Procter & Gamble executive, in his book, *Grow: How Ideals Power Growth*

and Profit at the World's Greatest Companies, shared the results of a 10-year study of 50,000 brands which found that the ones that defined their purpose around improving people's lives beat their category competitors by significant margins. In the new context, corporate social responsibility (CSR), once relegated to the fringes of business, is now front and centre and integrates deeply into the company's offerings.

The killing of George Floyd in the United States (US) triggered off mass protests and culminated in the Black Lives Matter movement. Subsequent comments on social media by US President Donald Trump and Facebook's refusal to flag them led to the #StopHateSpeech movement. Together, they have forced companies to take positions on these divisive issues. Many US companies and CEOs had come out openly in support of the black lives matter movement well before the current Facebook ad boycott.

**(Contd on page 31)**



# Jio's Trick To A \$100 Billion-Plus IPO Would Lie In...

Time will be the next frontier in India's digital battlefield; dollars will follow the hours consumers spend online.

India has left a void in their day by banning 59 Chinese apps after a border dispute with its northern neighbor led to violent clashes. The video-sharing platform TikTok, which became a craze in towns and villages as a medium of expression, is gone. So are its smaller cousins, like Bigo Live and Likee.

What can fill the gap? Thanks to the world's cheapest data charges of 9 cents per gigabyte, Indian smartphone users are guzzling content for six hours plus. For local startups like Glance, which offers games, news and video on the mobile lock-screen, the ban on Chinese competition is a chance to add to its tally of 100 million daily active users. The country's youth bulge also makes it a perfect occasion for homegrown education technology unicorns like Byju to scale up.

But the ultimate prize may go to super-apps that meld content and commerce in the 16 Indian languages besides English that boast anywhere between 5 million to half a billion speakers. To not have to download multiple apps to do different things will save phone memory, an important consideration for those who access the internet on low-end devices. Tencent Holdings Ltd.'s WeChat, which offers everything from messaging to

gaming and financial services, provides a successful template. Chinese users are also online for six hours a day, mostly to browse content, particularly social media. Although only 4% of their time is spent on e-commerce, it's enough to drive \$1.5 trillion in annual online sales. The smaller Indian market, with online sales of \$40 billion, will want to copy the playbook.

The most obvious super-app candidate is billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Jio Platforms Ltd., a four-year-old startup with an equity value of \$65 billion, including more than \$15 billion recently raised from investors including Facebook Inc., KKR & Co. and Silver Lake Partners. Before Jio eventually seeks a listing on Nasdaq or the New York Stock Exchange, Ambani would probably want it ready as a carriage-content-and-commerce powerhouse for half-a-billion people.

Jio's 4G telecom service already has roughly 400 million subscribers, though they currently don't even pay \$2 a month. The trick to a \$100 billion-plus initial public offering would lie in using the partnership with Facebook to introduce features such as the WeChat mini-program via the popular WhatsApp messaging service. It lets users book hotels, order taxis, explore augmented reality to try on a new L'Oreal beauty product, or test-drive a Tesla - without

leaving WeChat.

When it comes to building product awareness and interest, these embedded mini-apps in China are now a fourth as effective as regular online stores run by JD.com Inc. and Alibaba Group Holding Ltd., according to McKinsey & Co. They will offer brands in India a chance to sell more - and more profitably - even in remote towns. The consulting firm found that younger consumers in smaller Chinese cities give more weight to advice from social-media influencers and referrals by friends than their counterparts in larger metropolitan areas. This will probably hold true for India as well. As for the actual commerce, JioMart, Ambani's new e-commerce platform, would take orders and - if the regulator permits it - accept payments via WhatsApp. Staples could be delivered by traditional neighborhood stores, with Jio helping connect them to buyers. For discretionary products, Ambani may use his Reliance Retail Ltd., already the country's largest bricks-and-mortar retailer.

It won't be too hard to grease the wheels of super-app commerce with credit. Local lenders will be desperate for a new source of balance-sheet expansion after absorbing inevitable losses from the pandemic and lockdown. Still, the road to satisfied digital customers will be long and bumpy because of India's creaky

infrastructure. Keeping users hooked with novel content will therefore be crucial. Facebook is building a new version of Quest virtual reality headsets; the Silicon Valley firm is also acquiring studios that make VR games. Jio, which wants its set-top box to support online gaming, could find opportunities for collaboration. However, the main entertainment fare will still be cricket and Bollywood. Last year, Ambani promised Jio First Day First Show - movies streamed to broadband customers on the day of their theater release. With Covid-19 shutting down cinemas, producers in India need digital alternatives; audiences need their fix.

Although Ambani appears to be ahead, his won't be India's only super-app. Amazon.com Inc. has pledged to invest \$5.5 billion in the country, while Walmart Inc. has plowed in \$16 billion to acquire local e-commerce leader Flipkart Online Services Pvt. Potentially, they - or Alphabet Inc.'s Google - could seek telecom and digital media partners. Western tech firms were broadly shut out of China's digital revolution. In India, they'll join the fray, hoping for insights that will come in handy in other emerging markets. But India will still prefer local control over the super-apps. Six hours a day of 1.3 billion people - and all the data that flows from it - is a coveted resource, something politicians won't want slipping out of their sphere of influence.

# Sachin Pilot, A Most Unsuitable Boy

As kids, we used to lust and lust after imported Walkie-Talkie dolls. In those days, such items came from Japan, not China. The dolls were blonde, good-looking, spoke English and wore Western clothes. Sachin Pilot is Ashok Gehlot's Walkie-Talkie doll. A desi, Made-in-India doll. He is not blonde but speaks "good English" and is "handsome". Khallas! He is done for. There is no place for such men in today's Rajasthan. Bechara Sachin - is it his fault he was born to good-looking parents and sent to a good Air Force School where he was taught good English? His English must have been pretty damn good, for he got into that snob citadel, St. Stephens College in Delhi, and worse, went off to Wharton later - where his good English and good looks must have been noticed and admired. Tauba! This is seriously not okay. As Ashok Gehlot has pointed out, being handsome and speaking good English "is not everything!" Anything but, Sir! This is a huge disqualification!

We don't want educated people in government to begin with. Especially not those who speak good English. Bad English chalega. That's another matter. But please - definitely not the good variety. As for good looks - see, we prefer our netas to resemble toads and croak like them too. Sachin Pilot obviously had far too many strikes against him. Ashok Gehlot is absolutely right - this new generation has not been through what his generation has - they've been to good schools, good colleges, they are educated, articulate, ambitious and capable. Tch! Tch! Yeh new generation ki badi galti hai, sirji...

What do these padheylikhey fellows know about the real world of netagiri? Kuch bhi nahi. Jaaney do. Chalo, Sachin has been sacked. He ejected from the cockpit. But the poor chap's parachute didn't open on time. Like some media-wallas headlined their report, Pilot was unceremoniously 'derostered'. Now he finds himself in no man's

land. The old 'dhobi ka kutta' story is playing out with Gehlot smirking, gloating and going to town about the new generation, which is so faltu, those good-looking men only know how to give good sound bytes, but, as he asks pointedly, "inside their hearts, - kya hai?" Sir, try the latest version of choli ke peechay with a gender twist - Kurtey ke peechay kya hai, Kurtey ke peechay? Come on, Gehlot-ji, the answer is the same...dil hai, dil. Solid dil! You also have a dil, na? After 40 years in politics, maybe that dil needs a little dhak-dhak. A strong jolt. Because, truth be told, Sachin Pilot's generation has oomph. And the required qualifications to lead a young country like India. Itna toh sach hai. The guy is pretty cool - a commissioned officer in the Territorial Army vaghera. Aapney bhi kuch aisa kiya hoga. Big point is this, Gehlot-ji - agreed, Sachin Pilot ruined his chances to oust you and become the Chief Minister of Rajasthan, settling instead to accept a Deputy Chief



Ministership. You are now saying he is a misfit because he's handsome and speaks good English. Hello! What about your boss and Sachin's ex-boss: Rahul Gandhi? He is super-cute. And speaks good English. His sound bytes are priceless. Have you peeped behind his kurta and looked inside his dil?

Now what? Are the few Congress loyalists still hanging around, going in for a major image makeover? Will they stop speaking good English? Avoid

sound bytes? Play down their looks? Poor Shashi Tharoor - now we know why he isn't taken seriously by the High Command. This also explains why Babyface Jyotiraditya Scindia and a few other Peter Pans in the Congress party had to beat it - Rahul Baba must have been feeling maha insecure. Even though he's the one with the dimples! Uff, too much competition in the Congress beauty pageant... Oh well, there's always the BJP for the also-rans.



# Europe can be a key ally for India

Don't underestimate the value of EU to meet India's geopolitical, economic, and strategic ends

By Garima Mohan

The leaders of the European Union (EU) and India will meet for the first ever-virtual EU-India summit today (July 15). This 15th EU-India summit comes at a crucial time — just as India is dealing with a major military crisis on the border with China, and the EU is coming to its own reckoning of China as an aggressive power. That the summit is even taking place, given the coronavirus crisis and the domestic preoccupations of both partners, is a sign of how far the EU-India relationship has come. For India, this shouldn't be a business-as-usual meeting. As India tries to develop a comprehensive response to Chinese power by strengthening partnerships, economic decoupling and diversification, and as attitudes in Europe shift decisively away from China, the EU can be a crucial partner for India on several fronts.

This meeting follows on the heels of a strained EU-China summit,



which didn't even yield the customary joint statement, but a rather pointed statement from Brussels on "defending EU interests and values" in a "complex partnership" with China. In stark contrast, the meeting with India is set to produce a new road map for the partnership and a slew of initiatives on security, trade and investment, digital economy, infrastructure

connectivity, coronavirus crisis response, and the climate crisis. This difference between the two summits is no coincidence. In fact, Europe's perception of India has been changing in tandem with increasing tensions with China. In 2018, the EU released a new strategy for cooperation with India, calling it a geopolitical pillar in a multipolar Asia, crucial for maintaining the balance of

power in the region. Paris and Brussels have been actively pushing Europe to see India as a truly strategic partner.

Yet, in the public eye and in strategic circles in New Delhi, the value of the EU as partner is constantly underestimated. Since it is not a traditional hard power, many cannot imagine a role for Europe in dealing with the pressures New Delhi is facing.

There are perennial misunderstandings on capabilities — where Brussels can deliver to Indian interests as opposed to areas where Paris or Berlin would be better partners. But as India deals with the China challenge, the EU can be a valuable partner in several strategic areas. For example, on 5G technologies, as India reconsiders Huawei due to security concerns, European companies such as Ericsson and Nokia will be important players. Also, as India looks to check Chinese investment in its technology sector, Europe will be an important alternative. It is crucial for India to plug into the debates in Brussels on their 5G toolbox and the digital agenda to discuss mutual security concerns. Next, as India grapples with rising Chinese influence in its neighbourhood, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments and infrastructure connectivity are in the spotlight.

(Contd on page 31)

## Covid-19: From the US, lessons on what not to do

The Driven by politics rather than science, Donald Trump took a set of reckless decisions. Here are 10 lessons

The United States (US), which has the most expensive health care infrastructure in the world, remains, by far, the country most affected by the coronavirus pandemic with more than 3.5 million cases and around 140,000 fatalities as of July 15. Sadly, more than six months after the onset of the pandemic, the US appears to be far from flattening the infections curve. These problematic conditions were created by a seriously flawed response to Covid-19 from its initial identification until today. There were 10 major deficiencies, all of which provide lessons on what not to do.

One, decisions were made politically, rather than scientifically. This failure began at the top with President Donald Trump. He was initially dismissive of the coronavirus comparing it to the seasonal flu. He appointed Vice-President (V-P) Mike Pence to head a task force to advise on what to do but gave it no real authority.

Two, no national plan, backed by law, was devised to address the pandemic. The V-P's task force

developed guidelines for states and localities for testing, tracking and treatment of the virus; sheltering in place; and, the use of masks and social distancing to prevent its spread. These were only guidelines, not mandatory rules or law.

Three, the pandemic was treated as a state and local issue. There was no standardised federal intervention on the pandemic.

The governors and local officials were made responsible for handling it. As a result, the approaches and results varied considerably from state to state. Four, there was limited national access to testing, medical equipment and supplies. The federal government furnished a nominal amount of these, but the supplies and supply chain were woefully insufficient. The states were left to source these, and fought among themselves, to acquire these materials from overseas and private sources.

Five, there were mixed messages related to the pandemic. The task force held regular briefings until the country began to reopen and Trump



essentially silenced it. He commanded those briefings and used them to grandstand, argue with the press, contradict the medical experts, and even promote unproven drugs.

Six, there was a push towards a rapid reopening. Trump was always opposed to sheltering in place. He started suggesting considering reopening the country shortly after people started staying at home. He also

tweeted to his millions of followers to liberate states such as Virginia and Michigan where he felt the governors might resist or be too slow in reopening. Trump appeared to be driven solely by his re-election possibilities, at the cost of public health.

Seven, reopening one part, based on relative success in another, ignored the nature of the disease. The original hotspots for the

pandemic were primarily states and urban cities in the Northeast and Midwest and in California. By mid-May to early June, the spread was weakening in those locations and appeared to have peaked around the country. So states such as Georgia, Florida, Texas and Arizona moved ahead with relatively rapid re-opening. As a consequence, they became and are the new hot spots. (Contd on page 31)





# Adopt a new paradigm to deal with Covid-19 spread

The epidemic is out in the open. Embark on national surveillance, enhance testing, protect the vulnerable

By JVR Prasada Rao

The Covid-19 situation in India is turning grim with new infections per day racing towards the 30,000 mark. We now have the third-largest number of infections globally. The redeeming feature is the high percentage of recoveries, which can be explained by demography with a larger number of young people getting infected, but shedding the virus in a short period. But case fatality rate is rising especially among elderly and people with co-morbidities.

It is time to identify where we are falling short in our responses. Sporadic corrective measures are not helping. We should realise that the pandemic is no more limited to certain identifiable groups who can be accessed through contact tracing or contained by locking down geographical areas. The pandemic in India is out in the open, whether we technically name it community transmission or not. It is time to adopt a new paradigm in the response to quickly get ahead of the curve. Until now, we have based our entire response on the number of reported cases, which will touch the million-mark soon. Most of them are symptomatic cases detected by testing. Experts are of the opinion that, for every symptomatic case, there could be several undetected asymptomatic cases. No organised attempt has yet been made to ascertain the estimated number of total infections that India could have which is necessary for a meaningful response.

India had done this earlier in 1999 when the Aids epidemic was at its peak. At that time, we claimed 90,000 reported cases, which

was not credible. A nationwide sentinel survey done by the National AIDS Control Organisation estimated HIV prevalence in the country to be around three million. The government, at that time, bit the bullet and announced the figures to a shocked nation. It was chaotic for a few days, with the media pouncing on the government for hiding the facts, but it helped the country mount a strong response for the next 10 years which reversed the trend and brought down new infections by 56%. The estimated

prevalence was further revised as 2.4 million.

We need to make a similar effort to determine the size of the pandemic by a national-level surveillance programme. This will provide valuable inputs about the profile of the pandemic, its urban-rural, male-female orientation, and identification of risk groups who need greater care.

Once the size of the infected population is known with a reasonable degree of accuracy, the health care system can be geared to meet the increasing load of symptomatic cases who

will report for admission. It will become easier to do advance planning for procurement of drugs, diagnostics, life-saving equipment like oxygen, ventilator systems and protective gear for the health care personnel and prevent the system from getting overwhelmed.

A complementary effort has to be initiated in the area of testing also. Currently, testing is done only for symptomatic cases and contacts. A limiting factor for expansion of testing is the high cost of reverse transfer-polymerase chain reaction test

kits and availability. More rapid test kits, both blood-based and swab-based, are now available in the market at relatively affordable cost. The Indian Council of Medical Research has already evaluated many of these kits for sensitivity and specificity.

Under the new strategy, testing should cover a larger section of population based on risk factors, and not just on exposure to Covid-19. People at risk should be able to access testing at voluntary testing facilities in high-prevalence states to start with, and, later, (Contd on page 31)

## The US steps up against China

Beijing believes in the power of fear. It isn't working

China has developed a reckless track record, of antagonising country after country, with little regard for consequences. The only country China is wary of acting against is the United States (US). This is why Washington's announcement of measures against the Chinese regime in the past few weeks is noteworthy. The US formally announced on Monday that it did not recognise China's claims on submerged shoals and reefs in the South China Sea (SCS), diluting Washington's traditional stance of remaining neutral in third party territorial disputes. The US foreshadowed this by its earlier statements blaming the Chinese aggression for the situation in Ladakh. Washington has also imposed

sanctions against individual Chinese officials involved in its gulags for Uighur minority members. It also took measures, against China's repressive moves in Hong Kong. The US' actions against China on the economic front are equally important. It is now expected that a bilateral US-China agreement on accounting standards will fall apart. This will result in many Chinese firms being forced out of US capital markets and stock exchanges, a form of financial decoupling. Superpowers on a collision course is a recipe for global war, which is why the US and China tend to pull their punches against each other. The US preferred to attack the Chinese claim on the SCS on a legal point, namely that international law does not allow countries to stake



territorial claims on the basis of partially submerged reefs and rocks. It avoided going after the genuine islands that China has illegally captured. Nonetheless, the US has laid the basis for potentially more assertive warship movements inside Chinese-claimed waters. In the last 15 years, the world has seen Washington blow hot and cold in its responses to Beijing's assertiveness. Barack Obama's administration was willing to sacrifice strategic interests in return for cooperation on issues such as the climate crisis. President Donald Trump has

wobbled on the security side when China seemed willing to grant trade concessions. Now, the US is not interested in safeguarding any element of its relationship from the bitter strategic relations. However, there should be no doubt as to who is to blame for this — Beijing. The international community has been more than accommodative of China's aspirations. Over the past few years, and especially the past few months, it is evident Beijing sees its interests best advanced by using its power to instil fear rather than admiration.



# The Chinese trishul in South Asia

Through local, national, and regional instruments, Beijing has expanded its influence in the region

By Mahendra P Lama

For a country with 14 neighbours, China remained a regional power without a regional policy for a long time. But a new China has, in recent years, adopted a sophisticated trishul (trident) approach at the local, national and regional level, especially in South Asia. At the local level, the Khunjerab Pass on the Karakoram highway in Pakistan; Tatopani and Kerung-Rasuwadhi in Nepal; the Wakhan Corridor in northeast of Afghanistan; and Nathu la, Shipki la and Lipulekh in India are signs of integration, aimed at the borderland geography and communities. These instruments are likely to be mainstreamed and transformed into national and cross-regional grids. For instance, the Khunjerab Pass recorded a trade volume of nearly one billion dollars in 2019, and is already connected with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) through the Karakoram highway. The Shigatse-Lhasa-Shanghai railway line is proposed to be extended to Nathu la in Sikkim and Kerung-Rasuwadhi in Nepal. Besides the use of the Chinese renminbi (RMB) in trade — such as the \$6 billion border trade between Muse (Myanmar) and Ruili (Kunming-China) — foreign exchange reserves in RMB are being promoted.

At the national level, China has already grabbed a significant portion of South Asia's trade volume. China-South Asia trade recorded an over five-fold jump from a mere \$1.18 billion in 1990 to \$5.57 billion in 2000, and another 23-fold jump to \$127.36 billion in 2018. Over 23% of the total global imports of Bangladesh, 15% of India, 24% of Pakistan and 19% of Sri Lanka are from China. All South Asian countries now have a significant trade deficit with China. Bhutan is the only country which has steadfastly remained outside the trishul framework, despite the Doklam intrusion and other fresh claims by China.

From Hambantota and Colombo Port City in Sri Lanka to investing \$3 billion each in the Payra Power project and the Dhaka-Chittagong railway in Bangladesh, from putting in \$8.62 billion to complete eight energy projects under the CPEC in Pakistan to planning railway lines to Indian and the Nepalese highland borderlands, China has upset India's predominant position both as a traditionally



core neighbouring country and influential economic-democratic-military power. First, it has entered the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) process, and promoted the Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM) cooperation initiative. Second, it exploits forums it leads, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (Brics) initiative, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Boao

Forum, to attract South Asian countries into its fold. Third, it has effectively started using newly-created development funding agencies such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund to finance projects in South Asia. Fourth, the gradual unfolding of region-wide projects such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and its alignment with regional and sub-regional groupings in South Asia in the next few years will further extend its reach. India

has reacted to China's trishul strategy in four ways. It announced a "neighbourhood-first" policy, and re-engaged neighbours with a more liberal attitude. It initiated interventions such as waterways, railways and a gas pipeline in Nepal, and established electricity grid connections with Bangladesh. It blocked Saarc, and reinvigorated counter-balancing regional institutions such as the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) initiative and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-

Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (Bimstec). But India has not come up with a comprehensive counter-trishul approach yet. India's neighbourhood is now entangled in an unparalleled balancing dilemma. These countries are striving diplomatically to convey an impression of non-alignment. Aware that the cost of alignment, even at the perception level, could generate suspicion, they consciously appease India on its core concerns such as terrorism. But India is adept at immediately sensing significant deviations in their foreign policy. Nepal's tilt towards China, even without major formal agreements and projects, was obvious. Later, when Nepal signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) related to access to ports, partnership in BRI initiatives, and other trade and investment ventures with China. India unsuccessfully tried to use the proverbial stick but had to quickly fall back on the theme of historic and cultural ties. These nations fear that the competitive and conflictual existence of two giant neighbours, however beneficial, can result in micro-management in their domestic affairs.

## The roots of the Rajasthan battle

The Congress has failed to accommodate aspirations

The war between Rajasthan government (Mr Gehlot too has been summoned, but given that he is also home minister, this appears perfunctory); signs of rebellion by Mr Pilot and his loyalists; a public war of the words between the two factions; and speculation that the Mr Pilot is in touch with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the crisis within the Congress in Rajasthan has taken a new turn. While Mr Gehlot should have been more consultative in his approach, and Mr Pilot more patient about his ambitions, the issue is not specific to a personality clash between the two leaders. It is, yet again, evidence of the inability of the Congress leadership in Delhi to provide guidance, take decisions, manage conflicts, and accommodate aspirations. The party has not yet had a review of

the reasons for its loss in two consecutive national elections. There remains an acute crisis of leadership at the top, with groups calling for the return of Rahul Gandhi as president, even as Mr Gandhi remains reluctant. Other voices calling for the democratisation of the organisation — through an independent electoral process to choose a new president and a new Congress Working Committee — are not being heard. In this backdrop, it is but natural that younger leaders will seek opportunities to sustain their political lives and grow, instead of merely waiting for the

leadership to resolve its issues. What is happening in Jaipur is exactly what happened in Bhopal earlier this year. The party lost Jyotiraditya Scindia, who had been raising issues within internal forums for over a year but to no avail; the net impact — the Congress lost its government in Madhya Pradesh. Irrespective of whether the Rajasthan government survives, the Congress should be alarmed at its rapidly depleting political capital, its internal mismanagement, and the fury of some of its brightest, young political stars.





# Vikas Dubey's mysterious death

## Extrajudicial killings weaken the rule of law. UP must explain



principles here. Dubey was a gang lord; his list of crimes was long; he allegedly led the attack and killing on eight policemen in Kanpur last week. Such a man deserved to be punished for his crimes. But India prides itself on the rule of law. When a crime is allegedly committed, a process kicks in. The perpetrator is arrested, contingent on judicial sanction. Suspects are questioned. Evidence is amassed. Interrogations are conducted. A case is built up. The court examines the evidence and testimonies; the defendant has a right to legal defence. On the merits of the case, based on the law, the judiciary hands down its decision, which can then be appealed against. In a civilised

society, this process is undertaken, not just because the guilty is presumed to be innocent until convicted, but because this is the only way to sustain the legitimacy of the system and prevent arbitrary exercise of power. Even Ajmal Kasab, caught red-handed in the 26/11 attacks, got a trial.

In UP, there appears to be a pattern where this process is, often, not followed. There have been a spate of extrajudicial killings — encounters, in popular parlance — since the current government took office in 2017. This is attributed to a stern approach where patience for due process is limited. Even before Friday, this impatience with process, the desire to satiate the

thirst for instant justice, as well as, more controversially, ensure Dubey did not speak about his political and bureaucratic linkages were being seen as factors that would cut short his life. The circumstances of his death — he was shifted into another vehicle before the shoot-out; journalists following the convoy were stopped before the encounter took place; the absence of evidence to show how his car overturned — will only add motive to mystery. If UP wants to set an example, it must institute an independent probe on the manner of Dubey's killing and his entire network. India may have one less criminal today, but it has also fallen short of its own principles.

(News Agencies) Vikas Dubey is dead. On Thursday, when he was arrested in Ujjain, this newspaper argued that his arrest must mark the beginning — not the end — of the story about the nexus between politics and crime in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and a broken administrative and police system. But there appear to have been forces which did not want that story told. On Friday morning, in highly mysterious circumstances, Dubey died, and so did the story he may have told. It is important to reiterate first

### Roorkee police station sealed 50 cops quarantined after officer tests Covid-19 positive



(News Agencies) The Ganga Nahar police station at Roorkee in Uttarakhand's Haridwar district has been sealed and all 50 personnel has been put under self-quarantine as a preventive measure after a female sub-inspector (S-I) tested coronavirus disease (Covid-19) positive, officials said.

The female S-I had returned from Muzaffarnagar district in western Uttar Pradesh (UP) last week and later tested Covid-19 positive. All 50 self-quarantined police personnel's swab samples are being collected for Covid-19 test.

State healthcare workers are busy sanitising the police station and hoardings have been put up for the public, urging them to approach Ramnagar police post for complaints or any related work. Ramnagar police post has been converted into a makeshift police station in a bid to ensure smooth functioning of law and order in Roorkee. Additional personnel from Bhagwanpur and Jhabreda police stations have been deployed at the makeshift Ramnagar police station. Civil Lines police station personnel is carrying out night patrolling in the area under Ganga Nahar police station's jurisdiction, while the daytime responsibility has been given to Jhabreda police station authorities.

## India needs to rethink housing for the poor

**The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed an ugly reality: Migrant labourers live in slums and informal/unauthorised colonies that are congested, lack basic sanitation and water services, ventilation and green spaces. As a result, they are at a far greater risk of contracting the virus, along with other illnesses.**

(News Agencies) Last week, the Union Cabinet approved the Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs) scheme, which aims to provide reasonably priced rental accommodation for migrant labourers. The Rs 600 crore-programme has a two-pronged roll-out plan: First, existing vacant government-funded housing complexes will be converted into ARHCs through concessional agreements for 25 years; and second, incentives will be offered to private and public entities to develop ARHCs on their vacant land for 25 years.

The trigger for the scheme, which is a part of the Centre's larger affordable housing programme for the urban poor, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana — Urban (PMAY-U), is Covid-19. The pandemic not only triggered an unprecedented exodus of migrant workers from their host states to home states, but also exposed an ugly reality: Migrant labourers — ironically, the bulk of them work in the construction sector — live in slums and informal/unauthorised colonies that are congested, lack basic sanitation and water services, ventilation and green spaces. This is due to the informal nature of their employment; inability to access legally-mandated minimum wages, welfare benefits, employer-provided facilities or services, or afford formal rental accommodation, which in any case is in short supply.

The government estimates that there are 26-37 million families in urban India that live in informal housing, and they largely belong to the poorer sections. Under PMAY-U, India aims to build 20 million housing units for the poor by 2022. The pandemic has highlighted



the high social and economic costs of this gap in the safety net. People living in poor-quality, overcrowded, or unstable housing cannot follow directives on safe shelters or maintain social distancing. As a result, they are at a far greater risk of contracting the virus, along with other illnesses. There is also mounting evidence that Covid-19 could be airborne, and the lack of adequate ventilation increases the risk of transmission. The pandemic has also shown that homes are not just living spaces, but also productive spaces. So it becomes imperative that once construction activities restart, the sector must respond to the new realities and the demands of the Covid-19-hit world. This means that homes have to be thermally comfortable (at the lowest-income level, many cannot afford air-conditioning); have natural daylight; and proper ventilation. Architects say that three principles need to be

followed: Ensure window shading and ventilation; insulate the walls and roofs; and share walls between two houses. The focus on natural thermal comfort will deter buying/minimise the use of ACs, which are energy guzzlers and use high global warming potential refrigerants; and using less/reusing building material will mean less use of natural resources. Plus, cooler and comfortable homes increase productivity. The good news is that India has a code — Eco-Niwas Samhita Part I — for residential buildings. The code, which was launched by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency in 2018, sets standards to limit heat gains (for cooling-dominated climates), limit heat loss (for heating-dominated climates), and ensure natural ventilation and daylight potential. Unfortunately, the codes are voluntary, and many states have not dovetailed them into their by-laws.



# सुप्रीम कोर्ट के फैसले के बावजूद भी सरकार इन बलों को नहीं दे रही है संगठित ग्रुप ए सर्विस का दर्जा



नई दिल्ली। आलोक गौड़ :- बार्डर सिक्कूरिटी फोर्स (बीएसएफ), केंद्रीय रिजर्व पुलिस बल (सीआरपीएफ), भारत तिब्बत सीमा पुलिस (आईटीबीपी), केंद्रीय औद्योगिक सुरक्षा बल (सीआईएसएफ) और एस एस बी जैसे अर्ध सैनिक बलों या केंद्रीय सुरक्षा बल के जवान और अधिकारियों का हमारी बाहरी व आंतरिक सुरक्षा में अतुलनीय योगदान है। बावजूद इसके सरकार नौकरशाह और आईपीएस लाबी के दबाव में इनके साथ दोयम दर्जे का व्यवहार कर रही है बल्कि सुप्रीम कोर्ट के आदेश की अवेहलना करते हुए इन्हें नान फंक्शनल फाइनेंशियल फंड और संगठित ग्रुप ए सर्विस का लाभ भी नहीं दे रही। जिसको लेकर न केवल सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने केंद्रीय गृह मंत्रालय को फटकार लगाई है बल्कि अदालत उसके खिलाफ अदालत की अवमानना के मामले में सुनवाई भी कर रही है।

इन अर्ध सैनिक बलों के हक की लड़ाई लड़ने वाली कानून की शोधकर्ता दीपिका देशवाल के मुताबिक सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने फरवरी 2019 में अर्ध सैनिक बलों के हक में फैसला सुनाया था। जिसके बाद इन बलों के एक संयुक्त प्रतिनिधि मंडल ने तत्कालीन गृह मंत्री राजनाथ सिंह के साथ मुलाकात की थी। तब राजनाथ सिंह ने लोकसभा चुनावों के कारण आचार संहिता लागू होने की आड़ में चुनाव के बाद उनके साथ होने वाले सभी भेदभाव को खत्म करने और अदालत के फैसले को लागू करने का आश्वासन दिया था। चुनाव के बाद राजनाथ सिंह के स्थान पर अमित शाह देश के गृह मंत्री बन गए और इनका मामला फिर से अटक गया। दीपिका देशवाल के मुताबिक अर्ध सैनिक बलों के जवान और अधिकारियों को बाहरी व देश के भीतरी दुश्मनों से निपटने के साथ ही अपने जायज हकों के लिए भी नौकरशाह और आईपीएस लाबी से लड़ना पड़ा रहा है। इसमें भी दुखद बात तो यह है कि सरकार इन बलों के जवान और अधिकारियों को उनका हक देकर उनका मनोबल बढ़ाने के बजाय नौकरशाह और आईपीएस लाबी के हाथों में खेलकर उन्हें नैराश्य के सागर में डुबोने का काम कर रही है।

**एक पैरामिलिट्री बल की व्यथा : नेहरू 1.0 से मोदी 2.0 तक**  
मैं आपका ध्यान उन सैनिकों की समस्याओं की ओर दिलाना चाहती हूँ जो सीमाओं की रक्षा के लिए दिन-रात, गर्मी और ठंड में अनवरत खड़े हैं। जो कश्मीर, उत्तर-पूर्व या नक्सल में लड़ रहे हैं और शहीद हो रहे हैं, लेकिन आज यह बल अपनी पहचान तथा भविष्य के लिए अपने भीतर ही लड़ रहे हैं। यह बेहद निराशाजनक है तथा बलों के लिए

हानिकारक भी।

मैं सीमा सुरक्षा बल का उदाहरण देना चाहूंगी। 1965 में इसका गठन पाकिस्तान के आक्रमण के बाद किया गया था जो फौज ना हो पर फौज से कम भी ना हो। शुरुआती कमांडिंग ऑफिसर सेना से तथा प्रशिक्षण सेना की तर्ज पर होने के कारण यह एक बेहतर बल के रूप में उभरा तथा सीमाओं पर, कश्मीर, उत्तर-पूर्व पंजाब तथा नक्सल में स्वयं को साबित किया। तब यह बल छोटा था तथा मुख्यालय कम था। राजनैतिक समस्याएं कम थी। भारतीय पुलिस सेना के अधिकारी भी कम थे तथा दोयम दर्जे के नहीं थे। हमेशा सेना के अधिकारियों द्वारा कमांड देना संभव नहीं था अतः आईपीएस अधिकारियों को ड्यूटीशन की सुविधा दी गई जब तक सीमा सुरक्षा बल के अपने वरिष्ठ अधिकारियों का कैंडर तैयार ना हो जाए। यह 70 का दशक था। समस्या तब शुरू हुई जब सीमाएं अशांत हुई तथा राज्यों में राजनैतिक समस्याएं पैदा हुई। आईपीएस के अवसर राज्यों में कम हुए, इनकी संख्या बढ़ी तथा योग्यता कम हुई। केंद्रीय बलों में ड्यूटीशन इन के लिए लूप लाइन तथा राजनैतिक समस्याओं से बचने का एक जरिया बन गया। पहले यह कमांडेंट्समादेष्टा रैंक पर भी आने को तैयार थे। सीमाओं पर कमांडेंट की जिम्मेवारी तय होनी शुरू हुई तब यह डीआईजी तथा ऊपर के रैंक लेने लगे। डीआईजी स्तर पर भी ऑपरेशनल दिक्कत होने से यह इन पदों पर इच्छुक नहीं हैं, हालांकि आरामदेह सेक्टर जैसे जैसलमेर, बीकानेर, पंजाब अब भी इनकी मनपसंद पोस्टिंग में से है।

आईपीएस अधिकारी राज्यों में नौकरी करके राजनीति का पुलिसिया पाठ पढ़ कर आते हैं जिसमें अपने फायदे के लिए किसी भी स्तर तक गिर जाना शामिल है जबकि बीएसएफ के कैंडर अधिकारी अपनी सीमाओं के कामों में उलझे रहे। आईपीएस अधिकारियों ने सोची-समझी साजिश के तहत सीमा सुरक्षा बल के कैंडर को पनपने नहीं दिया तथा आईजी स्तर पर एचआर, इंटेलेजेंस तथा प्रशासन जैसी जगह पर कब्जा किया जिससे यह संपूर्ण सीमा सुरक्षा बल पर कब्जा कर सकें।

आईपीएस एसोसिएशन जैसी संस्थाओं ने इन्हें ऑर्गेनाइज किया वहीं बीएसएफ कैंडर ऑफिसर आर्म्ड फोर्स एक्ट के तहत कोई एसोसिएशन ना बना सकें तथा इनका कोई प्रतिनिधित्व नहीं हो सका। यह 90 का दशक था तथा केन्द्र में कमजोर सरकारें आई। राजनेता कमजोर होते गए तथा नौकरशाह मजबूत। सशस्त्र बल के कार्मिक

जिनकी आवाज सरकार है, क्योंकि यह आंदोलन नहीं कर सकते, लोबिंग नहीं कर सकते थे। उस सरकार पर नौकरशाहों, आईपीएस का नियंत्रण था। अतः सरकार के सुनने का सवाल ही नहीं उठता था।

**आईपीएस अधिकारियों ने वही स्ट्रेटजी केंद्रीय बलों में अप्लाई की जो अंग्रेजों द्वारा गुलाम भारत पर इस्तेमाल किया गया था जैसे-**

**सीमा सुरक्षा बल के चंद अफसरों को अतिरिक्त लाभ देकर रायबहादुर जैसा तमगा देकर कैंडर में दरार डालना। सक्षम अधिकारियों को उत्तर-पूर्व या नक्सल में लूप लाइन में रखना। सीमा सुरक्षा बल अधिकारियों को कई मामलों में फंसाना तथा इंगेज रखना। सीधी भर्ती अधिकारियों को स्टैटिक लोकेशन से दूर रखना ताकि वे जागरूक ना हो सकें।**

आईपीएस अधिकारियों द्वारा मनमाने तरीके से बल के संसाधनों का दुरुपयोग हुआ। उदाहरण राजस्थान जहां जवान अपने सर पर जनरेटर लेकर रेगिस्तान में चलते हैं ताकि आईपीएस आईजी रेत के टीलों पर नृत्य तथा संगीत का आनंद ले सकें। विद्रोह ना होने पाए उसके लिए जिस तरह अंग्रेज सरकार डलहौजी के बाद रिपन को भेजती थी उसी प्रकार सीमा सुरक्षा बल में भी रमन श्रीवास्तव, सुभाष जोशी

के बाद मरहम लगाने के लिए श्री कुमावत, श्री प्रकाश सिंह जैसे लोग भी भेजे गए।

अंग्रेजी शासन के अत्याचार का पानी सर के ऊपर जा चुका था। सीमा सुरक्षा बल के अपने कैंडर अधिकारियों की जमीनी खेप तैयार हो चुकी थी। रायबहादुर या तो रिटायर हो चुके थे या आईजी और एडीजी बन चुके थे। पढ़े लिखे और काबिल लोग बल ज्वाइन कर रहे थे। सोशल मीडिया उन्हें जागरूक कर रहा था। स्थिर सरकार से हिम्मत मिल रही थी। इस हिम्मत ने इन्हें संगठित किया तथा सरकार तथा आईपीएस से कोई मदद ना मिलने पर कोर्ट की शरण ली। बहुत ही धीमा प्रमोशन, खराब आर्थिक स्थिति, सम्मान की कमी तथा आईपीएस के व्यवहार ने अंतिम लड़ाई की शक्ति दी। इसके फलस्वरूप 2019 में माननीय उच्चतम न्यायालय ने केंद्रीय बलों को ऑर्गेनाइज कैंडर तथा बल के अंतर्गत लाने का आदेश दिया। इससे आईपीएस लॉबी तिलमिला उठी। आईपीएस एसोसिएशन न्यायालय के निर्णय को प्रभावित करने के लिए स्वयं एक पक्ष बना। कोर्ट का निर्णय आने के बाद भी आईपीएस लॉबी ने इसे रोकने की भरसक कोशिश की है। यह बेहद निराशाजनक है। केंद्रीय बलों के अपने अफसर कमांड के लिए तैयार है। आर्म्ड फोर्स के कार्मिक हड़ताल नहीं कर सकते। अतः यह सरकार का फर्ज है कि इन

पहरदारों के हितों की रक्षा करें। जिस देश में छोटा सा दल चंद व्यक्तियों के दम पर सड़क जाम करके अपनी बात मनवा लेते हैं वहां दस लाख के केंद्रीय बलों को अपनी पहचान बनाने के लिए तस्सना पड़ रहा है। आईपीएस जिन्हें बलों में स्नेह से इंडियन पैराशूट सर्विस के नाम से जाना जाता है एक बहुत ही प्रभावशाली तथा पढ़े लिखे लॉबी है। इन्हें समस्या बल के अधिकारियों को छुट्टी फाइनेंशियल एडवॉंटेज से नहीं है बल्कि ऑर्गेनाइज कैंडर या बल से है जिससे इनका ड्यूटीशन बंद हो जाएगा तथा इन्हें अपने मूल राज्यों के प्रति ज्यादा जिम्मेवार होना पड़ेगा। आईपीएस का तर्क है कि इससे केंद्रीय बलों का अखिल भारतीय स्वरूप नहीं रहेगा जबकि केंद्रीय बलों में कार्मिक अफसर देश के सभी हिस्सों से आते हैं।

यदि बलों की लड़ाकू क्षमता और इन्हें नैराश्य में डूबने से बचाना है तो नौकरशाहों पर लगाम लगाकर माननीय सुप्रीम कोर्ट का निर्णय लागू करके बलों को छुट्टी तथा बल तत्काल दिया जाए। यह बात बल के कार्मिक भी जानते हैं तथा पैराशूट सर्विस के अधिकारी भी कि सिर्फ आपकी सरकार इन पर लगाम लगा सकती है। इसका उदाहरण सभी आप की सरकार के पहले कार्यकाल में देख चुके हैं। मेरा मानना है कि आजादी के पहले भारतीयों में अंग्रेजों को देखकर जो भावना आती थी वही नफरत बल के कार्मिकों के भीतर इन नव-अंग्रेजों के लिए है।

IAAC foundation के दीपक बंसल ने दीपिका देशवाल (Wrestler and Jat Mahasabha Delhi president)की सराहना करते हुए अर्धसैनिक बलों के हक में जो सुप्रीम कोर्ट द्वारा फैसला (छच्छःःः)आया है उसके लिए सरकार से गुहार लगायी है कि इसे जल्दी लागू किया जाए पंजाब से अधिकतर लोग पैरामिलिट्री फोर्स में हैं और हम भली भाँति उस दर्द को समझते हैं जब (Supreme Court) मिलने के बावजूद लागू नहीं किया जाता।

दिन रात एक कर के अर्धसैनिक बल देश को सुरक्षित रखते हैं। आज समय है सारा देश उनके हकों के लिए एक साथ खड़ा हो और सरकार इसको (NFFU OAGA)तुर्तंग लागू करें।

CAPF यानी केंद्रीय सशस्त्र पुलिस बल जिन्हें पहले Central Paramilitary Force भी कहा जाता है में CRPF BSF CISF ITBP SSB आदि है जो पूरे देश में आंतरिक सुरक्षा की हरेक ड्यूटी जैसे कानून व्यवस्था बनाना, दंगों के समय शांति स्थापित करना, जम्मू कश्मीर में आतंकवादियों, नक्सल इलाकों में नक्सलियों, नार्थ ईस्ट में विद्रोहियों से लड़ना, देश में शांतिपूर्वक चुनाव कराना, आपदा यानी भूकंप, बाढ़ और तूफान इत्यादि के समय राहत कार्य करना, देश के अति महत्वपूर्ण व्यक्तियों की सुरक्षा करना, अंतरराष्ट्रीय बॉर्डर की रक्षा करना जैसे कार्य करते हैं। साथ ही साथ ये युद्ध के समय आर्मी की मदद भी करते हैं जैसे कारगिल में टैच ने आर्मी की मदद की और अभी लेह लदाख में प्लेट आर्मी के साथ मिल कर चीनी सैनिकों का मुकाबला कर रही है। अभी हाल ही में कानपुर में 08 बहादुर सिपाहियों की शहादत के बाद कानून व्यवस्था की स्थिति को बनाये रखने के लिए ब्ख की टुकड़ी तैयार को वहां तैनात किया गया है। फरवरी 2019 में एक लंबी कानूनी लड़ाई के बाद इन पैरामिलिट्री फोर्स और RPF (रेलवे प्रोटेक्शन फोर्स) को सुप्रीम कोर्ट के द्वारा संगठित सेवा यानी Organised Group A Service का दर्जा दिया गया और फिर भारत सरकार ने जुलाई 2019 में कैबिनेट की मंजूरी के बाद गृह मंत्रालय और रेल मंत्रालय को इस Organised Service का लाभ इन बलों को देने और इस संबं 1 में कानून बनाने का आदेश दिया। रेल मंत्रालय ने कोर्ट और सरकार के आदेशों का पालन करते हुए इस Organised

Service का लाभ त्थ अधिकारियों को दिया इसके लिए जरूरी सेवा नियम में बदलाव करते हुए इसे देश के अन्य त्थदपेक मतअपबम के जैसे कर दिया।

दूसरी तरफ गृह मंत्रालय ( Home Ministry ) ने सभी पैरामिलिट्री के वल जो पै होते हैं को इसका लाभ सभी अधिकारियों को देने और तय नियम के अनुसार जरूरी कार्यवाई करने का निर्देश दिया। एक साजिश के तहत इन फोर्स के वल जो खुद ही पै होते हैं ने न तो नियम के अनुसार इसका लाभ पैरामिलिट्री फोर्स के अधिकारियों को दिया और न ही इसको लागू करने के लिए सेवा नियमों (Service Rule) में बदलाव किया है। सुप्रीम कोर्ट के एक ही आदेश को जहाँ रेल मंत्रालय ने त्थ के लिए सही तरीके से लागू किया वहीं गृह मंत्रालय में पै लॉबी अपने स्वार्थ के लिए इस आदेश को पैरामिलिट्री में सही तरीके से लागू नहीं होने दे रहे हैं। इस कारण इस फोर्स के सभी अधिकारियों का मनोबल टूट गया और वो अपने हक के लिए फिर दिल्ली हाई कोर्ट की शरण में है।

देश के किसी भी Organised Service में उसी विभाग के अधिकारी Joint Secretary तक होते हैं लेकिन जिला और राज्य पुलिस में रहने वाले ये पै जिनको इस फोर्स का कोई ज्ञान नहीं होता यहां आकर सीनियर पोस्ट पर विराजमान हो जाते हैं जिस कारण विभाग का कार्य सही तरीके से नहीं हो पाता और इसी कारण आज सभी जवान और अधिकारियों को अपने छोटे छोटे हक के लिए कोर्ट का सहारा लेना पड़ रहा है।

कोर्ट और सरकार के आदेश के बाद भी IPS अधिकारियों की साजिश के कारण पैरामिलिट्री फोर्स को अपना वाजिब हक नहीं मिल पा रहा है जिससे उनका मनोबल गिरा है और बल में असंतोष है। आज पैरामिलिट्री के कार्मिक और अधिकारी अपने हक के लिए कोर्ट और देश की जनता की तरफ देख रहे हैं। आशा है देश की अदालत एक बार फिर उन्हें इनका हक देते हुए इसे सही तरीके से लागू नहीं करने वालों को उचित न्यायिक दंड देगी और देश की जनता इनका हक नहीं देने वालों और साजिस करने वालों को सबक सिखाएगी।

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# How the Rajasthan impasse is different from Madhya Pradesh saga

While Scindia is invested in the politics of MP and has a mass base in the state, his immediate aspirations did not revolve around seeking leadership in the state. In contrast, Pilot's ambition appears state-centric at the moment. He was keen to become CM while he was leading the Congress in the elections.

(News Agencies) The Congress' decision to sack Sachin Pilot from both deputy chief ministership and state unit presidency of the party in Rajasthan — and Pilot's open rebellion over the past few days — has thrown up comparisons with Madhya Pradesh.

In MP, Jyotiraditya Scindia — the party's young and popular face — walked out in March, along with legislators loyal to him, and joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), leading to the ouster of the Kamal Nath government, and the subsequent installation of the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government. But there are significant differences between the two states. Here are three such variations:

## 1 Ashok Gehlot versus Kamal Nath

Rajasthan's CM Ashok Gehlot is a political veteran, who is serving as CM for the third time. In contrast, Kamal Nath — while being a senior leader — was a newcomer to state politics, having been almost entirely in national politics. MP, for him, for much of his political career, was largely limited to his Lok Sabha constituency of Chindwara. He was resourceful,

but lacked the ground experience, control over all regions of the state, and skills of political management.

Gehlot — as reflected in his current legislative strength — appears to have a firmer grasp over the party organisation. He has grown up in Rajasthan politics, from ground-up. His network in each constituency is formidable. Gehlot's caste identity — he is a Mali, belonging to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category — is seen as relatively neutral in the otherwise bitter caste-driven politics of the state; the scattered nature of his community across the state also gives him an edge. Gehlot also has good links with both the old guard and the younger leadership of the Congress in Delhi, which explains the prompt and unequivocal support he has got in this current battle.

## 2 The arithmetic question

The MP assembly election results of 2018 was fragmented. In the house of 230 members, Congress won 114 seats and the BJP trailed behind, just narrowly, 109 seats. The Congress won the support of smaller parties and independents to form the government under Kamal Nath. But the narrow difference in seats

left the BJP smelling an opportunity. This presented itself when Scindia — unhappy at how the party leadership has failed in ensuring what he saw as a just distribution of power in the state, and Kamal Nath and Digvijay Singh's attitude towards his group — decided to walk out with 22 legislators loyal to him. This reduced the size of the assembly, ensured the Nath government slid into a minority, and enabled the BJP to stake claim to form the government and prove its majority.

In Rajasthan, by contrast, while the Congress had just about reached the half-way mark — in the assembly of 200 members, it won 100 seats — it was able to secure the support of other parties and independents and bolster its strength. The BJP, by comparison, won 73 seats. This leaves the gap wider and makes it more challenging for the BJP to oust the Gehlot government. It also means that Pilot will need to muster up greater strength to be able to effect a change in government.

## 3 Differing ambitions of the young Turks

While Scindia is invested in the politics of MP and has a mass base in the state, his immediate



aspirations did not revolve around seeking leadership in the state. The BJP, which already had Chouhan as a prominent leader and former CM, too, found it politically easier to get him back in the saddle. Scindia's loyalists were accommodated in the state cabinet, but Scindia himself was elected to the Rajya Sabha. There is speculation that a greater national role is planned for him.

In contrast, Pilot's ambition appears state-centric at the moment. He was keen to become CM while he was leading the Congress in the elections; he fought hard to ensure that it was him, rather than Gehlot, who got the seat; his camp's demand over the past week has revolved around ensuring that he becomes CM. This, then, complicates the situation on two

counts. One, it is not clear that Pilot has the numbers. But two, it is also not clear if the BJP will be willing to accommodate this ambition — given that it has a set of its own leaders in the state. It is instructive that the party has not made a single leader who has shifted from another party a CM in any state where it is in power. The closest example is Manipur, where N Biren Singh, a former Congressman is CM — but he had joined the party before the elections.

At the same time, there is a remarkable similarity in the two episodes — particularly with the regard to the inability of the Congress leadership in retaining its top talent. Whether Pilot goes the Scindia way, and whether Rajasthan goes the MP way, remains to be seen.

# How Ashok Gehlot retained support, made inroads into Sachin Pilot camp

A Rajasthan Congress functionary said on condition of anonymity that Gehlot was able to convince four Pilot loyalists that they would have no future with Pilot, who was then rumoured to be joining the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).



(News Agencies) Pradyumn Singh, a former three-term legislator, an old-time associate of Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot may have been the key in the latter's success in wooing back four rebel Congress MLAs from the Sachin Pilot camp.

Singh's son Rohit Bohra was one of them. He arrived in Delhi on Friday with three other Congress legislators Danish Abrar, Prashant Bairwa, and Chetan Dudi. All were considered Pilot loyalists.

On Saturday evening Gehlot managed to get through to Bohra on phone. And then, through Bohra, he was able to speak to the other three. A Rajasthan Congress functionary said on

condition of anonymity that Gehlot was able to convince the four that they would have no future with Pilot, who was then rumoured to be joining the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Gehlot promised to address all their grievances and dangled the carrot of important responsibilities.

Soon after the call, the functionary said, the four left Delhi and reached Jaipur at 4 am on Sunday, where they had separate meetings with Gehlot. "One of the MLAs [members of legislative assembly] sought forgiveness," said a second Congress functionary, who was present at Gehlot's residence when the four returned.

"With their return, Gehlot was able to break Pilot's camp and convince party leaders in Delhi that more rebel legislators would return to the fold," the first functionary said.

The four held a press conference on Sunday and said they were with Gehlot. "We are Congress soldiers for generations and are with the party," said Abrar. The others echoed the sentiment.

Their return also seemed to enthuse

others in the Gehlot camp.

According to the first functionary, Gehlot called almost all the legislators himself and assured them that he would take care of them.

Once he was convinced he had the numbers, he called a meeting of the Congress Legislative Party (CLP) on Monday. Legislators belonging to the Congress' allies in the state were also invited to the meeting.

"The CLP is a forum where party MLAs can raise their issues in front of Central observers, who then submit a report to the party high command," said a third party functionary who asked not to be named.

"The central observers have given specific instances of how Pilot and his supporters were trying to undermine the chief minister's authority and were hobnobbing with the opposition," a fourth functionary said on condition of anonymity.

The CLP passed a resolution on Monday, seeking "strict action" against any member of the legislative party

indulging in anti-party activities even as central leaders appealed to Pilot and rebel legislators to return.

Hours before the CLP met again on Tuesday morning, party leaders again reached out to Pilot to resolve the crisis. According to a fifth Congress functionary who did not wish to be identified, Pilot was told that if he does not want to attend the CLP meeting, he should address the media in Delhi and clarify that he is a "loyal soldier" of the party.

"But Pilot turned this offer as well and insisted on his demand for immediate removal of Gehlot as the chief minister," this person added.

HT learns that Jitin Prasada and Dinesh Gundu Rao, Pilot's friends, were asked to contact him. But they, too, failed to persuade him, said another leader involved in the crisis management. "His refusal was like the final nail in the coffin. It was finally decided to remove him as the deputy chief minister and the state Congress president," this person added on condition of anonymity.



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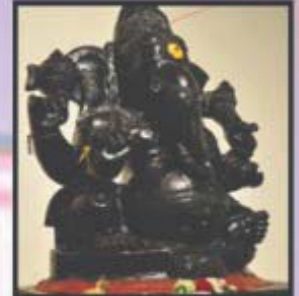
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# Banning TikTok takes a big tool away from Chinese surveillance work : US NSA

All the information is going straight to massive super computers in the cloud in China, US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien said, adding, "So China is going to know everything about you. They are going to have biometrics on you. You ought to be very careful regarding who you give such personal information to."

(News Agencies) Banning mobile applications such as TikTok by countries like India takes a big tool away from the surveillance work of China, a top White House official said on Tuesday. The Trump administration is "very seriously taking a look" at TikTok, WeChat and some other apps coming out of China, US National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien told Fox News Radio in an interview. "India has already banned those apps, as you know. And if they lose India and the United States, they lose some western European countries, that takes a big tool away from the espionage work or the surveillance work of the CCP (Chinese Communist Party)," he said in response to a question on the dangers posed by apps like TikTok. "The kids who are using TikTok — and it can be a lot of fun — but there are a lot of other social media platforms they could use. TikTok is getting facial recognition on you," O'Brien said. "They are getting all of your personal, private data, your most intimate data. They are getting to know who your friends are, who your parents are. They can map all your relationships," he added.

All the information is going straight to massive super computers in the cloud in China, O'Brien said, adding, "So China is going to know everything about you. They are going to have biometrics on you. You ought to be very careful regarding who you give such personal information to." The Trump administration, he said, is looking not just at TikTok but at WeChat and some other Chinese apps as well, because the Chinese are voracious consumers of America's personal data. "They will either try and get you to give it to them for free through WeChat or TikTok — if they cannot get it that way, they will steal it," O'Brien said. China, he said, has hacked into Marriott and stolen the personal data of hundreds of millions of people, including their passport numbers. "They have hacked into Experian and other credit rating agencies to get most intimate credit details. They have hacked into Anthem healthcare so that they can get medical details. "So this is not just an advertiser trying to find out what you are interested in searching for on Google so they can sell you a

different brand of car, this is a country that is looking to get every bit of personal, private information they can, so they know everything about you," O'Brien said. "There are social credit scores in China. They give people scores based on how compliant they are with Communist Party dictates. They are going to be able to put social credit scores together on all Americans and everyone in the world soon because of artificial intelligence and super computing. "We need to make sure that does not happen," the US National Security Advisor said.

## Officials seek options for when hospitals run out of ICU beds



(News Agencies) The shortage of hospital beds for coronavirus patients in some areas of the US has officials looking at where they will put people when more come in.

In one Texas city, the federal government is going to turn a hotel into what is called a surge hospital.

In Georgia, the governor said the state is working unceasingly to prevent hospital bed shortages. The head of a hospital system in hard-hit Miami-Dade County, Florida, told CNN that they plan to convert some regular rooms into ones that can handle the most serious coronavirus patients should the growth in

cases continue. "The situation is "very, very tight" at Jackson Health System, but they have stopped doing elective

## A Michigan man won \$2 million after a gas station clerk gave him the wrong ticket

(News Agencies) A Michigan man is lucky, even by lottery winner standards, after a gas station clerk gave him a \$2 million winning scratch-off ticket by mistake. The winner, who chose not to be identified, stopped at the station in the Detroit suburb of Eastpointe because he needed change to put air in the tires of his wife's truck, according to a statement from the Michigan Lottery. "I went in to get change and asked for a \$10

Lucky 7's ticket. The clerk handed me the \$20 ticket by mistake," the winner said in the statement. "He offered to exchange it for me, but something told me to keep it. I am sure glad I did!" The 57-year-old decided to take the prize as a one-time lump sum, so he got a \$1.3 million payout instead of an annuity for the full amount. He said he plans to use the money to buy a new house and will save the rest, according to the Lottery.





# Pentagon says US has withdrawn from 5 bases in Afghanistan as part of agreement with Taliban



(News Agencies) The Pentagon announced Tuesday that the US has withdrawn from five bases in Afghanistan and reduced the size of its forces there as part of the agreement it

our Afghan partners," Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman said in a statement.

US military presence in Afghanistan remains focused on capabilities -- not numbers. We maintain the capabilities and authorities necessary to protect ourselves, our Allies and partners, and US national interests," Hoffman said.

The statement makes no mention of the Taliban's continued links to

al Qaeda, something referenced in a Defense Department report earlier this month. In late February, the US and the Taliban signed a historic agreement, setting into motion the possibility of ending America's long involvement in the war, which has stretched nearly two decades.

The "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan" outlined a series of commitments from the US and the Taliban

related to troop levels, counterterrorism and the intra-Afghan dialogue aimed at bringing about "a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire." The agreement laid out a 14-month timetable for the withdrawal of US military forces, its allies and coalition partners.

CNN reported in May that data provided to the Pentagon's special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction showed that in the month

following the signing of the peace deal, the Taliban increased their attacks on America's Afghan allies to levels higher than usual.

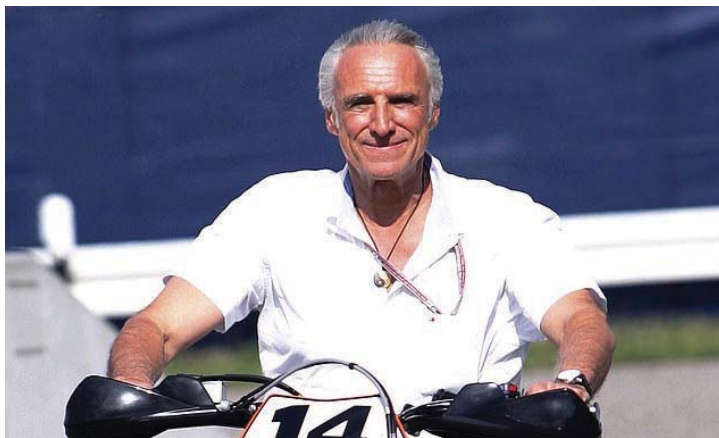
The US-led international military operation in Afghanistan told the inspector general that from March 1 to March 31, "the Taliban refrained from attacks against Coalition Forces; however they increased attacks against (Afghan National Defense and Security Forces) to levels above seasonal norms."

## Brazil President Bitten By Large Bird During "Horrible" COVID Quarantine

(News Agencies) Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro was bitten by a large bird after complaining of "horrible" quarantine on Monday. Mr Bolsonaro tested positive for COVID-19 last Tuesday and has been in isolation for a week now. While strolling through the grounds of his official residence on Monday, he decided to feed some large rhea birds, reports the Daily Mail. However, the interaction soon made an already-bad quarantine worse for Mr Bolsonaro, 65, as one of the bird bit his hands in full view of the country's press. The rhea is a large, flightless bird that is native to South America. Photos that are being widely circulated on social media show one of these large, emu-like birds pecking hard at Mr Bolsonaro's hand while he was feeding them. He was seen shaking his hand in pain after the incident. Brazil President Bitten By Large Bird During 'Horrible' COVID Quarantine Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro fed birds outside his residence on Monday. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro was bitten by a large bird after complaining of "horrible" quarantine on Monday. Mr Bolsonaro tested positive for COVID-19 last Tuesday and has been in isolation for a week now. While strolling through the grounds of his official residence on Monday, he decided to feed some large rhea birds, reports the Daily Mail.

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## Trump-supporting Austrian Red Bull boss fired top US executive team



(News Agencies) Red Bull has fired two top executives in the US who had lobbied for more diversity in the company and were blamed for the leak of a letter that criticized its 'public silence' on Black Lives Matter. North America chief executive Stefan Kozak and North America president and chief marketing officer Amy Taylor were let go, the energy drink company said Tuesday. While Red Bull employees in the US have been pressing for the company to be more vocal about racism, Red Bull's billionaire CEO Dietrich Mateschitz is a Donald Trump admirer who has spoken out against 'political correctness'.

The 76-year-old tycoon also owns a media firm which has been criticized for giving a platform to far-right activists in his native Austria. Sources told Business Insider that Red Bull's top executives in Austria are thought to have fired Kozak and Taylor in 'retaliation' for the leak, although no official reason was given for their departure.

The letter signed by more than 300 employees had

criticized the company for 'saying nothing' amid the global anti-racism protests and 'abandoning the communities we claim to support and foster in their time of greatest need'. Both Kozak and Taylor have pushed for more diversity and inclusion but Taylor was 'met with opposition' when she called for the company to take a more public stand on racism, The Wall Street Journal reports. A third executive, head of global culture marketing Florian Klaass, has also left after he allegedly approved a racist slide shown in a meeting earlier this year. The leaked slide, shown at a meeting in Detroit, is said to have shown racist stereotypes from countries around the world. Labels on the map allegedly said 'they do our laundry' on Mexico, 'they make our stuff' on China, 'evildoers' on the Middle East with an arrow indicating 'bombs go here', and 'zoo animals come from here' on Africa. Reports say that US employees had urged against the use of the slide but that Klaass and his team had gone ahead with it

anyway.

Klaass's online profile says he is based in Austria and has worked for the company since 2006. The slide was shown to more than 100 attendees and was meant as a serious attempt to show how Red Bull is a global organization, insiders said. Red Bull's headquarters are in Austria where the energy drink was first sold in 1987, before it broke into the US market in the 1990s and became the dominant player by the mid-2000s. The company's global CEO is Austrian billionaire Dietrich Mateschitz, who has an estimated fortune of \$26 billion and owns a private island in Fiji. In a 2017 interview, Mateschitz expressed sympathy with Donald Trump and said the new president 'simply needs time'. 'I don't think he's as much of an idiot as he's made out to be,' he told the newspaper Kleine

Zeitung at the time. 'When you speak to Americans you often hear that they're essentially happy to have a new administration. There was plenty to question about the previous one,' he said, referring to the Obama administration. Raging at 'political correctness' and the 'intellectual elite', Mateschitz was also highly critical of Germany and Austria for opening their doors at the height of the 2015 refugee crisis. Taking aim at those who encouraged refugees or used Angela Merkel's slogan of 'we'll manage it', he said that none of those people 'made their guest rooms available for five migrants to live in'. Mateschitz is also responsible for a television station called Servus TV which is owned by Red Bull, and which has faced criticism for allowing 'right-wing extremists' to appear in its broadcasts.





## Donald Trump is hit with barrage of polls with him trailing Joe Biden in Florida, Pennsylvania, and Arizona and barely hanging on in Texas

(News Agencies) President Donald Trump was hit with polling news across the board Wednesday, with a series of polls showing Joe Biden holding leads in critical states while voters register the dominant view that the country is on the wrong track. For a Trump campaign struggling to regain its footing by trying to find a way to hold public events amid the pandemic, there was troubling news in states the Democrat is trying to snatch away from the president. Nationally, Biden led Trump in each of five polls released Wednesday, with margins running as high as 15 points. Taken together, the five national polls released Wednesday gave Biden a lead of 9.6 percentage points over the incumbent. In a key battleground where part of the Republican convention will be held, a CNBC poll had Biden up 47 to 46 in North Carolina. In Florida, where Trump moved his residence from New York and where he plans to accept the party nomination, Biden was up 50 to 43 in a CNBC / Change Research poll. Trump has said he may have to move the convention outdoors in light of the surge in coronavirus infections in the state. Midwest battlegrounds that Biden hopes to pry from Trump are all leaning his way in the new surveys. In Pennsylvania, Biden was up 50 to 42, while in both Michigan and Wisconsin, he was leading 48 to 42 – all in CNBC / Change Research polls. A Monmouth poll had the spread even bigger in Pennsylvania, with Biden holding a 53 to 40 lead. Biden's lead was 51 to 45 in Arizona – another key state. Trump carried Arizona by less than 2 percentage points over Hillary Clinton in 2016. Biden held an 11-point national lead in the latest poll by the respect NBC / Wall Street Journal polling unit. A stunning 7 in 10 voters said the country is on the 'wrong track.' It had Trump's approval rating underwater, with 42 per cent approval and 56 per cent disapproval. Only in Texas did Trump hold a lead, with a 46 to 44 lead in a Republican-leaning state.

## Iowa meth kingpin who murdered five, including two girls aged 10 and 6



(News Agencies) An Iowa meth kingpin who murdered five, including two girls aged 10 and 6, will be put to death Friday after a judge denied his request to delay his federal execution. US District Judge Leonard Strand wrote Tuesday that he would not intervene to delay Dustin Honken's execution date due to the coronavirus pandemic. This comes as the first federal execution in 17 years took place Tuesday, when white supremacist Daniel Lewis Lee was put to death by lethal injection in the penitentiary in Terre Haute, Indiana.

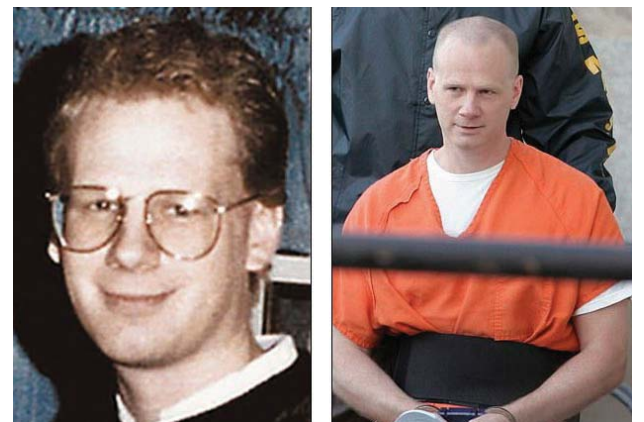
A second planned execution was scheduled for Wednesday morning, but a judge halted it last minute, granting double murderer Wesley Purkey a delay because his lawyers claim he is suffering from dementia.

Honken was denied a delay to his execution date Tuesday due to the coronavirus pandemic, meaning he could now be the second death row inmate put to death since Attorney General William Barr made

the move to push ahead with executions ahead of the 2020 presidential race. Strand said the Bureau of Prisons was in the best position to weigh the health risks against the benefits of carrying out the execution. Strand also denied Honken's motion to declare his execution void

due to an alleged procedural error by the government and affirmed the executive branch's power to set the date for executions. A federal judge also turned down on Tuesday a request by Honken's spiritual adviser - a Catholic priest - to put the execution on hold until after

the pandemic. Honken, 52, is scheduled to die Friday by lethal injection at the federal prison in Terre Haute, Indiana - the same facility where Lee was executed Tuesday. He has been on death row since he was sentenced to death in 2004 for the brutal 1993 slayings of five people - Greg Nicholson, Terry DeGeus, Lori Duncan and her daughters Kandi, 10, and Amber, 6, in Mason City. Nicholson, Duncan, Kandi, and Amber vanished on July 25 and DeGeus disappeared on November 5. The bodies of Nicholson and the Duncan family were found buried in a single hole located in a wooded area outside Mason City in 2000 after an informant provided authorities with maps of where Honken's accomplice Angela Johnson told him the bodies were buried.



Kandi and Amber each had a single bullet hole in the back of their heads. Nicholson and Duncan were bound, gagged, and shot multiple times, including once in the head. DeGeus's body was found in a field a few miles away, face down in a shallow hole with a severely fragmented skull having been shot one or more times. Honken shot and killed the two men because they planned to testify against him on drug charges. In 1993, Honken was operating a methamphetamine lab in Arizona when Nicholson, one of the two dealers he used for distribution, was pinched by police and turned informant, according to court documents. Honken was arrested on state drug charges following Nicholson's arrest, but made bond.

## NYPD hunts protester who beat a Chief of Department and three other officers with a cane during a violent brawl on the Brooklyn Bridge



(News Agencies) New York City police on Wednesday released footage of the suspect wanted in connection to the assault of several officers on Brooklyn Bridge. In a video from the scene

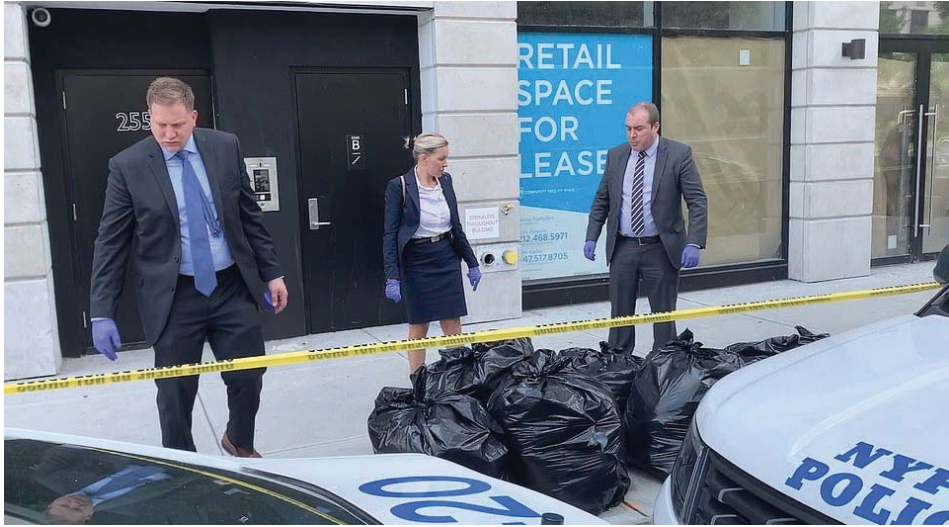
the man - dressed in cream pants, a dark red shirt and wearing a bright red bandanna around his face - is first seen climbing over the barrier on the bridge holding a cane to club officers. Several NYPD officers were attacked and injured

Wednesday as pro-police and anti-police protesters clashed on the bridge. At least four officers - including the city's highest ranking uniformed cop, Chief of Department Terence Monahan - were hurt and 37 demonstrators were arrested, police said. Following the assault on officers, police tweeted: 'The New York City Police Department is seeking the public's assistance identifying the following individual in the attached photos and video wanted for questioning in regard to an assault on police officers in the confines of the 5th Precinct. 'On July 15 at approximately 10:10 AM, on the Brooklyn Bridge while attempting to make an arrest an unidentified individual struck multiple police officers with a cane.'

The man is seen running along the busy roadway between cars as he makes his escape. Other pictures released by the cops show the object he is holding in more detail, revealing it to be similar to a wooden cane. In footage of the incident tweeted by the NYPD Wednesday, the protester is seen swinging a long object down at the heads of a group of officers from a pedestrian walkway as they attempt to arrest someone at 10am. Police photos of the aftermath showed a lieutenant with a bloodied face, a detective holding a bandage to his head, and a bicycle officer helping other officer dress a head wound. Their injuries are all said to be serious.



# Hitman in a 'ninja outfit' who killed tech millionaire, 33, in 'financially motivated' murder escaped out of a service exit



(News Agencies) A hitman in a 'ninja outfit' killed and dismembered the Manhattan tech millionaire Fahim Saleh on Tuesday in a financially motivated murder but was interrupted by the 33-year-old's sister and fled out of a service exit when she arrived at his \$2.2million apartment. Saleh, 33, was known for investing in developing countries and businesses. Among his businesses

was a motorbike taxi hailing in Nigeria which had recently encountered financial hardship, and he had also invested in ride-sharing companies in Colombia. At the time of his death, he was being sued by a former prison guard turned criminal who was jailed for using his app PrankDial to secretly record and listen to employees' phone calls. He founded the app in

2015. The app let Kirk Eady, the former deputy director of Hudson County Correctional Facility, place a call between two employees without them knowing he was behind it, then listen to whatever they said. He listened to their complaints about him and about their jobs then retaliated against them in the workplace, according to prosecutors.

He was jailed for 15 months and in 2017, sued Saleh for fraud, claiming the app made him think what he was doing was legal. Saleh's sister arrived at his apartment on East Houston in Manhattan's Lower East Side at 3.30pm on Tuesday and found her brother's remains in plastic bags. His limbs had been severed and his head had been cut off from his torso. Police say it was a professional job by a trained killer who rode with him up in the elevator then got out when it opened directly onto Saleh's apartment. The killer, dressed in a mask, gloves and hat and wearing what police sources described as a 'ninja outfit', had a suitcase with him - presumably to remove his remains when he'd finished the job. But when Saleh's sister showed up unexpectedly, sources told

NBC it appears the killer abandoned the grisly scene, leaving his electronic saw behind. It was still plugged in when she arrived. He got out through a service exit and remains on the run. Other sources told The New York Post the sister likely pressed the buzzer for his apartment, which gave the killer warning, and that he fled down the stairs as she made her way up in the elevator when there was no answer on the buzzer. Police sources say the killing was financially motivated but no other detail has emerged. According to an unnamed friend, neighbors heard screaming and loud noises but no one called 911. Police believe the suspect entered the building on Monday and then using the elevator, getting in with Saleh when he arrived home. 'He was

dressed like a ninja, full out, so you can't even see his face. 'He clearly knew what he was doing. 'We think his intent was to get rid of the body parts and go back and clean it up and make it look like nothing happened. 'He left before he finished the job,' the source told The New York Daily News. Sources told the New York Post that as the pair rode up to the seventh floor apartment together, Saleh appeared puzzled. No sooner had he stepped out of the elevator - which opened directly into his home - the attack began. He fell to the floor after either likely being shot or stunned, the footage reportedly shows. Police found that Saleh's legs below the knees and his arms had been removed, with the missing body parts placed into bags. Surprisingly, there was very little blood.

## NYC: STOP THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS!

New Yorkers working together can slow the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in New York City.



### PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

- Wash your hands with soap and water often.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or sleeve when sneezing or coughing.
- Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.
- Do not shake hands. Instead wave or elbow bump.
- Monitor your health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.



### STAY HOME IF SICK

- Stay home and call your doctor if you have symptoms like coughing, shortness of breath, fever, sore throat.
- If you do not feel better in 24-48 hours, seek care from your doctor.
- If you need help getting medical care, call 311.
- NYC will provide care regardless of immigration status or ability to pay.



### PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

- If you have chronic conditions like lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, cancer or a weakened immune system, avoid unnecessary gatherings and events.
- If you have family or friends who have one of these conditions, do not visit them if you feel sick.



### REDUCE OVERCROWDING

- Consider telecommuting.
- Stagger work hours, starting earlier or later.
- Walk or bike to work, if possible.
- If the train is too packed, wait for the next one.

Text COVID to 692-692 for real-time updates or visit [nyc.gov/coronavirus](https://nyc.gov/coronavirus).

Call 311 to report harassment or discrimination.

\*Messages and data rates may apply. Check your wireless provider plan for details.



Bill de Blasio  
Mayor  
Olivio Barbieri, MD  
Commissioner



# 'Keep Lord Ram out of regional politics': Ayodhya saints lash out at Nepal PM Oli

**This is second controversy created by Oli in connection with India. Last month, Nepal cleared a constitution amendment bill to reflect new map in the national emblem kicking off boundary dispute with India.**

(News Agencies) The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Sri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirath Kshetra Trust and saints in Ayodhya have strongly condemned Nepalese PM KP Sharma Oli's statement that real Ayodhya was in Nepal and Lord Ram was born in Thori in southern Nepal. Chairman of Sri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirath Kshetra Trust Mahant Nritya Gopal Das on Tuesday urged Nepalese PM to keep Lord Ram out of regional politics. Oli had made the remarks while speaking at an event to mark birth anniversary of Nepalese poet Bhanubhakta.

"Nepalese PM must keep Lord Ram out of regional politics. His comments on Lord Ram are

unwarranted," said Mahant Nritya Gopal Das.

"Lord Ram was a 'Chakravarti' emperor and Nepal was also part of his kingdom. Ties between India and Nepal are even older than history. His (Nepalese PM) comments are unfortunate," added the chief priest.

It may be pointed out that every year 'Ram Baraat' (wedding procession of Lord Ram) from Ayodhya leaves for Janakpur in Nepal with much fanfare. Large number of saints take part in the much-awaited annual event.

Commenting on Oli's remark, Sharad Sharma, regional spokesperson of the VHP, who operates from Karsevakpuram in Ayodhya, said: "It is at the behest

of China that PM of Nepal has given such baseless and unwarranted statement."

"Nothing can be more absurd than this. All religious scriptures prove that Lord Ram was born in Ayodhya here in India," added Sharma. Raju Das, priest of Hanuman Garhi, dubbed Oli's statement as another ploy to divert attention from increasing opposition he is facing in Nepal. "At present Nepalese PM is under immense pressure from the Opposition to resign from his post. As there is no option left, he has given this absurd statement just to divert attention of people from ongoing political turmoil in the country," said Das. "In recently concluded decades'



old Ram Janmabhoomi case in month, Nepal cleared a Supreme Court all historical facts were present before the court to prove Ram Janmabhoomi in Ayodhya is birth place of Lord Ram," said Das. This is second controversy created by Oli in connection with India. Last

constitution amendment bill to reflect new map in the national emblem kicking off boundary dispute with India. This map shows Indian territories Lipulekh, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura as part of Nepal.

## China will allow cinemas in low-risk areas to open from July 20

(News Agencies) China will allow cinemas in low-risk areas to reopen from July 20, the country's film administration said on Thursday, six months after they were forced to shut as part of the country's draconian measures to contain the novel coronavirus. Cinemas resuming operations will face a series of restrictions - from limited film showings to mandatory mask use - while those in medium-to-high risk areas will remain shut, the China Film Administration said in a statement.

China, which has seen its case numbers sharply decline since March, has progressively eased lockdown measures and most restaurants, shopping malls and even clubs have been open for months.

"This is breaking news for the industry and people are thrilled," said Gao Jun, former general manager of Beijing-headquartered Xinyinglian Cinema Chain.

"This industry is in a desperate situation because of high operational cost: the rent." Cinemas reopening will have to keep the size of the audience at 30% of normal capacity and will have to leave empty seats between viewers, according to the statement.

Visitors are also required to book tickets in advance, wear face masks and cannot bring food and drink into the theatre, it said. Cinemas in the world's second-largest film market were forced to shut in late January as China sought to contain the virus which first emerged in the central city of Wuhan late last year and has killed 583,000 globally so far this year. Shares in China's largest cinema owner Wanda Film jumped on the news, ending the day up 1.1% percent and outperforming the broader Shenzhen Composite Index which closed 5% lower. Wanda Film forecast earlier this week it would swing to a first-half net loss of up to 1.6 billion yuan (\$230 million), compared with a gain of 524 million yuan during the same period last year.

## China's economy returns to growth as virus lockdowns lifted

**Growth reported Thursday was a dramatic improvement over the previous quarter's 6.8% contraction-China's worst performance since at least the mid-1960s.**

(News Agencies) China became the first major economy to report growth following the coronavirus pandemic, recording an unexpectedly strong 3.2% expansion over a year earlier in the latest quarter as anti-virus lockdowns were lifted and factories and stores reopened.

Growth reported Thursday was a dramatic improvement over the previous quarter's 6.8% contraction — China's worst performance since at least the mid-1960s. But it still was the weakest positive figure since China started reporting quarterly growth in the early 1990s. China, where the pandemic began in December, was the first economy to shut down and the first to start the drawn-out process of recovery after the ruling Communist Party declared the disease under control in March.

"The national economy shifted from slowing down to rising in the first half of 2020," the National Bureau of Statistics said in a statement. Manufacturing and some other industries are almost back to normal operating levels. But consumer spending is weak due to public unease about possible job losses. Cinemas and some other businesses still are closed and travel remains restricted.

Economists say China is likely to recover faster than some other major economies due to Beijing's decision to impose the most intensive anti-disease measures in history. That included cutting off most

access to cities with a total of 60 million people and suspending trade and travel. In the three months ending

factories that make the world's smartphones, shoes, toys and other goods reopened.



Retail sales shrank by 3.9%, but that was a marked improvement over the previous quarter's 19% contraction while millions of families were confined to their homes and shopping malls were shut down. Exports grew by an unexpectedly strong 0.4% in June but still are off 3% for the first half of the year. June imports rose 3% — including a 10.6%

in June, factory output rose 4.4%, a sharp rebound from the previous quarter's 8.4% contraction as

jump in purchases of U.S. goods despite a tariff war — but are down 3.3% so far this year.

## Taiwan holds military drills against potential China threat

(News Agencies) Taiwan's military fired missiles from the air and the island's shore facing China on Thursday in a live-fire exercise to demonstrate its ability to defend against any Chinese invasion. Assault helicopters launched missiles and fighter jets dropped bombs on targets at sea, while tanks and missile

was part of a five-day annual exercise that



trucks fired from a beach to deter a simulated invading force. "We want the world to see our determination and efforts to protect our country." President Tsai Ing-wen said, observing the exercise in a helmet and green military uniform. The drill

ends Friday. China regards Taiwan as a breakaway province that is part of its territory. The self-governing island of 24 million people lies 160 kilometers (100 miles) off China's southeast coast across the Taiwan Strait.



# The true cost of a new confrontation with China

China's response to the coronavirus outbreak has provided a pretext for some in Washington to spar even more openly with Beijing. Top White House advisor Peter Navarro accused the Chinese government of exploiting the pandemic to advance its interests, and one senator even claimed that China is "trying to sabotage" America's search for a vaccine and is bent on "world domination." Steve Bannon, the mastermind of President Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, attributed the death of George Floyd, in large part, to China's misdeeds.



This cartoonish depiction of villainy might be dismissed as campaign season hyperbole if it weren't informing real policy proposals. And if lawmakers wanted to find the most wasteful, counterproductive and inflammatory way to confront China, they couldn't do much better than the newly proposed Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI) -- a multi-billion-dollar defense-spending initiative aimed at countering China's rise.

Misconceived as it is, this suite of hypersonic weapons, missile defense equipment and other tools of force projection enjoys bipartisan support and was recently included in the Senate Armed Service Committee's markup of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

Until now, much of the "new Cold War"-style mongering directed at China has been merely rhetorical. The US has not substantially increased its troop levels in East Asia as it once did in Eastern Europe, during the actual Cold War. There have been no clandestine efforts of late to topple

unpalatable leaders in South Asia, as there once were in Latin America (as far as we know).

But this new initiative could be a game changer. Rep. Mac Thornberry of Texas, the top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, insists "it is time to put our money where our mouth is." Given the appetite that mouth has had for armed conflict in recent decades, this is a horrible idea.

The PDI's financial costs are significant, but so are the costs of heightened confrontation with China -- as are those of launching another military endeavor that lacks the support of the American public. Eurasia Group Foundation polling shows a solid majority of US respondents support reducing America's military presence in Asia, not increasing it.

How much money are we talking about, in this proposed buildup? If the Senate Armed Services Committee has its way, the plan will cost nearly \$7 billion over the next two years and billions more in the years to come. To lawmakers who pour money into

the Pentagon's existing \$738 billion budget, which exceeds the levels reached during the Korean and Vietnam wars, \$7 billion might seem like peanuts -- but it's real money.

It would not be money well spent. The PDI is misguided and unnecessary. America's current military might, which also exceeds the peak of the Reagan buildup of the 1980s, is more than enough to address any military challenge posed by China. The US spends two and a half times more than China on its military, and there is no evidence China has ambitions to match or replace its global military machinery. China has made advances in military technology and has sparked concern among analysts with its assertive claims on islands, waters, and airspace in its vicinity, but the fact remains that China has enough problems at home. One analyst suggests that fully half of China's military is devoted to border or internal security, limiting its ability to project power beyond its borders.

Throwing more money at tools of

military confrontation is not only a waste of resources, but it likely invites blowback. A major military buildup in East Asia would needlessly antagonize China at a moment when cooperation with Beijing should be the focus, as it's clearly necessary to address the global recession, current and future pandemics, and climate change.

Cooperation on these issues should not preclude assertive opposition to China's human rights abuses and its crackdown in Hong Kong. But a military buildup will not help the US make progress on those fronts. And it could discourage American allies in Asia from building up their own defenses, which could ultimately help China expand in the region. The PDI's plans to increase US missile defense capabilities in East Asia are particularly alarming. Despite their benign name, missile defense systems are destabilizing weapons. They undermine the logic of deterrence by allowing a nation to launch an attack with less fear of a retaliatory strike. China opposed a 2017 effort to

place a missile defense system in South Korea, fearing it could be used to increase US capabilities to attack China's own retaliatory missiles rather than defend against North Korean strikes. They're stunningly ineffective, besides. A former head of the Pentagon's office of operational testing and evaluation himself testified about tests of missile defense systems, "These tests are scripted for success, and what's been astonishing to me is that so many of them have failed." Washington may view its actions as defensive, but China likely sees American efforts to increase missile defense capabilities as a precursor to attacks on its interests. For starters, the PDI's plans to improve "expeditionary airfield and port infrastructure" will be seen by Chinese leaders as a way for the US to conduct extended military campaigns in their backyard. This perception probably extends to ordinary Chinese. According to a study by the Eurasia Group Foundation, the one thing which would make American-style democracy most attractive to Chinese citizens is if "the foreign policy of the United States was more restrained." Unfortunately, the current political climate does not bode well for de-escalation. Domestic political factors steer policies on both sides of the Pacific. China's provocative rhetoric toward the US may be designed more to placate or provoke domestic audiences than to signal actual policy moves on security, trade, and the environment. And during a presidential election year in the US, when China-bashing is a perennial campaign strategy of both political parties, harsh rhetoric by President Trump is likely meant to stoke his political base. And the Biden campaign criticized the President for not being tough enough on China. The American public, however, has little appetite for this escalation. The leaders of the Senate Armed Services Committee claim the Pacific Deterrence Initiative will "send a strong signal to the Chinese Communist Party that the American people are committed to defending US interests in the Indo-Pacific." But there's little to suggest they are, especially with so much going on at home -- from the pandemic and the ensuing economic crash to demonstrations against police violence.

## The downfall of Jeff Sessions

It was late February of 2016, which now seems like generations ago, when Jeff Sessions was the first United States senator to endorse then-presidential candidate Donald Trump. The move caught many by surprise. Trump was not a serious candidate, the conventional wisdom held, so why would an experienced senator like Jeff Sessions back him? Led by his strongly held views on immigration, which aligned with Trump's, Sessions boarded the Trump train at its first stop and rode it all the way to the top job at the Department of Justice.

Then, in 2017, Sessions did the right thing against the President's wishes when he recused himself from the Justice Department's investigation of foreign

influence into the Trump campaign. Of course, he did. It's what an honorable public official does. As Sessions noted, "I did what the law required me to do. I was a central figure in the campaign and was also a subject of and witness in the investigation and could obviously not legally be involved in investigating myself."

But in the aftermath of his recusal, Jeff Sessions was nonetheless punished by Trump -- in verbal attacks and removal from his role as Attorney General -- for simply doing what his job required of him. So, when he ran to be the Republican candidate to take on Democrat Doug Jones for his old Senate seat in Alabama, perhaps Sessions expected that Trump would support his

opponent, former Auburn University football coach Tommy Tuberville. Sessions was not in a political position of strength, and the President took every opportunity he could to go after his former top backer, whose sin was acting ethically.

Republicans should view Sessions' loss as a cautionary tale. As the November election draws closer, the actions of GOP elected officials will be scrutinized. Republican politicians have been frequently asked if and when they will speak out against Trump's behavior. That many of them, particularly those from red states, haven't yet says much about the current state of the Republican Party. The ballad of Jeff Sessions could explain their reluctance.



# US should lead, not lecture, on China's crackdown in Hong Kong

The United States government has attacked China's new security law for Hong Kong as undermining political freedoms. Anyone who cares about democratic values should see that there is merit to that criticism. But on an issue that directly targets China's core sovereign interests, it is all too easy for Beijing to dismiss Washington because police forces across the US have been caught in photographs and videos violating the rights of American citizens.

Let me be clear that I do not mean that other countries should be excused from human rights violations because of social injustices in the US. But the endemic problems with America's criminal justice system, which have persisted across both Democratic and Republican administrations, undermine Washington's credibility to take other countries to task for their abuses. To command authority globally, the US must, at the very least, abide by the standards it



seeks to apply to other countries. Last Wednesday, on the 23rd anniversary of the restoration of Hong Kong to China, Beijing enacted a new national security law without disclosing the draft to Hong Kong in advance. This law carries maximum sentences of life imprisonment for secession, subversion of state power, terrorist

activities and collusion with foreign and external forces to endanger national security. Under the law, Chinese courts have jurisdiction over "very serious" cases and cases where national security faces "serious and realistic threats," overriding the authority of Hong Kong's courts. While similar laws exist in many countries,

including in the US, there are concerns that these laws will be implemented by China in a way that stifles dissent and undermines the autonomy of Hong Kong. In response to the new law, US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo issued a press statement criticizing "Beijing's attacks on freedoms of speech, the press, and

assembly, as well as the rule of law, all of which have, until now, allowed the territory to flourish." Pompeo further stated at a press briefing, "Security forces are already rounding up Hong Kongers for daring to speak and think freely. The rule of law has been eviscerated."

The demonstrators who have protested all across America for weeks in response to the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor might find the State Department's position hypocritical. News reports abound of peaceful protesters getting arrested by the police in multiple US cities.

New York Assemblywoman Yuh-Line Niou told me about heart-wrenching incidents of her constituents not knowing where the police had taken their loved ones detained while protesting. When demonstrators were finally released, they recounted the horrific conditions under which they were held, including being denied water to wash tear gas from their eyes.

## 'He Is and Always Will Be a Terrified Little Boy'

**Mary Trump has not indicted her uncle. She has indicted the whole family. And that could give it a "seismic imprint."**

Donald Trump is the damaged product of an absent mother and a sociopathic father. That's in essence Mary Trump's assessment in her ultra-anticipated instant bestseller that's due out Tuesday—*Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man*.

For anybody who's done the reading these past five years—from Wayne Barrett's biography that was published in 1992 to Gwenda Blair's multigenerational study from 2000 to psychology experts' more recent efforts to explain this president—it's a takeaway that's not altogether unfamiliar. And the glut of books about Trump and his aberrant administration has contributed almost inevitably to a tendency to treat even the most hyped fresh releases as cash-grab ephemera to speed-read for damning tidbits and just as quickly forget amid the ruthless whirl of crises.

But hold up here for a sec—for the most devastating, most valuable and all-around best Trump book since he started running for president. In the vast Trump literature, this one is something new.

That's because of the unprecedented access, and its pathos, which is because of the source—the president's only niece, the 55-year-old daughter of his oldest

brother, who died at 42 in 1981 in her estimation as a result of a pathological, decades-long destruction at the hands of his own twisted kin.

Mary Trump, to be sure, is a partisan (a registered Democrat who's expressed public admiration for Hillary Clinton) with an ax to grind (she and her brother were all but excised from passed-down riches), and she writes, too, with palpable sadness and anger stemming from the long-ago loss of her father. The White House, meanwhile, predictably has dismissed her account as rife with "falsehoods" and "ridiculous, absurd allegations." But she also holds a Ph.D. in psychological studies. And in these taut 211 pages, she puts us in new rooms, shows us new scenes with new details and lets us hear from members of the president's nuclear family who have been conspicuously and obstinately mum. She is, after all, and by blood still, one of them—and "the only Trump," as she puts it, "who is willing" to dish on what she calls "my malignantly dysfunctional family."

*Too Much and Never Enough* (at least on its own) is not likely to hurt the president politically. (There's plenty else at this point that's doing that.) It's not going to lead immediately to any legal jeopardy he doesn't already face. It's almost

certainly not going to "take Donald down," either, as she characterizes her impetus—first, she reveals, by having been foundationally helpful to a Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times investigation, then by writing the rest of what she herself has written. But what this book does do is help us understand him, offering the most incisive rendering yet of why he is the way he is. No matter what happens in November, historians will have to contend with the influences that forged the personality of one of the most consequential presidents ever—and in Mary Trump's telling, the current occupant of the Oval Office, the man just shy of 63 million voters thought was the most preferable choice to lead their nation, is "a narcissist" whose "pathologies are so complex and his behaviors so often inexplicable that coming up with an accurate and comprehensive diagnosis would require a full battery of psychological and neuropsychological tests that he'll never sit for," whose "deep-seated insecurities have created in him a black hole of need that constantly requires the light of compliments that disappears as soon as he's soaked it in." She says he is "a petty, pathetic, little man." She says he is "ignorant" and "incapable" and "lost in his own delusional spin." She says deep down he "knows he has never

been loved." She says his reelection "would be the end of American democracy."

I asked Trump biographers—people who've spent extended periods of their lives attempting to plumb his psyche—what they thought of her book.

Michael D'Antonio told me he found it "chilling."

And Tim O'Brien? He believes it'll be "indelible."

"There were a lot of mob movies before 'The Godfather,' but 'The Godfather' gave us a very specific understanding of being in a mob family because it was this rich, detailed, inside account of how a family dysfunctioned together," he said. "There was nothing new in 'The Godfather' about how mobsters rolled, but the portrait it painted was so searing and rich and authentic that it defined our understanding of a criminal family. And, yes, there have been other books about the Trump family—Wayne's, mine, Gwenda's—but none of us captured his family life in the way that she has." O'Brien predicted Mary Trump's work will have "a seismic imprint." "It gives," he said, "the deepest understanding of his family dynamics that anyone has provided, and how that shapes his psychosis, and why he's such a dangerous leader."



# Ignorance Is Bliss!

## Why Employers And Employees Ignore Mental Health?

**One in seven Indians suffer from a mental issue. Organisations have begun addressing employees' mental health, but much more needs to be done**

When it comes to employee wellbeing, companies hype their compensation packages, flexible working hours and snack bars. Few, however, talk about mental health, let alone make it a priority. According to a Lancet paper, one in seven Indians suffered from a mental illness in 2017. With the pandemic causing a surge in anxiety, depression, sleep disorders etc, it is more important than ever to address these concerns.

At the workplace, mental illness remains a largely taboo subject. A 2016 study by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India revealed that nearly 42.5 per cent of employees in the country's private sector organisations suffer from depression or general anxiety disorder. Even though many individuals with mental health issues are part of the workforce, they rarely divulge these at the workplace, fearing prejudice and stigma. According to a 2019 study by Businessolver, an Iowa-based employee-benefits administration services company, 68 per cent of employees worry that reaching out about their mental health issues could negatively impact job security. Although 50 per cent of all employees (and 60 per cent of millennial employees) reported having had a mental health problem, only one-third of them reached out to their employers. Organisations do not actively seek this information from employees. "Most pre-joining medical tests that organisations mandate consist of tests on physical health parameters," says Nimisha Dua of Conagra Foods. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities



Act, 2016, recognises mental health issues as a disability and mandates employers to make provisions for suffering individuals. Most organisations, however, don't have a formal recruitment policy that addresses mental health, nor the tools and environment to successfully integrate people with such illnesses in the workforce. Both employers and employees skirt conversations about mental health. Employers hesitate to hire individuals with mental health issues as they fear erratic behaviour, inability to work effectively in teams, prolonged absences and the inability to cope with the demands of the job. Employees, on the other hand, do not disclose their mental health issues or seek counsellors to avoid stigma. They believe they might be ridiculed, made the butt of office jokes and that it could affect promotions and participation in prestigious projects.

Human resource departments should be more proactive in providing

counselling services to employees and assure them of confidentiality. Some organisations have a panel of mental health professionals. "Though some workplaces have been actively getting counsellors on board for their employees, it is certainly not a widespread practice," says Dua. "Where they exist, their services remain underutilised because of employees' apprehensions and hesitation."

Experts believe that offices must openly talk about mental health to reduce the stigma surrounding it. These discussions should be inclusive, avoid derogatory references and uphold the dignity of employees. Corporate wellbeing programmes are now emphasising stress management, work-life balance and mental wellbeing. Flexibility, inclusivity and a stress- and harassment-free environment should be incorporated into the work culture. A weekly meeting discussing different kinds of psychological problems and

encouraging people to speak about mental health disorders is also helpful.

Psychiatrist Avinash De Sousa says, "HR professionals, team leaders and senior executives must be trained in peer-to-peer support and how to respond when someone discloses their mental illness.." Tushar Chadha, CEO, People Plus Advisors, believes organisations should plan their growth trajectory from two perspectives—business achievement and life satisfaction. "I know people who are successful and have realised their professional ambitions. They often have status, power and money, but not satisfaction and fulfilment, which often leads to mental illnesses."

Experts say most mental illnesses are treatable, but some cases require long-term interventions. Dr Santosh Bangar, consultant psychiatrist, Global Hospital, Mumbai, says, "A mental health professional makes a diagnosis after assessing the person. This process may take several sessions. Sometimes, psychological tests may be required." Treatment involves

psychotropic medication, psychological intervention or social management or a mix of these.

There is a considerable shortage of mental health professionals in India—we have one psychiatrist for a lakh people and one psychologist for every 30,000 to 40,000. While the cost of treatment varies from city to city and professional to professional, it can range anywhere between Rs 500 to 5,000. There are charitable trusts offering low-cost services. In municipal and government hospitals, services are free, though there are long waitlists. The price of treatment, however, stands in stark relief to the costs of mental illnesses. A WHO-led study estimates that depression and anxiety disorders cost the global economy \$1 trillion each year in lost productivity.

There is growing evidence on the efficacy of counselling. Sheetal Nair, corporate head, DSS Group of Companies, says, "Workplace counselling interventions have been found to reduce sickness absence rates. This alone demonstrates the cost-effectiveness of counselling and the positive impact it can have on productivity. Organisations are beginning to realise that mental health lies along a spectrum, just like physical health. Anybody could suffer from an illness, with varying degrees of severity, and equally well recover from it. "Hiring a person with a history of depression and mental health is not a problem. Employers should not forget that depression and anxiety are common and rarely serious to impact the ability to perform at work," says Chadha. "If an employee has a mental illness, the employer should accommodate their needs."



# More than 940 deaths reported in one day as US coronavirus cases shatter another record

In South Texas' Hidalgo County, some patients have to wait on a stretcher for 10 hours before being examined due to lack of resources, said Dr. Ivan Melendez, the public health authority.

"We are in dire need, and we are exhausted," he said. "We had four ICU patients. Now we have 211. We had three people on ventilators. Now we have 135."

The county has seen more than 10,000 confirmed Covid-19 cases -- more than 1,200 reported Thursday alone, he said. An unpublished document prepared for the White House coronavirus task force says 18 states in the coronavirus "red zone" for cases should roll back reopening measures amid surging cases.

The "red zone" is defined as areas "that during the last week reported both new cases above 100 per 100,000 population, and a diagnostic test positivity result above 10%."

Georgia is among the 18 states in the "red zone" for cases and among the 11 states in the zone for test positivity.

As some states struggled to tame the virus, the debate over wearing face coverings is heating up. Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp sued Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms on Thursday over her efforts to require face masks in

public places. Friday on CNN, Bottoms accused Kemp of playing politics and wasting taxpayer money with the suit. President Donald Trump this week visited, and Bottoms pointed out he was breaking city law by not wearing a mask.

And in Utah, a public meeting about a mask policy was abruptly canceled when people without face coverings packed the room. The crowd booed when it was called off.

"This is the exact opposite of what we need to be doing," Utah County Commissioner Tanner Ainge said at the meeting room in Provo. "We're supposed to be physically distancing, wearing masks. This gathering violates current health recommendations." Colorado Gov. Jared Polis told CNN on Friday he used data to implement a statewide mask mandate for public indoor spaces.

"We care about our economy and saving lives and we need to learn from our cities and counties that led the way and mask-wearing economy," he said.

Thursday, Polis announced residents must wear masks when they are in public indoor spaces and are not able to social distance. The order took effect at midnight. A top corporate lobbying group on Friday

renewed calls for "consistent federal and state guidelines on safety measures, including face coverings." The Business Roundtable said it's been lobbying for those mandates since April, according to a press release. The group, chaired by Walmart CEO Doug McMillon, represents the CEOs of America's biggest companies. Several major companies, including Walmart, will require customers at all their US stores to wear masks. For five consecutive days, Florida has led the nation in coronavirus cases per capita. Currently, Florida is averaging just over 55 cases per 100,000 people according to analysis of Johns Hopkins University data. Florida took over the top spot from Arizona on Monday. Arizona -- which had held the top spot for over a month -- dropped to third, behind Louisiana. The main floor of Florida's Emergency Operations Center in Tallahassee has been emptied out for cleaning and is closed until Monday after 12 workers tested positive, Jason Mahon, Florida Division of Emergency Management communications director, told CNN on Friday. Miami-Dade "hospitals have more COVID patients in ICU beds than they have available ICU beds," a spokesperson from

Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez told CNN in a statement. The ICU capacity is "above 100 percent," the statement

says. "Some hospitals have begun to operate more ICU beds than they would normally operate. Our target was for that metric to be at

or below 70%. In other words, we wanted to have 30 percent of beds available for non-COVID purposes," according to the statement.

## Fahim Saleh's assistant in custody in connection with death of tech entrepreneur, official says

He was last seen in surveillance video getting into an elevator in his apartment building and a man dressed in all black -- who police believe is Saleh's assailant -- entering the elevator with him, according to the law enforcement official. The elevator in Saleh's building goes straight into the apartment units there, the source said. Saleh died from stab wounds to the neck and torso; the manner of death was homicide, according to the medical examiner. Saleh, the son of Bangladeshi immigrants, was the founder and CEO of Gokada, a motorbike-hailing app in Nigeria. He most recently founded the venture capital firm Adventure Capital -- which invested in ride-sharing start-ups in countries like Bangladesh and Colombia. Saleh's family recalled his "brilliant and innovative mind" in a statement confirming his death this week. "The headlines talk about a crime we still cannot fathom," the statement said. "Fahim is more than what you are reading. He is so much more. His brilliant and innovative mind took everyone who was a part of his world on a journey and he made sure never to leave anyone behind." There are no words

or actions to provide any of us comfort except the capture of the person who exhibited nothing short of evil upon our loved one." While still in high school, Saleh founded PrankDial.com, a website for prerecorded prank phone calls that, he wrote in 2018, had generated over \$10 million since its start. He continued to build and sell sites throughout his teens and his time at Bentley University in Massachusetts. Over the years, Saleh sought to propel the careers of other young people in the tech industry. On Medium, where he blogged regularly, Saleh called his founding of Gokada "one of the most out there things" he'd ever done. His limited knowledge of Nigeria's transportation system at first turned off Nigerians he tried to recruit for his start-up. In 2019, Gokada raised \$5.3 million in seed funding and hired over 800 drivers, but Gokada's business hit an unexpected drawback in February when Lagos state banned commercial motorcycles in the city. Saleh filmed an impassioned plea on behalf of his employees to lift the ban as the company pivoted to delivery and worked toward launching a boat hailing service, he told CNN in February.

## For companies, the end of neutrality

Companies that have remained silent are being called out on social media for their indifference to issues that concern their users. Neutrality is no longer an excuse. The Facebook ad boycott raises the question as to whether brands will, from now on, use their marketing budgets to make choices beyond commercial ones -- comprising reach and the cost of a medium. Will it be appropriate for a brand to buy advertising on a publication, platform or channel that actively preaches hate or is aligned to a divisive agenda? Will a brand's media choices reflect its intrinsic values and affect consumer choice? Will consumers look beyond just physical brand attributes to evaluate the moral choices a brand makes? These are some of the questions that will be asked of companies sooner rather than later. In an increasingly globalised world, protests quickly move beyond national boundaries, forcing change over larger geographies. The US-centric debate on racism soon spread to India where colourism is hugely prevalent, getting the

country's largest consumer goods maker, Hindustan Unilever, to announce a name change and revamp the proposition of its nearly five-decade-old fairness cream. A prominent matrimonial website shaadi.com was forced to take off its skin tone filter in response to objections from some users. While corporate-initiated change may not alter age-old prejudices immediately, these clearly are steps in the right direction. A February 2020 US study published by the Harvard Business Review threw up a surprising finding -- that the previously held view of not mixing commercialism with politics may well be gone. In India too, many business leaders are being asked tough questions on where they stand on key issues, and are finding it difficult to look away. In this post-Covid world, where the trust deficit has soared, businesses that put purpose before profit will benefit in the long-run. Consumers will seek out brands that resonate with their values and will reward them with their loyalty.

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## Adopt a new paradigm to deal with Covid-19 spread

in other parts of the country also. Many countries, including the United States, have introduced voluntary testing, which has promoted health-seeking behaviour in the population. The kits can be provided either free or at subsidised cost to testing centres. Greater efforts are needed to save the lives of people who are more vulnerable to Covid-19, such as the elderly and those with co-morbidities. Patients often die of co-morbidities due to lack of attention to and care for those health conditions in Covid-19 hospitals and care centres. Specialist medical attention should be provided to them in Covid-19 hospitals to treat the co-morbidities. There were similar instances in the 1990s, when out of fear and stigma, HIV-infected persons were not treated for opportunistic infections and co-morbidities. In the last few weeks, a number of drugs have been re-purposed, with varying degree of effectiveness, for treatment of moderate and severe cases of Covid-19. The timely and effective use of these drugs should help in reducing mortality even in severe cases. The central and state governments should adopt effective procurement mechanisms to make these drugs available in sufficient quantities to physicians treating Covid-19 patients. Covid-19 has also disproportionately affected the marginalised sections of the population such as HIV-positive persons, tuberculosis patients, sex workers, drug users and gay and transgender people, many of whom are facing discontinuation of treatment for their existing medical conditions. Marginalised groups who have lost their means of livelihood need to be enlisted into the social support system to save them from starvation and death. If India has to fight a long and sustained battle against Covid-19, it can't happen only through biomedical interventions. We need a wholesome and all-encompassing programme, which involves all sections of the population affected by the virus. India's strength lies in its strong communities, who should be mobilised in full strength to take the country ahead of the pandemic curve and control its spread.

# Covid-19: From the US, lessons on what not to do

Eight, the US had no uniform enforcement mechanisms. The extent to which states enforced sheltering at home, wearing of masks and social distancing varied sharply. In some states such as Georgia and Texas with Republican governors and large cities with Democratic mayors, the governors only recommended these actions to battle Covid-19, while the mayors required them by law. Nine, a misplaced prioritisation of economic concerns over health concerns. The reopenings were done almost solely to stimulate the economy which had cratered due to the pandemic. This had huge costs.

Ten, and perhaps most important, there has been the consistent rejection and discounting of expert advice. From the outset, Trump minimised the advice of experts such as internationally-renowned infectious disease and task force member Dr Anthony Fauci, and constructed his own alternative version of reality. Overall and with a few exceptions in hard-hit states where individual governors demonstrated leadership, the US has managed Covid-19 reactively rather than proactively. A large part of this failure must be attributed to Trump who, after months of not wearing a mask, has only recently been seen in public wearing one, and who continues to insist that, at some point, the

pandemic will just disappear.

Trump is a role model of what not to do personally, politically and professionally in response to a pandemic. His coronavirus playbook is a template for current and future national leaders on how not to fight a pandemic. These are the primary lessons that India and other countries can learn from the US' disastrous handling of this situation. India must pay heed, as cases are continuing to rise, indicating that possibly the toughest lockdown in the world did not yield the outcomes that had been anticipated. Sometime shortly, India will pass the grim milestone of one million cases to become the third nation to do so, after the US and Brazil.

That is bad news for India. There is a silver lining in the cloud though. That is because of its much lower fatality rate. Moreover, according to Indian government officials, 80% of active cases are from 49 of the country's 720 districts, which mean a vast majority of the cases are restricted to less than seven per cent of the districts. By taking a targeted approach to testing, tracking and treatment to flatten the curve in these hot spots and ensuring no spread beyond these areas, the impact of the pandemic can be minimised going forward.

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# Trump offers denial and delusion as pandemic crisis overtakes his presidency

In another extraordinary twist on Tuesday, the White House stepped up what is now a full frontal assault against the government's top infectious disease specialist, Dr. Anthony Fauci, who has been telling the truth about the dire turn taken by a pandemic that is now infecting twice as many people per day as it was several months ago. In a USA Today op-ed, Trump's top trade adviser and anti-China polemicist Peter Navarro wrote that the respected scientist "has a good bedside manner with the public, but he has been wrong about everything I have interacted with him on."

If nothing else, the President's wild appearance gave a whole new meaning to the notion of incumbent presidents running for a second term on a Rose Garden strategy by staging a highly unusual campaign-style speech to rail against his opponent from the White House.

In recent days, whispers

have emerged from inside Trump's camp that aides are worried he is yet to settle on a strong campaign message and that his reelection effort is meandering. If there was a second term manifesto hidden in Trump's digressions and bitterness on Tuesday, it was very well disguised.

The President had an uncanny feel for the resentment at the Washington establishment and the perceived indifference towards political elites and political correctness at a time of sometimes bewildering racial and social change in 2016. Perhaps that mix can carry him to a second term. But after Tuesday's showing, it will be impossible to argue he won a second term based on a reasoned and orderly road map out of the crisis. The mystery of Trump's missing strategy Trump's unwillingness to face up to the coronavirus nightmare that is staring the rest of the nation in the face leaves

the impression that the man who vowed in his 2016 Republican National Convention speech "I alone can fix it" long ago ran out of ideas on the virus. That speech horrified Trump's critics because of its dystopian vision. But at least Trump looked strong, and was dictating the political winds. In his wandering monologue on Tuesday, he looked lost, a shadow of the man who burned down the Republican Party and the Washington political establishment.

He appeared to be what he is -- a president who is flailing after being cruelly overtaken by events. Such an image -- that beset President Jimmy Carter in the last summer before his reelection bid amid the Iran hostage crisis -- is a perilous one for first-term presidents. The mystery of Trump's behavior in recent months is that it seems unlikely he can come from behind against Biden unless he can find a way to suppress the virus, or at least give Americans

hope that some semblance of normal life can resume soon.

But more and more, it seems like Trump has played his best card -- his demand several months ago for states to open up and revive the economy -- which has been exposed as a backfired gamble as the pandemic races across Southern and Western states. And his go-to strategies of inciting divisions, stirring cultural warfare and sowing confusion with misinformation don't seem to be working -- at least if the polls are right.

The President did his best to talk up his "transition to greatness," but the idea is so divorced from the awful reality of the last few weeks -- with the average daily rate of new infections hitting 60,000 -- that his words only served to display his own considerable remove from reality.

"I think you're going to have some good news very, very quickly having to do with the

vaccines," Trump said, at about the same time that Fauci said that it could take a year-to-a-year-and-a-half for the world to get a Covid-19 vaccine, that even then may not be completely effective.

Despite the rolling shutdowns in cities across the country, certain to throw many Americans who work in the service, tourism and transit industries out of work again, the President stuck by his predictions of a riotous return to economic growth. But absent any credible plans to stem Covid-19's march, all the President has to sell right now is hope.

"I think by Election Day you're going to see some incredible numbers. The third quarter is going to be really good, the fourth quarter is going to be great, but next year is going to be one of the best economic years," he insisted.

"So hopefully I'll be able to be the President where we say, 'Look at the great job I did.'"

## Europe can be a key ally for India

Don't underestimate the value of EU to meet India's geopolitical, economic, and strategic ends

The EU has its own connectivity strategy, providing around \$414 billion in aid globally, and is already partnering with Japan and the United States (US) to provide alternatives to BRI. This is a crucial opportunity where Brussels can deliver what India needs. Entities such as the European Investment Bank are active in India, investing in metro and other infrastructure projects. India should explore this partnership with the EU to not only fill domestic infrastructure needs but also as part of India's neighbourhood diplomacy.

On the pandemic and China's response, India and the EU have similar concerns. There is huge apprehension in Brussels on the disinformation campaign led by China around the origin and responses to the virus. There is also an

increasing recognition that Chinese influence in international organisations needs to be countered. The EU and Australia coordinated to push for an independent enquiry into the origins of the virus at the World Health Assembly. As India takes the chair of the World Health Organization's executive board, the EU can be a powerful ally in checking Chinese influence at WHO and beyond.

With troubles in EU-China relations, debate on the Indo-Pacific is also picking up in European capitals besides Paris. The EU has several programmes on maritime domain awareness and information-sharing in the Indian Ocean, which are now expanding to include South and Southeast Asia. The German navy has shown an active interest in

contributing to Indian Ocean security and collaborating with partners. Japan and Australia are active diplomatically in pushing to get Europe on board the Indo-Pacific. India should actively advocate its vision of the region and explore avenues for cooperation with the EU, particularly to check Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean.

Finally, as India looks to shore up domestic capabilities and strengthen its economy, it cannot afford to ignore the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Europe which is languishing after many rounds of failed negotiations. The EU is India's largest trading partner and the second-largest destination for Indian exports. As Europe looks to diversify supply chains and move away from China, India shouldn't miss the opportunity to attract

investments and deepen its relationship with the world's largest trading bloc, which has already negotiated FTAs with Vietnam, Japan and Singapore.

Europe doesn't face a territorial threat from China, and the push and pull of European policy towards China will continue. Imperfect alignment on China shouldn't limit Europe-India cooperation. Europe has decisively moved away from a China policy based solely on economic engagement to checking Chinese influence domestically and internationally, with the tools Brussels knows best — economics, technology, and diplomacy. India needs to rethink what it wants its partnership with Europe to look like and yield. Europe can be an unlikely but useful partner as India deals with the China challenge.

## Trump's risky nose-to-nose challenge to China in the South China Sea

In the past, large-scale American operations in the region have had little dissuasive impact on Chinese activities or Beijing's unceasing effort to build, reinforce and staff military facilities across the island groups. At the same time, China has pressed ahead with its own efforts to build a blue-water navy capable of challenging American dominance of the Pacific, while cementing its hold over the South China Sea. Andrew S. Erickson of the US Naval War College, one of America's leading experts on Chinese naval power, has testified to Congress about China's naval strength, which includes advanced weapons and anti-ship missiles that could take these US aircraft carriers out early in any battle.

The central question is how directly the US wants to challenge a China that is clearly determined to dominate the region by force of arms, threatening an accidental conflict that could quickly, even catastrophically, escalate. Earlier in his presidency Trump proclaimed his ability to negotiate even the thorniest international problem. But today, fighting for his political life in an election where most polls suggest he is trailing badly, he seems to have no interest in negotiating any stand-still agreement with China in the region or guaranteed free passage of ships of all nationalities through and in the South China Sea. A concept a successor, with nothing more to prove, might be prepared to explore.



# Major US Twitter accounts hacked in Bitcoin scam

Billionaires Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates are among many prominent US figures targeted by hackers on Twitter in an apparent Bitcoin scam. The official accounts of Barack Obama, Joe Biden and Kanye West also requested donations in the cryptocurrency. "Everyone is asking me to give back," a tweet from Mr Gates' account said. "You send \$1,000, I send you back \$2,000." Twitter said it

was a "co-ordinated" attack targeting its employees "with access to internal systems and tools". "We know they [the hackers] used this access to take control of many highly-visible (including verified) accounts and Tweet on their behalf," the company said in a series of tweets. It added that "significant steps" were taken to limit access to such internal systems and tools while the

company's investigation was ongoing. Meanwhile, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey tweeted: "Tough day for us at Twitter. We all feel terrible this happened."

Twitter earlier had to take the extraordinary step of stopping many verified accounts marked with blue ticks from tweeting altogether. Password reset requests were also being denied and some other "account functions" disabled. By 20:30

EDT (00:30 GMT Thursday) users with verified account started to be able to send tweets again, but Twitter said it was still working on a fix. Dmitri Alperovitch, who co-founded cyber-security company CrowdStrike, told Reuters news agency: "This appears to be the worst hack of a major social media platform yet." On the official account of Mr Musk, the Tesla

and SpaceX chief appeared to offer to double any Bitcoin payment sent to the address of his digital wallet "for the next 30 minutes". "I'm feeling generous because of Covid-19," the tweet added, along with a Bitcoin link address. The tweets were deleted just minutes after they were first posted. But as such tweet from Musk's account was removed, another one appeared, then a third.

# India's population could peak at 1.6 billion in 2048: Study

The projections set the population peak at about 2 billion lower than the UN Population Division's estimate of 10.9 billion at the end of the century.

Both China and India, the world's two most populous nations, will register population peaks before 2050, following which they will post sharp declines. In 2100, China's population will be 51.1% of its peak population, and India's will be down to 68.1% of its peak, said the analysis.

The population of sub-Saharan Africa will triple from an estimated 1.03 billion in 2017 to 3.07 billion in 2100. North and the Middle East is the only other region forecast to host a larger population in 2100 than in 2017, with Asia and Eastern Europe recording the steepest declines. The populations of at least 23 countries, including Japan, Thailand, Italy, Spain, Portugal and South Korea, could decline at least 50%.

"Our forecasts for a shrinking global population have positive implications for the environment, climate change, and food production, but possible negative implications for labour forces, economic growth, and social support systems in parts of the world with the greatest fertility declines," said the study.

**Older population**

The global age structure will shift dramatically, with 2.37 billion people aged above 65 years in 2100, compared with 1.7 billion under 20 years, which underscores the need for liberal immigration policies in countries with significantly declining working age populations.

"The decline in the numbers of working-age adults alone will reduce GDP {gross domestic product} growth rates that could result in major shifts in global

economic power by the century's end... While population decline is potentially good news for reducing carbon emissions and stress on food systems, with more old people and fewer young people, economic challenges will arise as societies struggle to grow with fewer workers and taxpayers, and countries' abilities to generate the wealth needed to fund social support and health care for the elderly are reduced," said first author Stein Emil Vollset, a professor at the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington in the US.

In 2100, India will have the world's largest working-age population of 578 million in the world, followed by Nigeria, China and the US. Although the number of working-age adults in India is projected to fall from 762 million in 2017, it is expected to be one of the few - if not the only - major power in Asia to protect its working-age population over the century to rise up the GDP rankings from the seventh to third, said the report. India is also forecasted to have the second largest net immigration in 2100, with an estimated half a million more people immigrating to the country in 2100 than emigrating. To fully reap the benefits of this large working age population, called in demographic terms, the demographic dividend, it is critical to invest in quality health and adaptive education that empowers and equips young people to meet the needs of the job market," said Argentina Matavel Piccin, UNFPA Representative to India.

"The diverse fertility situations in the states combined with the inter-regional population dynamics in India present unique

opportunities, which can be turned into a powerful engine for the overall socio-economic development, if a differential planning approach is adopted. Very few countries in the world boast of such a scenario of a significant staggered demographic transition. India can afford to fill shortage of labour in one part of the country with migrants from another part, hence reducing the usual cultural adaption periods that most cross-country and cross-continent migrants must go through before they can fully contribute to host countries," added Piccin. The global total fertility rate (TFR is the average number of children a woman has in her lifetime) is predicted to decline from 2.37 in 2017 to 1.66 in 2100, which is well below the replacement rate of 2.1 births per woman. India's TFR declined to below 2.1 in 2019, and is projected to have a continued steep fertility decline until about

2040, reaching a TFR of 1.29 in 2100, said the report.

"The sustained decline in population size is an obvious outcome of educating and empowering women along with meeting their contraceptive needs and choices. Family planning services are likely to have an economic impact for families that extends beyond the reductions in fertility and improvements in health to many other aspects of their lives. If women's needs for family planning and reproductive healthcare are met, along with other basic health and education needs, then population stabilization will be achieved naturally, not as a matter of control or coercion," said Poonam Muttreja, executive director, Population Foundation of India, New Delhi. Liberal immigration policies could help maintain population size and economic growth even as fertility falls, said the study, which notes

that some countries, such as the US, Australia, and Canada, are likely to maintain their working-age populations through net immigration.

"We need a fundamental rethink of global politics. Greater multilateralism and a new global leadership should enable both migrant sending and migrant-receiving countries to benefit, while protecting the rights of individuals. Nations would need to cooperate at levels that have eluded us to date to strategically support and fund the development of excess skilled human capital in countries that are a source of migrants.... The projected changes in the sizes of national economies and the consequent change in military power might force these discussions," said Professor Ibrahim Abubakar, University College London, UK, and Chair of Lancet Migration (who was not involved in the study), in a linked comment.

## To deal with China, focus solely on economic growth

An argument may be made that in a democratic country, other policy choices are also important. Social justice has its place and economic growth cannot be the sole criteria for decision-making. These choices are not mutually exclusive or unique to us. It is India's resistance to common sense reforms in labour, land or judicial processes has also led to an attenuation of economic wealth and the concomitant inability to push back against China. India needs to want economic success as badly as China does. If this desire is too

mitigated by its desire to address many other issues such as retribution for past injustices, regional or linguistic reaffirmation, or fears about elite domination, the country may fall short of its optimal economic potential.

At a philosophical level, it is entirely possible for a country to be successful and satisfied, with the kind of balance India has apparently sought, between being a mid-level economic power while also a disorganised democracy. However, in a world where the metric of power is largely Gross Domestic Product per

capita, such a nation will need to accept a position of lesser influence. These choices can cause the angst of seeing others whom we may consider the "bad guys" finishing first. This government, more than others in the past, believes in an aligned pan-national vision around a common goal. This dispute with China provides an opportunity for policymakers to introspect about the choices we have made, as a nation. The road to victory in Galwan runs through the choices made in bureaucracy, the judicial system and the legislature.



# Biden Expands Lead as Trump's Approval Drops

## Voters increasingly dislike president's performance during coronavirus pandemic, but majority of voters back his handling of economy

WASHINGTON—Former Vice President Joe Biden's lead over President Trump reached double digits this month as Mr. Trump's approval rating declined amid widespread disagreement with his handling of the coronavirus pandemic, according to a new Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll.

Less than four months before the November election, 51% of voters said they would vote for Mr. Biden if the election were held today, with 40% backing Mr. Trump. Mr. Biden's lead over the president rose to 11 percentage points from 7 percentage points last month, as both candidates saw growth in the share of voters who view them very negatively.

But Mr. Trump maintained the backing of a majority of voters on the economy, with 54% approving of his handling of the matter, a record high in the poll. The U.S. economy officially entered a recession in February after the pandemic forced wide swaths of the economy to shut down, triggering millions of job losses. While activity showed signs of rebounding in May, economists expect the outlook could deteriorate as a wave of new cases forces states to pause or reverse reopening plans.

The president's overall job-approval rating dropped 3 percentage points over the last month. Forty-two percent of voters approved of Mr. Trump's performance, with 56% disapproving—his lowest job-approval rating since April 2018.

Peter Hart, a Democratic pollster who worked on the survey, said Mr. Trump faced the most challenging environment for an incumbent since Jimmy Carter in 1980 and Lyndon Johnson in 1968. Mr. Carter lost and Mr. Johnson decided not to run for re-election.

Which findings from the latest WSJ/NBC News poll are most meaningful to you,



and why? Join the conversation below.

"President Trump has hit the trifecta in the misery market. The three key indicators—job rating, personal feelings, attitudes on re-election—are all deeply submerged underwater," Mr. Hart said. "They represent the best measure of the standing and political strength of an incumbent president."

Forty-two percent of voters in the poll approved of President Trump's performance, with 56% disapproving—his lowest job-approval rating since April 2018. The coronavirus crisis continued to drag on Mr. Trump's chances of winning re-election, with 37% of voters approving of his handling of the continuing outbreak and 59% disapproving. The number of voters who approve of Mr. Trump's response to the pandemic has steadily dropped, falling 6 percentage points since last month and 8 percentage points since March. More than 136,000 people in the U.S. have died as a result of the virus and more than 3.4 million people have been infected, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. As states grapple with how and when to safely reopen, coronavirus cases are increasing across the country, with experts raising alarms about a

resurgence of the illness.

Mr. Trump and his top advisers have often played down the threat, saying that the country is recovering from the pandemic. They have also emphasized the importance of reopening the economy. By more than 2-to-1, voters said they are more likely to vote for a candidate who is more focused on stopping the spread of the virus than on reopening businesses. Nearly three-quarters of voters said they always wear a mask while shopping, working or when they're around people outside their homes, an 11-percentage-point increase from last month. The share of Trump supporters who say they always wear masks climbed 15 points since June, from 39% to 54%.

Both candidates face low enthusiasm, with 14% of voters saying they were enthusiastic about former Vice President Joe Biden and 23% saying the same about Mr. Trump. Overall, nearly three-quarters of voters, 72%, said they believed the country was on the wrong track. Republican pollster Bill McInturff, who conducted the survey with Mr. Hart and fellow Democrat Jeff Horwitt, said Mr. Trump's path toward winning reelection is narrowing.

"There would have to be a sea change in these numbers to say how you would project that Trump would be winning

a national vote," he said, adding that the president could focus on winning the electoral college even if he loses the popular vote, as he did in 2016.

Though a narrow majority of voters support Mr. Biden for president, fewer—47%—say they want a Democratic-controlled Congress, down from 51% in June. Forty-three percent of voters say they prefer a Republican-controlled Congress.

Voters are paying close attention to politics, with 77% saying they are highly interested in the election. Voter interest, which typically jumps in September, has never been this high this far from an election.

Messrs. Trump and Biden are both facing low enthusiasm from voters, many of whom viewed them negatively and expressed discomfort with their candidacies. Forty-eight percent of voters viewed Mr. Trump very negatively, with another 6% viewing him somewhat negatively. Just over half of voters, 52%, said they were very uncomfortable with Mr. Trump.

It was the president's highest very-negative number since January 2018, when the government shut down amid a dispute between Mr. Trump and Congress over immigration and the wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Meanwhile, one-third of voters have a very negative view of Mr. Biden, the highest such level the former vice president ever recorded in the poll. Another 13% have a somewhat negative view of him. Thirty-eight percent said they were very uncomfortable with Mr. Biden's candidacy.

Voters signaled they are more enthusiastic about Mr. Trump than Mr. Biden, though neither candidate received high marks on that front. Just 14% of voters said they were enthusiastic about Mr. Biden compared with 23% who said the same about the president.

But Mr. Biden is holding on to the support of more members of his party than Mr. Trump is of his. Ninety-two percent of Democrats back the former vice president, while 84% of Republicans say they will vote for the president. Independents narrowly sided with Mr. Biden, 39% to 35%.

Voters appear to be still making up their minds about Mr. Trump's decision last week to commute the sentence of Roger Stone, his longtime friend and political adviser who was convicted of making false statements, witness tampering and trying to impede a congressional investigation into Russian election interference. Nearly half of voters, 47%, said they hadn't heard enough about the matter to give an opinion, while 16% supported the president's decision and 36% opposed it.



# Trump stares down a ticking economic time bomb



It's crunch time for the key issue President Donald Trump's aides and advisers believe will determine his fate this November.

A stretch of critical decisions from mid-July until Labor Day will lay the foundation for what the U.S. economy will look like in October before voters make their final decisions. And White House officials are scrambling to prevent a dangerous pileup.

Governors must tame raging Covid-19 outbreaks across the South and West to avoid another lurch into a deeper recession. Whether cities and states reopen their schools on schedule will determine whether many of their parents can return to work. And congressional leaders are starting to debate a fourth economic rescue package to prop up a shaky recovery — while the president monitors cues from the stock market, one of his favorite barometers of success.

It's a perilous mix of challenges for a president whose overall approval ratings are sinking — but who still regularly polls better on the economy than his Democratic opponent, former Vice President Joe Biden. A recent Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll showed 54 percent of voters approved of Trump's handling of the economy — even as his approval rating dropped to 42 percent and he trailed Biden nationally by 11 percentage points.

"If the president wants the economy to be on an upward trajectory in early October with early voting, then getting the policy right in July and August is very important," said Michael Strain, director of economic policy studies at the right-leaning American Enterprise Institute.

Trump's aides and allies want to take advantage of the window as best they can, and they see the next six weeks as crucial to that effort.

They're pressuring cities and states to find a way to reopen schools with full-time, in-person classes — even as major school districts from coast to coast announce plans to launch with a virtual school year. The president's top economic aides are starting negotiations with lawmakers to push for a payroll tax cut and other measures that will get employers to keep up the hiring despite signs of economic trouble in some coronavirus hot spots.

The amount of money Congress decides to pump into the economy as part of the next aid package will have huge effects on unemployed Americans who have relied on expanded benefits in recent months, and on state and local governments struggling to stay afloat with their tax revenue tumbling.

Getting more schools in shape to open by Labor Day is perhaps most critical. "You can't have an open economy and closed schools," Strain said. "State and local policymakers seem to want to have both at the same time and that is just not an option. Workers can't go to work in many cases if there are kids at home. For those working at home with kids, they are working reduced schedules." Trump's White House and campaign have leaned hard in recent days into the idea of reopening school, viewing it as a key campaign message to appeal to suburban women and stressed out parents — despite the wide range of views among teachers and

health officials.

Administration officials recognize the president has few tools to force states and school districts under local control to reopen, apart from using the bully pulpit of the White House, according to interviews with half a dozen current and former administration officials and Republicans close to the White House. Senior administration officials are exploring ways to incentivize states and cities to open by redirecting funds or giving extra cash to districts, or earmarking parts of the upcoming stimulus package for state and local aid to be spent on the associated costs of opening schools during a pandemic.

The White House's Council of Economic Advisers circulated an internal brief last week that showed a year of forgone schooling leads to a 7 to 11 percent persistent drop in future earnings. The brief also explored how school closures have hurt single moms, who bore the burden of closed schools in the form of less job security and lower pay.

Some senior aides think the White House became invested in the school issue too late after focusing throughout the spring on reopening restaurants, bars and small businesses across states — when schools should have been their first priority.

Now school reopenings have morphed into one of the top talking points for the president and his aides — often treating the issue as distinct from the explosion of Covid-19 cases, the core driver of local officials' concerns.

"The president has said unmistakably that he wants school to reopen," White House

press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said at a briefing Thursday. "When he says open, he means open and full, kids being able to attend each and every day at their school. The science should not stand in the way of this."

McEnany said recent studies shows kids are less at risk of falling critically ill from Covid-19 when compared with the seasonal flu. Other health experts have warned publicly that no one yet fully understands the risk the virus presents to children since schools and day camps have largely been closed since March, when the pandemic was in its infancy in the U.S..

While that debate rages, an economic lifeline for millions of families will hang in the balance in the coming days — with expanded unemployment insurance benefits expiring in less than 10 days.

Some of Trump's outside economic advisers, such as Stephen Moore of the Heritage Foundation, have urged the White House to end the current practice of giving unemployed Americans an additional \$600 a week in jobless benefits on top of regular state jobless aid — seeing it as a disincentive to an economic rebound.

"You've got to take the \$600 a week off the table and go back to the traditional unemployment system," said Moore, who sent a memo to the White House this week outlining this advice. "You can't keep paying people not to work."

"The president's reelection fate depends on getting this right and setting the stage for a strong recovery in the fall," Moore added. "He will get reelected if the economy is recovering at a nice pace, but that is not certain right now."

Trump in recent weeks has publicly aired ideas including more direct payments to taxpayers, liability protections for workers and businesses, infrastructure spending and targeted state and local aid for Covid-19 response efforts. The White House has said it hopes that tens of billions of dollars will be included in the next coronavirus aid package to ensure teachers can safely go back to work and students can return to school.

"We continue to see the

challenges facing millions of Americans by shutting down the greatest economy in our history, but as the country opens the Trump Administration will prioritize pro-growth, economic policies and incentives that encourage businesses to reopen and move to safe re-employment — moving hardworking Americans from unemployment benefits to rising wages," said Judd Deere, the White House deputy press secretary. "The President built the most inclusive economy in our history with low taxes, deregulation, reciprocal trade, and energy independence, which has given us a solid foundation for this Transition to Greatness, and he will do so again."

Economic officials inside the administration are proud of the work they did on the CARES Act, a package of aid that is widely credited — along with the Federal Reserve's extensive measures — of preventing an economic meltdown as the shutdowns began in March. The U.S. unemployment rate did not soar as high as some top officials had expected, and many aides across the administration feel frustrated the health officials have not acted with the same efficiency to control Covid-19, viewing the two as separate problems on different tracks.

Other aides inside the White House say the fate of the economy is closely intertwined with how well the U.S. is controlling the virus. To think otherwise is to ignore a global pandemic, these aides say — and handing off too much responsibility to states to solve it on their own will not work.

Trump's political advisers still view the economy as the best message for the president this fall, since, before the virus, he presided over a historically low unemployment rate. They plan to build the campaign around that idea as often as possible to draw a contrast with Biden's economic proposals.

"There is a stronger chance of recovery with Trump than with Biden," said the Republican close to the campaign. "That message needs to be reinforced every day to make it the No. 1 thing on people's minds. People instinctually do not blame him for the economy crashing. They blame the virus."



# I'm using unemployment benefits to buy insulin': US workers face hardships over pandemic

Millions of workers have lost health insurance and faced salary cuts and unions say firms are not doing enough to take care of employees

As millions of workers around the US remain out of work due to the coronavirus pandemic, employers are pushing cuts to wages, eliminating health insurance and other benefits, and terminating workers rather than furloughing them.

Rodney Watts worked at the Atlanta international airport employed by the retail and concessions contractor HMS Host for nine years as a warehouse shift supervisor before getting laid off in March. Watts says he is using his unemployment benefits to pay for his insulin, as he lost his health insurance with his job termination.

"Without insurance I have to pay out of pocket ... I take insulin shots three times a day. Now I'm using unemployment to pay for it," said Watts. "My diabetes is a rollercoaster. If I don't take my shots, I feel real bad. The insulin runs me almost \$400 for just a small bottle and I also take metformin."

Some employers are pushing to avoid providing workers with health insurance, even as the workers begin to return to work, and others out of work who have kept their health insurance are struggling to afford co-pays for life-saving medications.

Hanna Castano of Euclid, Ohio, who has type 1 diabetes, lost her job as a server at a Bob Evans restaurant in March 2020 when the pandemic shutdown began. She found a new job at a local drug mart but was shortly laid off due to lack of customer demand the store had anticipated. The change in employment disrupted her unemployment benefits, of which she has only received one week of pay, and the loss of income left her struggling to afford the \$50 co-pay for her insulin under her Medicaid coverage. Though her restaurant reopened, she is still waiting to be called back into work when customer demand recovers.

"I will go sick because my daughter needs something that I have to get," said Castano, who has relied on financial support from friends



and family while living in a motel. "I don't know how much longer I can keep paying for my insulin and not being able to get the food and diapers that my daughter needs because I will die without it." The Fontainebleau hotel in Miami Beach, Florida, is suing the Unite Here union, seeking to stop making healthcare payments for more than 1,000 workers under the current union contract.

A housekeeper for 10 years at the hotel, Cristina Aguirre-Sevillano, cannot afford medicine prescribed to her, which costs nearly \$400 out of pocket, after recently testing positive for Covid-19. "I haven't been able to get the medicine my doctor recommended me to take," said Aguirre-Sevillano. "My daughter is also under my health insurance plan, so she lost her health insurance. I don't have health insurance, I can't afford medicine and I can't pay my rent either because I only received one payment of \$275 from unemployment since being furloughed in March."

Initially furloughed in March, Aguirre-Sevillano was called back to work in June but has worked only five days. She is one of several workers in Florida who have not received their full unemployment benefits yet, and she continues to experience problems with the state system.

Wendi Walsh, the Unite Here

Local 355 secretary-treasurer, said union contract language stipulates hotels must continue healthcare coverage for employees until they have not worked the required number of hours for two consecutive quarters. She said: "Every other hotel we represent has that same contract language and they are abiding by it because they are legally required to do so and amidst a pandemic it's the moral thing to do, but the Fontainebleau has taken a different path, going so far as to file a lawsuit to avoid taking care of their employees during a deadly outbreak of a virus." According to Walsh, the hotel also proposed implementing wage cuts of between 10% and 20% for workers in the bargaining unit. "The union is rejecting that proposal and would oppose the company unilaterally implementing those wage cuts," added Walsh.

Monalisa Rodriguez, a server and hostess at Terranea Resort outside Los Angeles, for seven years, was terminated in May after initially being furloughed.

"It was devastating. At the same time they fired us, they took away our health benefits," said Rodriguez, who was hoping to eventually retire from the resort. She relies solely on her income to provide for two children and take care of her mother. "It's been extremely hard. I've struggled a lot trying to figure out how

to provide for my family, relying on food banks and the Salvation Army to make ends meet."

A spokesperson for Terranea Resort said in an email that 550 out of 1,100 employees were laid off in May 2020 for the resort's survival. "We will continue to bring back all employees according to our seniority policy and will rehire laid-off employees should we have the opportunity to do so." Mozes Bautista, who has worked at Hilton Embassy Suites in Phoenix, Arizona, for five years, recently returned to work after being terminated, but he has to wait until September 2020 for his health insurance to restart with the company.

"They said they would give back the paid time off but only gave back some of it. Because they fired us, we're reclassified as new hires so we don't have health insurance until September," said Batista. "They're no longer matching our 401(k) either."

Gate Gourmet, an airliner catering contractor, was one of several airline companies to receive federal bailout funds to prevent layoffs, but it terminated workers anyway. Over \$170m is allocated from the Cares Act to Gate Gourmet for payroll protection. According to Unite Here, Gate Gourmet had about 8,000 employees before the pandemic, with only 1,100 currently working and plans to

bring back just 1,600 additional workers on 1 September.

Lamar Banks worked as a customer service assistant for nearly six years at Gate Gourmet in Chicago before he was laid off in May 2020, just weeks after he had a child and had to use all his paid time off to quarantine after a supervisor tested positive for coronavirus.

"I got a letter in the mail shortly after saying it was going to be a permanent layoff," said Banks. "They stopped health insurance." Banks said Cobra, which allows Americans to continue benefits they once received from a job, costs \$500 a month, and he had not received unemployment yet. "I don't know what I'm going to do or what that means. I was thinking when things got better, I'd be able to go back to work."

Gate Gourmet would not clarify its current employment numbers. "We are committed to complying with all our obligations, including covid safety measures, seriously and will use all Cares Act funds exclusively for the continuation of payment of employee wages, salaries and benefits," said a spokesperson. "We continue to be a proud employer to thousands of workers in the United States and are ready to serve our customers as they begin to resume operations." The Fontainebleau Hotel and HMS Host did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Speaking to the Miami Herald, Silvia Pereda, Fontainebleau vice-president of human resources, said the hotel was "focused on recovering its financial stability so that it can return as many of its laid-off, former employees as possible to employment, which will, critically, result in them receiving a paycheck and benefits once again". The union's demands for payment of benefits for laid-off workers was making this harder, Pereda said.



# Sex in a Pandemic: For Liberals, More Netflix and Less Chill

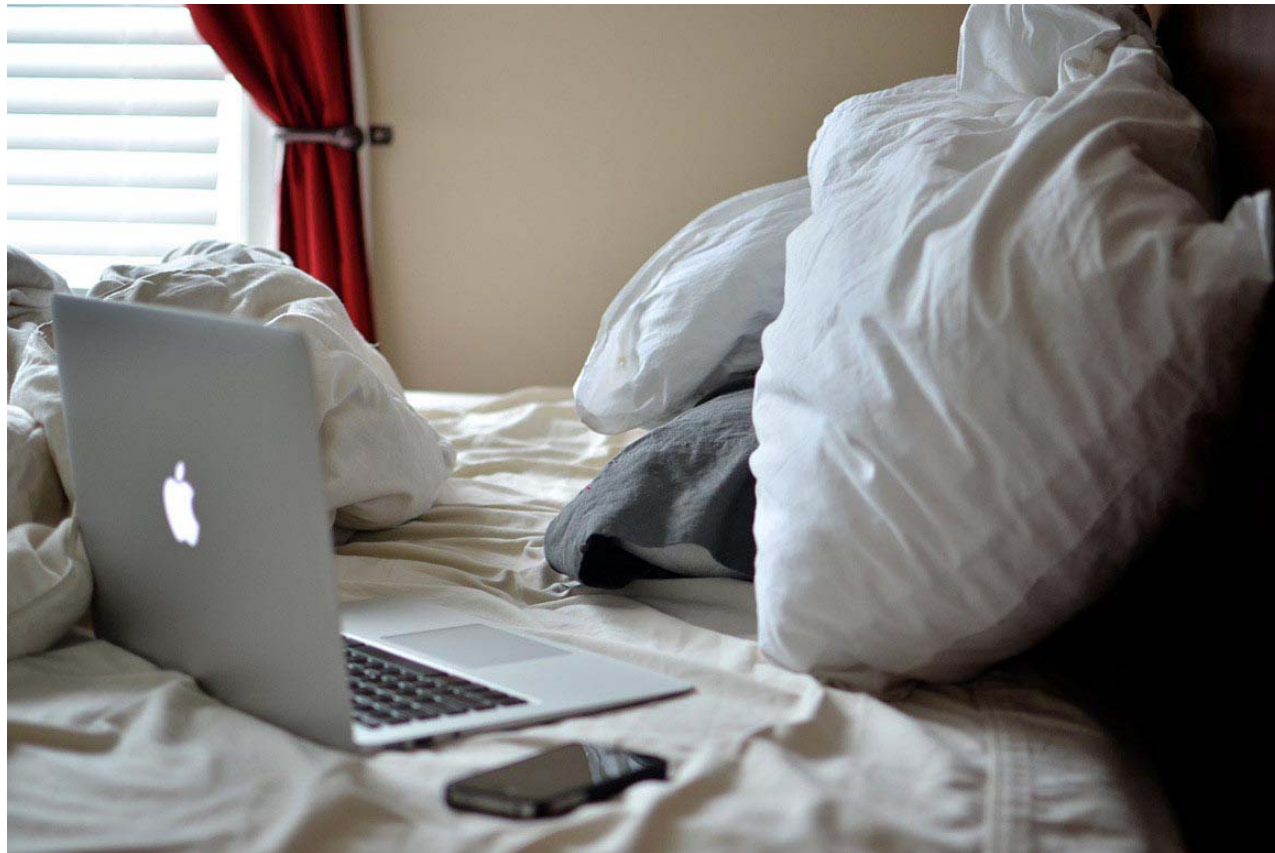
There's a partisan gap in how coronavirus is changing Americans' intimate lives.

The past few months have made it clear that a global pandemic is, when it comes to close human contact, a very strange time to be alive. Quarantines have put the brakes on hookups and dates, and understandable anxieties over health and work and home and spreading deadly viruses and the disappearing comforts of daily life aren't exactly aphrodisiacs.

But this situation hasn't necessarily affected everyone in the same way. Depending on their politics, Americans hold drastically differing views on the need for continued lockdowns and the personal threats posed by the virus. These differences mean that Democrats and Republicans have responded to the pandemic quite differently, and that even extends to what people are doing in their bedrooms. Simply put, there's a sizable partisan gap in how the coronavirus is affecting Americans' sex lives.

At the Kinsey Institute, we recently conducted a study to explore the impact of this pandemic and the resulting lockdown and social distancing measures on people's sex lives and relationships. Starting in mid-March, just as widespread social restrictions began being implemented across the country, we surveyed more than 2,000 adults. Some were single, some were in relationships, some were married; some lived alone, some cohabited. Their ages ranged from 18 to 81. Their self-identified political beliefs spanned the partisan spectrum. And what they told us was striking.

Liberals were



significantly more likely than conservatives to report a decline in their sex lives since the start of the pandemic. They reported less desire for sex in general, a lower frequency of sex with a partner and a lower likelihood of experimenting with new sexual activities at the time when most of the country was locked down. Conservatives, meanwhile, were significantly more likely than liberals to say the pandemic hasn't affected their sex lives at all. And importantly, this holds true regardless of a participant's relationship status or living situation: Single liberals were less sexually active than single conservatives, just as cohabiting liberals were less active than cohabiting conservatives.

Among the self-identified liberals, 49 percent said their sex lives had declined since the beginning of the pandemic. Among conservatives, just 33 percent said their sex lives had declined. But it's not that conservatives were

necessarily undergoing some kind of sexual revolution during the pandemic—the number of conservatives and liberals reporting improvements in their sex lives during lockdown was similarly low (17 percent vs. 13 percent, respectively). Instead, 50 percent of conservatives reported that their sex lives hadn't changed at all—compared with 37 percent of liberals. Put another way, more than two-thirds of conservatives reported that their sex life either improved or stayed the same, while less than half of liberals claimed the same.

So how do we explain this pattern of results? For singles, social distancing is part of the story. Consistent with other recent reports that have emerged, including smartphone tracking data, we found that liberals were more likely than conservatives to closely stick to social distancing guidelines. It stands to reason that if liberals were social distancing, they would be less likely to be out dating or hooking up

during the lockdown period.

But that's not the full story. In general, liberals were more likely than conservatives to report higher levels of stress, more loneliness and more preoccupation with death during this time. All of these factors have a tendency to put a damper on sexual desire and interest. Studies have repeatedly shown that feelings of everyday stress are related to sexual problems, including lower sexual desire. (Of course, there are some people who cope with stress and anxiety by turning to sex—but that's the exception rather than the rule.) It therefore makes sense that the people who were more worried about the pandemic—in this case, liberals—have been less sexually active than their less-concerned counterparts. Our findings are intriguing in light of a number of previous studies finding greater concern with pathogen avoidance in conservative populations. Based on this work, political

psychology researchers probably would have expected that people with more conservative beliefs—especially those who are single—would be less inclined to engage in sexual behavior or to take on new partners during a global pandemic.

However, partisanship appears to influence how people perceive the relative threat of this particular virus. Among our participants, liberals reported more concern about their own health and safety than conservatives. Thus, the conventional wisdom on pathogen avoidance does not seem to apply here. Our survey doesn't allow us to definitively say why we observed specific changes in behavior, but given the public conversation about coronavirus, it's reasonable to assume the strong difference in Covid-19 messaging among Republican and Democratic leaders—and the way it's been covered in liberal and conservative media—is playing a big role. These findings are also interesting against the

backdrop of decades of research finding that values typically linked to conservative political beliefs—namely, tradition and religiosity—tend to be linked to reports of less frequent sexual behavior, as well as less casual sex. On the basis of this, liberals are often presumed to be more sexually active in general than conservatives; however, at least during the Covid-19 pandemic, that does not appear to be the case.

It is important to note that while our survey was based on a large and demographically diverse group of adults and replicates general trends in attitudes toward the virus and toward social distancing more broadly, we did not have a truly representative sample, which merits some caution in generalizing conclusions. For example, conservatives who participate in sex studies may be different from other conservatives in that perhaps they have more positive attitudes toward sex and/or more active sex lives. Thus, they may not reflect conservatives as a whole.

With that said, it is important to look at the political differences we observed in the context of the broader survey. Specifically, while conservatives in our study reported more sexual activity during the pandemic than liberals, overall levels of sexual behavior were down across the political spectrum. So if there's one thing that unites us in all of this, it's that we're unlikely to see a Democrat- or Republican-led baby boom on the other side.



# Post-Brexit trade with India to focus on 5 sectors

The Boris Johnson government has been keen on a free trade agreement with India. Formal talks on such a pact can only begin after December 31, but some talks on exploring 'building blocks' have begun.



Information and communications technology (ICT) and services are among five sectors identified as key areas for closer cooperation in trade arrangements after the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union is completed on December 31. The Boris Johnson government has been keen on a free trade

agreement with India. Formal talks on such a pact can only begin after December 31, but some talks on exploring 'building blocks' have begun. Other sectors identified are food and drink, life sciences and chemicals to address non-tariff barriers to trade. Official sources here said the 14th Joint Economic and Trade Committee (Jetco) – the annual mechanism for government-to-government negotiations – is scheduled for July 24 between Commerce minister Piyush Goyal and International trade secretary Elizabeth Truss

virtually. Minister of state for Commerce Hardeep Singh Puri on Wednesday held a virtual bilateral meeting with Ranil Jayawardena, the UK's minister for International Trade, to discuss market access and other bilateral trade issues as a prelude to the Jetco meeting. British ministers have emphasised to Indian interlocutors that the country would not become protectionist, but more open after leaving the EU. The Brexit process is currently in the one-year transition phase that ends on December 31, when the UK's exit will be complete.

The UK's eagerness for an FTA with India has been met with a wait-and-watch approach in New Delhi, where a review of FTAs with various countries is envisaged by Goyal to protect the interests of Indian industry and traders.

In the long-stalled EU-India free trade talks, easier mobility of Indian professionals (the so-called Mode 4) is one of the key areas New Delhi has been insisting on. Brussels believes that there will be better chances of reaching the agreement with India after Britain leaves the EU.

## Air India ends work-from-home for most employees from July 20

Air India advised all department heads to ensure that norms of social distancing and proper sanitisation and other related measures are strictly followed through.



National carrier Air India on Wednesday announced that all its offices will operate at full strength from July 20, adding that those not reporting to work will be marked absent. However, it made an exception for employees residing in containment zones, but asked them to keep the office posted about the status of the containment. "It has now been decided that Air India offices will function at full strength from July 20 and no separate roster for functioning under Covid situation is to be operated. Employees who do not attend office will have to apply for leave or shall be marked absent," said the airline.

It further advised all department heads to ensure that norms of social distancing and proper sanitisation and other related measures are strictly followed through. "Work from home option can be

considered for employees who are at higher risk due to medical conditions, pregnant women and employees staying in containment zones," it said.

In another order, the airline said it has begun the process of sending some employees on leave without pay ranging from six months or two years that can also be extended up to five years, it said in an official staff order issued on Tuesday.

The scheme is being introduced for some employees to opt on a voluntary basis as well and can be availed for "personal reasons".

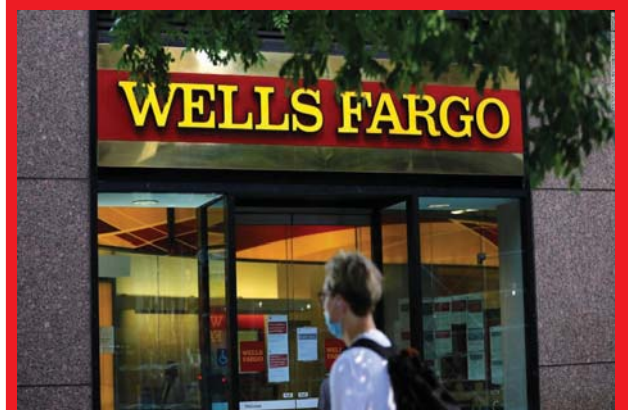
"This Scheme (LWP) is being introduced for grant of leave without pay and allowances for permanent-employees, for a period of six months (extendable upto 5 years) or for a period of two years (extendable upto 5 years) at the discretion of the Management," the order said. This Scheme shall be appli-

cable to permanent employees of the company. "Board of Directors in its 102nd meeting held on 7th July, 2020 has approved a Scheme whereby employees can opt to take Leave Without Pay ranging from six months or for two years and the same can be extendable upto five years," the order said.

"The Scheme also authorises CMD to pass an order on behalf and in the name of the Company whereby an employee would be sent on leave for six months or for a period of two years extendable upto five years, depending upon... suitability, efficiency, competence, quality of performance, health of the employee, instance of non-availability of the employee for duty in the past, as a result of ill health or otherwise and redundancy," it added.

The policy approved by the board states that departmental heads at headquarters and regional directors of the region are required to assess each individual on the above mentioned factors and identify the cases where option of compulsory leave without pay can be exercised. To streamline the process of identification of redundant manpower who would be told to proceed on compulsory leave without pay a committee of The respective Regional Directors will be constituted comprising General Manager (Personnel), General Manager (Finance) and concerned Departmental Head.

## Wells Fargo is a hot mess. It has only itself to blame



Wells Fargo has gone from one of America's strongest big banks to easily the weakest. For years, Wells Fargo's laundry list of scandals and legal problems had only a fleeting impact on its once-monstrous bottom line. That is no longer the case.

Wells Fargo (WFC) is the only major lender during the pandemic to lose money -- its first loss since the 2008 financial crisis. And that red ink was driven in large part by the crushing penalties imposed two years ago by the Federal Reserve for abusing customers. Wells Fargo is such a mess that it's being forced to slash its coveted dividend. During the Great Recession, Wells Fargo was so strong that it was among the last of the banks to touch its dividend. Today, it's the first.

All banks (except maybe Goldman Sachs) are suffering because of the pandemic, which has caused mass unemployment, surging bankruptcies and a collapse in GDP. But the fact that Wells Fargo is hurting so much more than its peers is its own fault. Just ask Charlie Scharf, the man hired last year to get the bank back on track. "We are responsible for the position we're in," the Wells Fargo CEO told analysts Wednesday after detailing what he called "clearly a very poor quarter for us." Wall Street agrees with that assessment. Wells Fargo's share price has collapsed by a staggering 54% this year, far worse than the 35% drop for the KBW Bank Index (BKX). Rivals including JPMorgan Chase (JPM) and Bank of America (BAC) are down around 30%.



# Sabu-Jaddi ; The Site revealing the Sahara's verdant past



Our pickup truck turned onto a dusty two-track road heading away from the Nile River in north-eastern Sudan. Ahead of us, the landscape stretched forever and the small bumps on the horizon, perhaps distant mountains or nearby sand dunes masked by mirage, were impossible to gauge in the vastness. The only thing that appeared certain was the emptiness.

After an hour, we arrived at a wadi (dry riverbed) lined with outcrops of crumbling sandstone. Day-dreaming as soft tunes of Sudanese jazz crackled through the staticky radio, I snapped back to attention as something caught my eye: a white animal-like shape on one of the cliff faces. Wondering if it was the desert playing tricks on me, my doubts dissipated when we rounded a corner and stopped. Surrounding us, on every exposed surface of rock, were thousands of ancient petroglyphs depicting scenes of elephants, giraffes, ostriches and boats.

As the wind picked up and the sand began to blow, I stared in awe at the unexpected scenes depicting what I'd imagine to see in the lush grasslands and winding waterways of the Serengeti, but not in the bone-dry Nubian Desert, the eastern flank of the Sahara sandwiched between the Nile and the Red Sea. As an archaeologist who has worked on projects from the bottom of the Black Sea to the tops of the Rocky Mountains, it's not every day that a site completely and utterly surprises me. However, this veritable encyclopaedia of petroglyphs etched in front of me

marked a rare and exciting exception.

"Welcome to Sabu," said my driver with a smile, "where you can see how Sudan used to be." Hidden amongst rock outcrops between the third and fourth cataracts of the Nile River, the archaeological site of Sabu-Jaddi (or simply "Sabu") contains more than 1,500 rock drawings spanning 10,000 years of human history in the region. Archaeologists have yet to determine when, exactly, the ancient Nubians who lived here first chiselled these images, but one thing is for sure: the remarkably well-preserved etchings of hippos, crocodiles and papyrus boats depict a vastly different world than the parched desert landscape that now covers much of northern Africa, and offer a glimpse into the Sahara's verdant past.

"Sabu has a large diversity of figures," said archaeologist Dr Bruce Williams, who worked in Sudan for more than 50 years. "There are animals from

early times, cattle from the later Kerma period (2600-1450BC), boats of Egypt's New Kingdom (1570-1069BC), a collection of Christian period motifs and more that continue through time."

Beyond the sheer magnitude of drawings and the deep history that the site encompasses, Sabu also provides a detailed record of how people lived and adapted as the world's largest desert began to form around them.

The climate of the Sahara region was once drastically different than it is today. Though the desert is generally considered to be two to three million years old, during a time known as the African Humid Period (roughly 13000-3000BC), seasonal monsoons from Central Africa swept upwards, delivering ample rainfall to the northern part of the continent. During this era, the Nile surged as it was fed by countless rain-filled tributaries that snaked into a green, fertile plain – much like the savannahs of

Kenya and Tanzania. Immense herds of elephants, giraffes and gazelles thundered across the landscape and hippos snorted throughout ponds and riverways.

A large variety of plants and animals offered abundant resources to humans who roamed these grasslands in small family groups of hunter-gatherers. At Sabu, the hundreds of animal figures that were incised into the sandstone's surface are evidence of this forgotten era. This earliest form of Saharan rock art is known as the Bubaline Phase, and while Sabu isn't the only site with ancient petroglyphs depicting exotic game animals in the Sahara, it was the first in Sudan to be documented (by a British archaeological expedition in the 1940s) and remains one of the only ones readily accessible to visitors today. "There is a lot of rock art in Nubia and the adjacent deserts," explained Dr Williams. "Most big outcrops, especially those with caves, are often spectacularly developed." While

the imagery is widespread across Sudan, Sabu remains one of the largest known concentrations in the country.

Beyond the ancient art, other information about prehistoric people's relationships with animals has been identified at nearby excavations, where butchered bones from warthogs, leopards, monitor lizards, fish, gazelles and giraffes lie alongside remnants of chipped stone tools and ancient fire hearths. The evidence of such game, both at Sabu and in the nearby excavations, offers a glimpse into a time when life on the grassy North African plains was ample. But it was not to last, and around 5500-5000BC, the climate began a 2,000-year transformation as the African Humid Period slowly came to an end. As I continued my exploration at Sabu, venturing deeper into the site, climbing over large sandstone boulders and squeezing through cracks in the cliffside, other creatures began to appear among the traditional animals of the African plains. One in particular, suddenly visible everywhere I looked, stood out among the exotic: the common cow. The appearance of the humble bovid (which marks a new artistic period in the Sahara, known by rock art historians as the Bovidian Phase), while perhaps not as incongruous as an elephant or ostrich, is evidence of an important societal shift that was likely initiated by the changing climate 7,000 years ago.





# How long does coronavirus immunity REALLY last?

82-year-old man who recovered from the disease caught it again just 10 days later - ending up in intensive care BOTH times

An 82-year-old man who spent four weeks in intensive care with Covid-19 was struck down by the virus again just 10 days after recovering. The unidentified man went to an emergency department at Massachusetts General Hospital after suffering from a high fever for a week. He tested positive for Covid-19 and then his condition rapidly worsened while he was in hospital. Doctors managed to save his life with a lengthy stay on a ventilator but he fell sick again less than a fortnight later, despite testing negative twice before being discharged. The man's case is one of many that raises questions about the type of immunity people build up against Covid-19, and how long it really takes to be cleared from the body.

Medics title their article 'A case report of possible novel coronavirus 2019 reinfection' and discussed how it was possible that the man recovered and tested negative but fell ill again. Experts are still not sure whether people can catch the coronavirus twice and they are increas-



ingly beginning to believe protection may only be short-lived. Other coronaviruses that cause the common cold do not produce permanent immunity and people can catch them multiple times, and the same may be true of Covid-19.

Reports from around the world have claimed to see patients fall ill with the disease more than once, but there is little proof they are reinfections. A high profile group of cases in South Korea turned out to have been false positive results when patients were retested. The report, published in The American Journal of Emergency Medicine, detailed the case of the un-

named 82-year-old this month. The man was already seriously ill before he caught coronavirus, suffering from Parkinson's, diabetes, chronic kidney disease and high blood pressure. All of these - and his old age - put him in the highest possible risk category of dying from Covid-19. But doctors managed to save him. He appeared in the emergency department of the hospital complaining of a fever and shortness of breath for a week.

A chest X-ray and examination of his blood oxygen levels led doctors to believe he had Covid-19 and a swab test confirmed his diagnosis. While in A&E the man's lungs began

to fail so he was put on a ventilator and rushed to intensive care, where he then spent 28 days recovering. He spent a total of 39 days - five-and-a-half weeks - in hospital before being discharged to rehab. After two negative coronavirus tests he was allowed to leave the ward and was breathing on his own. But just 10 days later the man reappeared in the emergency department - again with a fever and struggling to breathe. Another chest X-ray showed signs of Covid-19 infection in his lungs again, and a swab test again confirmed he was carrying the virus. This time he and his family had asked doctors not to put him on a ventilator and not to resuscitate him if his heart stopped, but he was admitted to intensive care again. In the ITU he went into shock and his kidneys failed - but again he survived, recovered and was sent back to a normal ward after a week.

After testing negative for coronavirus a further two times, he was discharged from the hospital for a second time after 15 days and is since believed to have recovered. His

medics said that, rather than getting infected twice, it's likely he never fully recovered the first time and that tests weren't sensitive enough to notice he was still carrying the virus. The doctors, led by Dr Nicole Duggan, said: 'Many viruses demonstrate prolonged presence of genetic material in a host even after clearance of the live virus and symptomatic resolution.'

'Thus, detection of genetic material by [swab test] alone does not necessarily correlate with the active infection or infectivity. 'Observational data suggest SARS-CoV-2 viral shedding may last 20-22 days after symptom onset on average with some outlying cases exhibiting shedding as long as 44 days.' They said that in one 71-year-old woman, a study had found she continued to test positive for Covid-19 five weeks after her symptoms disappeared. Because the virus was only first discovered in December, scientists have not had the opportunity to work out how it affects people in the long-term.

## Staggering 85% of new coronavirus infections in Blackburn 'are among South Asians'



A staggering 85 per cent of new Covid-19 infections in Blackburn with Darwen are among its South Asian population, a local health chief revealed today amid fears it will become the second place in England to be hit with a local lockdown because of a spike in coronavirus cases. For the next month, only two people from the same family will be allowed to visit another household indoors in the Lancashire authority and every-

one must wear face masks in any enclosed public space. This differs from the national guidance, which says two households of any size can meet inside. People are also being urged not to hug anyone from outside their own household and to get regularly tested at new mobile centres as part of the measures to avoid a Leicester-style lockdown, which council bosses say is a 'very real' threat. Mass testing began at

the weekend after 114 people caught the virus in the last two weeks. Latest Public Health England (PHE) data shows Blackburn with Darwen has 47 Covid-19 cases per 100,000 population in the last week — second only to Leicester's rate of 101.3.

Dominic Harrison, the authority's director of public health, said 85 per cent of the 114 new cases were people from South Asian backgrounds.

That's despite the South Asian community only accounting for 30 per cent of the council's 150,000 population. Many other areas of England which have the current highest infection rates of Covid-19, such as Bradford, Rochdale and Oldham, also have large South Asian communities.

Professor Harrison told the BBC Radio 4 Today programme: 'We have what we call a rising tide event rather than an outbreak. 'We have a number of cases rising in specific areas across a significant community but not a single big outbreak but not a single big outbreak like Kirklees or other areas that had a workplace outbreak.'

'What we're seeing from looking at postcode data is a single case being infected then going back to a household and all of that household getting infected. And when we look at that data we can see clusters in a part of the town but the clusters are household clusters and a number of those are causing the rising tide event. 'We

know they are mainly in South Asian areas and they're in areas with a high number of terraced houses with high numbers of occupants in the house — four or five or more.

'We've had 114 new cases in the last two weeks and about 97 of those are South Asian.' Health Secretary Matt Hancock welcomed the extra measures introduced in Blackburn. He told BBC Breakfast: 'On Blackburn, I think that the council there are doing a fantastic job. 'There is a higher rate of Covid in Blackburn than the average across the country, it's not as high as in Leicester. We've gone in and are supporting them, working with them, for instance put in much more testing. And then they've taken these steps locally and I applaud that. 'This is exactly the sort of local action we want to see.' A mountain of evidence has shown Britons from black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) backgrounds are more likely to contract the disease and die from it than white people.





# Climate change: Siberian heatwave 'clear evidence' of warming

A record-breaking heatwave in Siberia would have been almost impossible without human-caused climate change, a study has found. The Russian region's temperatures were more than 5C above average between January and June of this year. Temperatures exceeded 38C in the Russian town of Verkhoyansk on 20 June, the highest temperature ever recorded north of the Arctic circle.

The Arctic is believed to be warming twice as fast as the global average. An international team of climate scientists, led by the UK Met Office, found the record average temperatures were likely to happen less than once every 80,000 years without human-induced climate change.

That makes such an event "almost impossible" had the world not been warmed by greenhouse gas emissions, they conclude in the study. The scientists described the finding as "unequivocal evidence of the impact of climate change on the planet". Climate scientists use computer simulations to com-

pare the climate as it is today with the climate as it would have been without human influence to see how likely different weather events would have been. The researchers say that the current Siberian heat "has contributed to raising the world's average temperature to the second hottest on record for the period January to May".

What happens in the Arctic doesn't stay in the Arctic. The changing Arctic climate is of huge importance here in the UK. Four of the six main systems that determine this country's weather are driven by conditions in the Arctic, said Dr Katharine Hendry of Bristol University. She was one of the lead authors on a paper published last month that suggested a series of extreme weather events could be linked to changes in the Arctic. The so-called "Beast from the East", in the winter of 2018, is one.

It involved Arctic air blasting the country, driving temperatures below 0C for several days. Over half a metre of snow fell in some areas.

The storm is reckoned to have caused over £1bn of damage and claimed 10 lives. The paper published last month also cites the storms and floods in February this year and ones back in 2015 as other possible examples of Arctic-linked changes.

"The link between the Arctic and UK weather is through the jet stream," said Prof Stott, referring to the ribbon of fast-moving air high up in the atmosphere. The jet stream helps move weather systems around the globe.

But sometimes it creates "blocking" patterns that can cause weather systems to stall. The unusually sunny spring experienced in the UK this year was caused by a blocking pattern that allowed high pressure systems to dominate the UK for months on end.

## State of emergency

The heatwave in Siberia was caused by the same pattern but with even more dramatic results. The extreme temperatures led to a cascade of natural and human disasters which prompted Russian President Vladimir Putin to declare a state of emergency in early June.

A vast fuel spill was caused by the collapse of a reservoir containing 20,000 tonnes of diesel near the Russian city of Norilsk in late May. Arctic wildfires are estimated to have led to the release of 56 megatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> in June. At the same time, there has been widespread melting of the permafrost and reports of unusually large swarms of Siberian silk moths that have damaged trees, making them more susceptible to fire.

## Uncertain future

It is well-known that the Arctic is warming at twice the rate of the rest of the planet. Arctic temperatures are estimated to have risen 2C since 1850 compared with 1C globally. What impact that will have on the world's weather is less certain. "Looking at the geological record, we don't think we've had CO<sub>2</sub> levels as high for about five million years," said Dr Hendry. "So we really don't know what to expect into the future."

"We are," she said, "in uncharted territory". This year's Siberian heatwaves shows just how extreme conditions can become. What worries many scientists is that this new climate era we are entering means many places now experience weather conditions beyond anything local ecosystems - or indeed human communities - have evolved to endure.

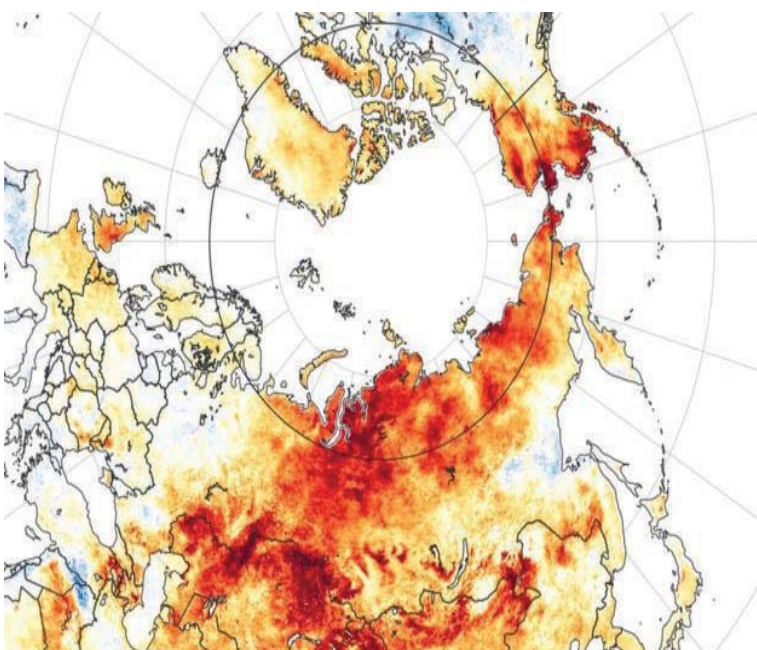
## How NASA's new rover will search for signs of ancient life on Mars

If NASA realizes its midsummer dream, a spacecraft will blast off from Cape Canaveral, Florida, sometime between 30 July and 15 August, destined to ignite the next generation of Mars exploration. The mission aims to deliver the space agency's latest rover, Perseverance, to an uncharted crater known as Jezero—an ancient lake bed that could offer a window into Mars's climatic history. Perseverance will carry many tools and instruments, including a small helicopter and a novel array of 43 sample tubes, robotic arms, and multiple drills, which will bore into the martian sur-



face for chalk-size cores of rock and soil. The cores will eventually make their way back to Earth in a sample return campaign, a joint effort between NASA and the European Space

Agency. Should they contain organic compounds, they may indicate the existence of past microorganisms—in other words, evidence of ancient life on the Red Planet.





# Indians deserve more greenery, cities must change

The fundamental human need for proximity to nature is undeniable, and cities must figure out how to provide it to everyone, rich or poor, writes Bharati Chaturvedi, founder and director of the Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group



The last four months have been traumatic for most Indians. Economic issues apart, the social pain has been almost unwatchable. We're all traumatised. Many of us need

mental health relief. Being one with nature is an important way to heal mental health. Most of us have to walk a fair distance for a patch of grass with a few trees — an urban Indian park, an apology for nature. A lot of us nurture a few plants in our tiny balconies. Our cities must change. Let's first redesign housing so that trees, creepers and balconies for houseplants are part of the colony space. Even a little humble gardening is known to make people hap-

pier. We deserve more greens in our commons.

The earlier vatika-type spaces stand replaced with passive parks, concrete walking trails and boring flower beds with occasional shrubs touted as outdoors. Let's transform these into active interactions where one can smell the flowers and mud, the trees drop their flowers and leaves around you, where earthworms come out on a rainy day with red velvet beetles. This won't happen just like that, be-

cause existing designers are often stubborn. We require specifications — on native plants, diversity, and many other aspects. We also need exposure to what is a great local park can be like. Most important, we have to stop cutting down our trees, choking ponds and replacing them with infra. The fundamental human need for proximity to nature is undeniable, and cities must figure out how to provide it to everyone, rich or poor.

## Dolphin number dips in Chambal river, experts raise concern

The latest census report prepared by the Madhya Pradesh forest department says that dolphins' number in Chambal river has been reduced by 13 per cent in four years.

There are just 68 dolphins left in 435-kilometre-long Chambal river sanctuary which passes through three states (Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan), according to the latest census report of Madhya Pradesh forest department. The report came out in last week of June. According to the census report, dolphins' number in Chambal river has been reduced by 13 per cent in four years. The decreasing trend is continuing from 2016 when there were 78 dolphins.

In 2006, the Supreme Court's Central Empowered Committee (CEC) ordered a ban on mining in the sanctuary area to save the flora and fauna of the river. "But illegal sand mining and consumption of water is so rampant that it is putting the whole ecosystem of the river in danger," said Jyoti Dandotiya, chief sci-

entist of the Deori Gharial Eco-park in Chambal sanctuary in Morena. Principal chief conservator of forest (PCCF), wildlife, SK Mandal said, "The decrease in number of dolphins is a matter of concern but Chambal is a lifeline for three states and the locals of MP, UP and Rajasthan are withdrawing water daily. Similarly, illegal sand mining is rampant in Bhind and Morena in MP and Dholpur in Rajasthan. Forest teams face so many life threatening attacks while taking actions against illegal sand mafia. Forest team needs support of locals, which they never get."

"Dolphin is a sensitive animal and we didn't find many studies so we roped in a team of experts including scientists of Wildlife Institute of India (WII) to do a research for safeguarding and increasing the population of

dolphins in Chambal," he added. Experts raised concerns on the decreasing number of the national aquatic animal. Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun, scientist Qamar Qureshi, who is doing a research on dolphins in Chambal, said, "The maximum carrying capacity of dolphins in Chambal is 125. It's a rare species of dolphins - platanista gangetica - and has been declared endangered by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It requires at least 3 metre depth and 266.42-289.67 m<sup>3</sup> per sec flow of water for sustainable habitat."

"But perennial problems like illegal extraction of sand from the river bed and water withdrawal projects in Morena, Dholpur and Kota are disturbing the whole ecosystem of the river and decreasing the water level and flow.



It needs to be addressed properly to save the dolphins as well as ghariyal," he added. Qureshi said, "With research on what is their favourable environment, we are also doing research to know about their communication system. There is lot to know about this species. It has rudimentary eyes. From preying to surfing, dolphins do it through ultrasonic sound. Now, the research has come to a halt due to Covid-19.

We would resume it once this pandemic is over to know more about dolphins." "The dolphins were spotted for the first time in 1985 in Chambal river near Etawah. That time, the number was more than 110 but poaching reduced the number. Now poaching is not at all a problem but unfavourable habitat is. Not only dolphins, but population of ghariyals has also been affected," said Dandotiya.

## Two rhinos drown to death as flood waters submerge Assam's Kaziranga national park

Kaziranga authorities informed on Wednesday that carcasses of a male and a female rhino were found on Tuesday at Tinimukhuni Nallah and Miikrjan Tongi areas in the central range of the park.

Two rhinoceros were killed due to drowning in Assam's Kaziranga national park and tiger reserve, which is reeling under monsoon flood fury that has become an annual feature. Kaziranga authorities informed on Wednesday that carcasses of a male and a female rhino were found on Tuesday at Tinimukhuni Nallah and Miikrjan Tongi areas in the central range of the park, which is spread over 430 square kilometres (km). This

is the third rhino death in the park - the largest habitat of one-horned rhinos in the world -- this monsoon. On June 26, the carcass of a male rhino, which had died due to natural causes, was found in the western range of the park. At present, around 90% of the park's total area is submerged under floodwaters and 153 of the total 223 forest camps inside are inundated, of which 14 of which have been vacated. According to a bulletin is-

sued by the park authorities on Wednesday, 66 wild animals have died during this monsoon with 23 deaths (two rhinos, five wild boars, a swamp deer, 14 hog deer, and a porcupine) due to drowning and 12 (all hog deer) after they were hit by speeding vehicles. A total of 45 animals (all hog deer) have been injured — 44 due to floods and one due to a vehicle hit. Forest personnel has rescued 117 animals, including a one-year-old female rhino

calf, which had got separated from its mother to date. Every year as floods ravage Kaziranga, the park's animals including elephants, rhinos, and tigers cross the nearby national highway to find safety in the hills of adjoining Karbi Anglong district. Though vehicle movement is regulated and a speed limit of a maximum of 40 km per hour (kmph) has been imposed, several animals get injured or die due to speeding vehicles.



# Forest officials rescue tigress which strayed out of flood-hit Kaziranga national park

## Over 100 wild animals including a one-year-old rhino calf affected by floods rescued

Ending a nearly 30-hour long operation, forest officials and veterinarians on Wednesday successfully tranquilised and rescued a two-year-old tigress that had strayed out of the flood-affected Kaziranga national park and tiger reserve (KNPTR). The tigress is among the 117 wild animals that have been rescued from inside and around the park spread over 430 sq km of which 90% area has been flooded. "Due to rising flood waters, the tigress had strayed out of the park on Tuesday morning. It had spent a few hours resting near the national highway 37 that passes close to the park before it took shelter in the kitchen of a thatched hut in a nearby Baghmari village," informed KNPTR director P. Sivakumar.

the tigress the entire time hoping that it would move out on its own. In the meantime, the family was shifted to a forest guest house. As we were worried about the animal's health, it was tranquilised at 2:30 pm on Wednesday and rescued," he added. A team comprising veterinarian Shamsul Ali and forest personnel who carried out the rescue operation took the tigress to the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) located at Borjuri near the national park where it is recuperating. "The tigress has recovered from anaesthesia and is out of danger. She doesn't appear to have suffered any injuries. We will keep her under observation for 2-3 days before releasing her in the park," head of CWRC Rathin Barman said.

The rescued tigress is one of the two tigers that had strayed out of the park on Tuesday to escape flood waters. While the other tiger was successfully driven out of the area and reached the higher locations in nearby Karbi Anglong district safely, the tigress had moved into a hut. On Monday, a sub-adult tiger had come out of the Agratoli range of the park to escape flood waters and took shelter in a goat shed in Kandolimari village for several hours before moving back to the park. Floods, which ravage Kaziranga, the largest habitat of one-horned rhinos in the world, annually affects its inhabitants who try to find safety in higher locations or cross the nearby NH 37 and head to the hills in Karbi Anglong district. On Tuesday, an adult rhino had



come out of the park's Kohora range and spent some time on the national highway before heading back to the park. Videos of the rhinos running on the highway are circulating on social media. Till Wednesday, 66 animals of the Kaziranga national park had died during this monsoon. Twenty-three of the animals (two rhinos, five wild boars, one swamp deer, and three turtles. While 14 of the rescued animals have died, 98 have been released into the wild and five others are under treatment at the CWRC facility.

(all hog deer) have been injured—44 due to floods and one due to vehicle hit. Forest personnel have so far rescued 117 animals including a one-year-old female rhino calf which got separated from its mother. The rescued animals include 2 rhinos, 98 hog deer, one wild buffalo, 11 pythons, one tiger, one swamp deer and three turtles. While 14 of the rescued animals have died, 98 have been released into the wild and five others are under treatment at the CWRC facility.

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### मोदी का एलान-ए-जंग

## बूंद-बूंद को तरसेगा पाक

नई दिल्ली: हम हिंदुस्तानी

भारत सरकार के प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने आज एक ऐतिहासिक एलान किया। उन्होंने कहा कि भारत को जंगलों के संरक्षण और जल संचयन के लिए एक राष्ट्रीय अभियान शुरू करने की आवश्यकता है।

मोदी ने कहा कि जंगलों को जल संचयन के लिए एक राष्ट्रीय अभियान शुरू करने की आवश्यकता है। उन्होंने कहा कि जंगलों को जल संचयन के लिए एक राष्ट्रीय अभियान शुरू करने की आवश्यकता है।

### भारतीय-अमेरिकन कम्युनिटी द्वारा घोर निंदा

अमेरिका ने एट्री देन से किया इंकार

भारतीय-अमेरिकन कम्युनिटी द्वारा घोर निंदा

अमेरिका ने एट्री देन से किया इंकार

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Since April 2005 Editor : Sharnjit Singh Thind

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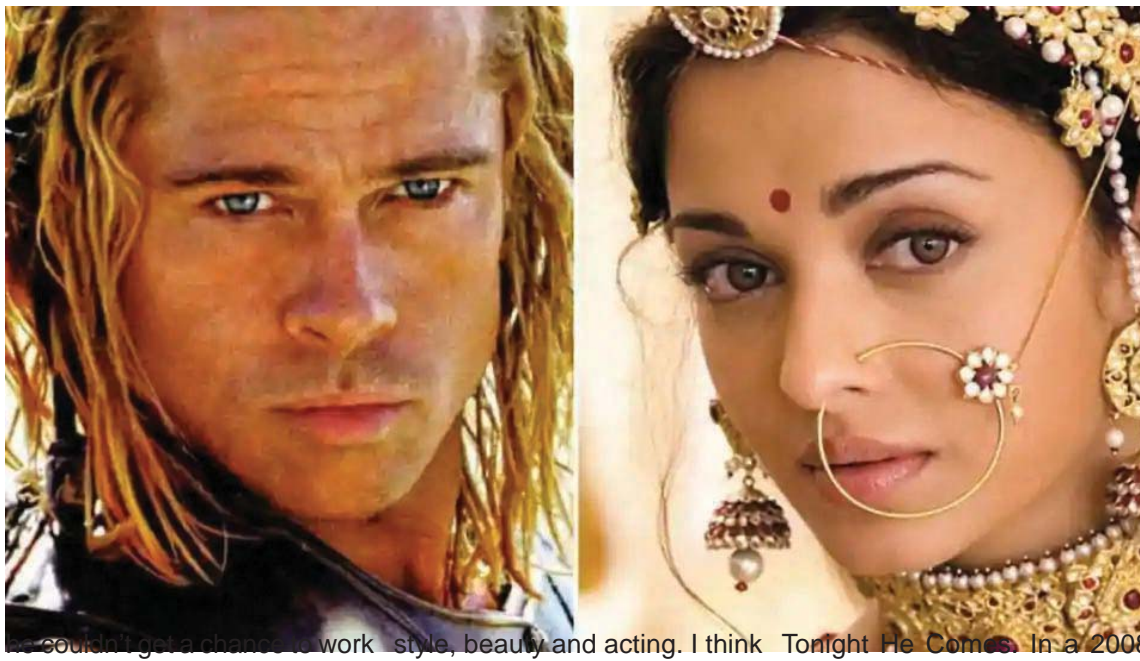


# When Aishwarya Rai turned down Troy, Brad Pitt expressed regret: 'I think we missed an opportunity'

Did you know Aishwarya Rai was offered a role opposite Brad Pitt in the blockbuster film Troy? The actor turned down the role.

For a brief stretch in the 2000s, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan appeared in several English language films. Her first was *The Mistress of Spices*, which she followed up with *Bride & Prejudice*, *Provoked*, *The Last Legion* and *The Pink Panther 2*. But did you know that Aishwarya was also supposed to star in the 2004 historical epic, *Troy*.

According to a Pinkvilla report, the actor was supposed to play Briseis, but turned the part down because she was uncomfortable filming certain scenes. The role eventually went to Rose Byrne. *Troy* was a major box office success, which went on to make close to \$500 million worldwide, and was nominated for one Academy Award. In 2012, while promoting his film *Killing Them Softly*, *Troy* star Brad Pitt expressed regret that



couldn't get a chance to work with Aishwarya. He told IANS, "Given a chance, I would like to work with Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, because she's a versatile actor. She is one of the most popular actresses of Bollywood, who has achieved huge acclaim in the west for her

style, beauty and acting. I think we missed an opportunity to be cast together for *Troy*." *Troy* wasn't the only big-ticket Hollywood project, starring a major actor, that Aishwarya turned down. The actor was in talks for Will Smith projects such as *Hitch*, *Seven Pounds* and

*Tonight He Comes*. In a 2008 interview to IANS, she said that she did not turn down the film because she wanted to celebrate Karwa Chauth back home. "That's what they wrote in the US press... that I preferred to return to Mumbai to 'starve' myself for a religious occasion than to meet

Smith for the film. That's completely incorrect," she had said.

"The script reading for *The Seven Pounds* was just after Diwali when Dadima (Teji Bachchan)'s health dipped drastically. So I didn't make that trip out to LA for the reading session with Will. Is that wrong? Not to me. I'd any day put family over career." About turning down *Tonight He Comes*, she had said, "That's true. I had to say no to Will for *Tonight He Comes*. I feel awful about it, but I've my priorities very straight. Yes, family always comes first."

Like Pitt, Will Smith was also regretful: "I really wanted to work with her... She has this powerful energy where she doesn't have to say anything, do anything, she can just stand there. Anything she's making, I'll be there."

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## Greyhound movie review

# Tom Hanks' thrilling World War 2 film gives Apple TV its biggest V-Day yet

Tom Hanks revisits World War 2 in this thrillingly tight survival drama, whose release on Apple TV+ won't do justice to its excellent action sequences.

Greyhound

Director - Aaron Schneider

Cast - Tom Hanks, Stephen Graham, Elisabeth Shue

Nothing good ever happens when Tom Hanks is left to wander at sea, but he certainly comes back with some excellent movies. Greyhound — Hanks' new film, which he also wrote — is no Cast Away, though. At an hour and 22 minutes long, it's a lean action thriller which gives its star another excuse to revisit an era that is clearly very meaningful to him.

Having co-produced both Band of Brothers and The Pacific for HBO, in addition to his iconic starring role in Saving Private Ryan, Hanks' dives back into World War 2 with the enthusiasm of a child being told to ignore homework for a couple of hours and play with his toys instead. And he has millions of dollars at his disposal to realise his most swashbuckling

fantasies.

This could have come across as a little self-indulgent, given the characters' tendency to speak in jargon, but there's an innocence in everyone's eyes that is impossible to ignore.

Impeccably staged and thrillingly tight, Greyhound tells the story of a first-time captain (Hanks, no stranger to playing captains), and the tremendously difficult situation he is confronted by on his maiden mission in command. An international fleet of 37 ships, loaded with goods vital to the Allied cause, must cross a treacherous stretch of the North Atlantic sea without air support for five days. Mere hours after being told 'Godspeed', the fleet comes under attack by a Wolfpack of Nazi submarines.

What unfolds is a rather relentless survival drama, in which Hanks' Commander Ernie Krause is forced to lead by example, and fend off the Nazi attack with only his instincts and

courage to guide him. A crucifix makes a couple of crucial appearances, but Greyhound is a largely secular story. Director Aaron Schneider structures the film almost like Jaws, and tries his best to give personality to the metal monsters at its centre. Every time the camera cuts to a ship, a documentary-style name card pops up, identifying it. This doesn't do much to help you tell one ship from the other — to the layman's eye, they all look the same — but it certainly adds a sense of character to these machines, which, to the men assigned to them, must surely have felt like fellow soldiers.

Alas, if only Hanks had treated some of the human characters with the warmth that he has for the vessels. For a movie in which the interpersonal interactions are mostly restricted to sharp orders and replies of 'aye, sir', Greyhound is best enjoyed for the spectacle. The waters may be deep, but the characters



most certainly are not.

But Schneider knows he needn't worry with Tom Hanks at the helm. The actor squeezes every last drop of his charismatic screen presence into Greyhound, playing Ernest as a sort of, well, earnest extension of himself. Forced to reprimand a couple of unruly soldiers, he says, "Restore the relationships you have damaged and fill me with peace." And the soldiers, God bless them, drop their heads in shame and comply. That's the power of Hanks. In the film's sole instance of swearing, the culprit instantly apologises. Rude words have no place in the presence of Tom Hanks. It's difficult to tell,

however, if Greyhound will find its intended audience, which I'm assuming is older men, on Apple TV+. Yanked from theatres because of the coronavirus pandemic by original distributor Sony, the film was quickly offloaded to the fledgeling streamer. An iPhone won't do justice to its grand action sequences, and neither will Apple's relatively small subscriber base do any favours for Tom Hanks.

But despite everything, being anchored on Apple's shores for the rest of eternity is still a favourable outcome for Greyhound. It would have been torpedoed in theatres.

## The Old Guard movie review

# Charlize Theron is back in beast mode in massively entertaining Netflix film

Charlize Theron leads a pack of immortal mercenaries in Netflix's massively entertaining action film, sure to kick off a new franchise.

The Old Guard

Director - Gina Prince-Bythewood

Cast - Charlize Theron, KiKi Layne, Matthias Schoenaerts, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Luca Marinelli, Marwan Kenzari, Harry Melling

Netflix is no longer just in the original movie business, it's in the franchise business. Not to be outdone by the other players in the market, which often fall back on legacy titles when the going gets tough, the streamer is well on its way to creating a legacy of its own. While a sequel to To All the Boys has already been released, follow-ups to Will Smith-starrer Bright and Chris Hemsworth's Extraction are on their way.

The Old Guard, starring Charlize Theron as Andy (or Andromache of Scythia), the leader of an immortal squad of mercenaries, comes across as a brazen attempt at starting a series and it's tailor-made for one. Based

on the comic book by Greg Rucka and Leandro Fernandez, the film is directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood, who had thus far displayed no evidence of having a knack for making action movies. And there lies the problem. By not allowing women to make big-budget action movies, based on false assumptions and decades of prejudice, truly talented filmmakers such as Prince-Bythewood are being sidelined in favour of inexperienced white men. I can name a dozen recent action films that are infinitely inferior to The Old Guard, but were made simply because their male directors came cheap and proved themselves to be pushovers.

For instance, there is no way in hell any studio in the world would have risked the \$225 million that Universal put on first-timer Carl Rinsch to make the already forgotten Keanu Reeves-starrer 47 Ronin, on a

female filmmaker. Or, for that matter, even the \$160-odd million that Fox literally begged one-film-old Josh Trank to take for Fantastic Four. Despite its various successes, The Old Guard still feels like a compromise, money-wise — the film has a made-for-TV vibe that is difficult to ignore — but it's a start. And that's what matters.

In addition to its refreshing handling of gender and racial stereotypes, the action in The Old Guard is especially well done — it's a sort of mishmash of the styles Theron previously worked with on Atomic Blonde and Aeon Flux. The fights aren't shot in long takes, but they aren't edited to within an inch of their lives, either. Like the rest of the movie, they're a marriage of big-budget ideas and mid-range execution. But while Prince-Blythewood isn't able to bring an instantly



recognisable personality to the proceedings, she is smart enough to not take herself too seriously. The premise is undeniably silly, and for the film to fully embrace that silliness works in its favour. But few would demand seriousness from a scene in which Theron and her cohorts chop adversaries in half with medieval weapons. It's not all goofy fun, though. Between these action scenes, the film pauses to inject moments of quiet emotion, usually through flashbacks. When The Old Guard — made up of a bunch of international actors of equal

beauty — finds a young woman who displays traits of being an immortal herself, they enlist her as the newest member. But she has a question: Does she have a choice in the matter? As it turns out, she doesn't. But they let young Nile Freeman (KiKi Layne) come to terms with it in her own time.

It's a familiar set-up, often seen in the superhero genre ('with great power comes great responsibility', anyone?). But The Old Guard is one of the few films that actually addresses the idea of consent -- a benefit, perhaps, of having a female director at the helm.





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## Major US Twitter accounts hacked in Bitcoin scam



(Story on Page 33)

## More than 940 deaths reported in one day as US coronavirus cases shatter another record



(News Agencies) Battles over wearing face coverings intensified even as the US shattered another daily coronavirus record and health officials warned hospitalizations are getting out of control in some areas. There were 77,255 new cases reported Thursday, topping a previous high set two days ago, according to Johns Hopkins University. At least 943 people were reported dead that day. More than 138,000 people have died from coronavirus nationwide, and experts warn that number will likely go up as hospitalizations rise in several states. In Texas and Arizona, morgues are filling up in the hardest-hit areas and officials are bringing in coolers and refrigerated trailers to store bodies.

(Contd on page 30)

## Fahim Saleh's assistant in custody in connection with death of tech entrepreneur, official says



(News Agencies) Fahim Saleh's assistant was in custody Friday in connection with the dismemberment of the tech entrepreneur at his luxury Manhattan condo, according to a law enforcement official. The assistant, who allegedly owed Saleh tens of thousands of dollars, was on a repayment plan, the official said. Saleh, 33, was found dead in his Lower East Side apartment on Tuesday, a law enforcement source told CNN. When Saleh's sister rang the doorbell to his condo, the assistant was allegedly dismembering his body with an electrical saw and fled, according to the official. Saleh died of multiple stab wounds, New York City's medical examiner said on Thursday.

(Contd on page 30)

## India's population could peak at 1.6 billion in 2048: Study

Both China and India, the world's two most populous nations, will register population peaks before 2050, following which they will post sharp declines. In 2100, China's population will be 51.1% of its peak population, and India's will be down to 68.1% of its peak, said the analysis.

(News Agencies) New Delhi India's population will peak at 1.6 billion in 2048, after which it will steadily decline to 1.09 billion in 2100, according to an analysis that covered 195 countries in the Global Burden of Diseases 2017 study, findings that hold mixed economic as well as social implications for the country. According to the study, which was published in The Lancet journal, the world's population will peak at 9.73 billion in 2064, after which it will shrink to 8.79 billion in 2100.

(Contd. on page 29)



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