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The Home of
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Vol. 19

Issue 21

Friday 24 July to 30 July 2020

\$1

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

'A Very Dangerous Game'

US Congress set for brawl as unemployment cliff looms

Next week, Millions of Americans who are out of work due to COVID-19 will see a drastic reduction in their unemployment benefits despite this pandemic being far from over.



**Story on
32,33,34,35,36**

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Foreign students will confront more



International students led to the deportation of those among them who enrolled in colleges offering online classes only for the upcoming fall semester. It was a rare retreat for an administration that prides itself in its pertinacity. The percentage of whom are from India, did not fight back themselves. They couldn't. Their colleges did for them, led by Harvard and

The deepening bonds between India and the UK

Further cooperation on health is the most pressing priority. The UK is already India's second biggest research partner, with joint research expected to be worth £400m by next year. This partnership is leading the way



Preparing for a new role is always exciting, but especially so when the assignment is leading the United Kingdom (UK)'s largest overseas diplomatic network. In normal times, the preceding weeks involve a range of meetings. But these are not normal times.

My appointment was announced in February. By March, I had been diverted to lead the UK government's long-term Covid-19 response. I saw first-hand the nature of the challenge we all face. But I also saw how connected, and mutually reliant, we are as a global community. I saw how vital the UK's partnership with India is, whether that was keeping trade routes open for essential medicines and equipment, or Oxford University, AstraZeneca and Serum Institute collaborating on a potential vaccine. The ties between the UK and India run deep. During my preparations, I found a commitment across government to invest further in this relationship — from the prime minister down. This was on display recently at India Global Week, with the UK's most senior ministers underscoring the enormous potential of our partnership. When I presented my credentials to the president, he spoke warmly of close ties.

My arrival may have been delayed and unusual, but the task is clear. The crisis has brought our shared priorities into sharp relief, so I know where my immediate focus lies. Further cooperation on health is the most pressing priority. The UK is already India's second biggest research partner, with joint research expected to be worth £400m by next year. This partnership is leading the way — from Oxford Nanopore's work on rapid analysis of virus genomes to the Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation-backed project on temperature-sensitive distribution mechanisms. The goal: A vaccine developed in the UK, manufactured in India.

At the same time, we all face economic challenges from Covid-19 and share a determination to secure our prosperity. Over the last 10 years, the UK has invested over £22 billion in India helping create more than 422,000 jobs. In turn, India is now the UK's second largest source of foreign investment. We are committed to deepening our trade partnership, now that the UK has left the European Union, and will discuss this in next week's ministerial-level virtual Joint Economic and Trade Committee meeting.

The administration has reportedly been planning to either substantially curtail or suspend a popular programme that allows international students to stay back on their student visa and work for one to three years, known as Optional

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). But they fought as much for their students as for themselves. Full tuition-paying foreign students are critical for their financial well-being. And, of course, they are super-talented — some of them have gone on to found iconic companies such as Tesla and Moderna, the pharmaceutical firm that leads the worldwide race for a vaccine to beat the coronavirus. That's their clout, and, together with strategically opportune assistance from other quarters, it saw them through this most unexpected crisis. But the July 6 directive by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency left students shaken as never before. It caught them at the most vulnerable point in their Thousands of miles from home, they were trying to deal with the deadliest

pandemic the world had faced in 100 years, with all its insecurities and uncertainties. After the original order, international students could think and talk of nothing else. Would they be impacted? How badly? Would they have to choose a course because it would help them stay in the country, in compliance with the directive? These were not choices they had prepared to make, and, mercifully, they won't have to now. But there may be more coming. The administration has reportedly been planning to either substantially curtail or suspend a popular programme that allows international students to stay back on their student visa and work for one to three years, known as Optional Practical Training (OPT). This is considered to be

a stepping stone to an H-1B and, eventually, a Green Card. More than 223,000 graduates remained under this programme in the 2018-19 academic year. The administration plans to package the suspension with a more expansive executive order on immigration, which is due for an announcement any day now, as indicated by Trump several times recently. It will be touted as a temporary measure, meant to ensure Americans have the first shot at any and all jobs that become available as the economy emerges from the crushing impact of Covid-19. It is the same underlying logic used for suspending Green Cards in April and all non-immigrant work visas in June, including H-1B and L-1, the two most popular types with Indians and Indian firms. And all of this may not be temporary.



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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.



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.



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.



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.



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.
- **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.



India to boost Rafale capabilities with HAMMER missiles under emergency order: Report



HAMMER (Highly Agile Modular Mmunition Extended Range) is a medium-range air-to-ground weapon designed and manufactured for the French Air Force and Navy initially.

HAMMER (Highly Agile Modular Mmunition Extended Range) is a medium-range air-to-ground weapon designed and manufactured for the French Air Force and Navy initially.

The HAMMERs would give India the capability to take out any bunkers or hardened shelters in any type of terrain including the mountainous locations such as Eastern Ladakh, the sources said.

When asked to comment, an IAF spokesperson refused to confirm or deny the developments related to the new acquisition.

Five Rafale would be arriving in India from France on July 29 and their advanced weaponry including the long-range SCALP and Meteor missiles would have reached India before their touchdown.

The first five Rafale fighter aircraft would start arriving in India by July 29 flown by pilots of the 17 Golden Arrows commanding officer.

The delivery of the aircraft was earlier supposed to have been done by May end but this was postponed by two months in view of the Covid-19 situation in both India and France.

The trainers will have the tail numbers of the RB series in honour of the Air Force Chief RKS Bhadauria who played a pivotal role in finalising India's largest-ever defence deal for 36 Rafale combat aircraft.

The aircraft on their way from France to India would be refuelled by a French Air Force tanker aircraft in the air around Israel or Greece before they make a stopover in the Middle East. India

had signed a deal worth over Rs 60,000 crore with France in September 2016 for 36 Rafales to meet the emergency requirements of the Indian Air Force.

Air Chief Marshal Bhadauria was the Deputy Chief of Air Staff at that time and headed the Indian negotiation team for the deal which is the biggest ever in monetary terms in India. Armed with the long-range Meteor air to air missiles and SCALP, the Rafales would give India an edge over both Pakistan and China in terms of air strike capability.

Sources said the air to air and the air to ground strike capabilities of the Rafale cannot be matched by both China and Pakistan and the aircraft would give India an edge over both the rivals.

With the Rafales arriving in the country in the middle of a dispute with China, the Indian Air Force is further boosting the capabilities of the combat aircraft by equipping it with the HAMMER missiles from France. The order for the HAMMER standoff missiles with the capability to take out any type of targets at the range of around 60-70 kms is being processed under the emergency powers for acquisition given to the armed forces by the Narendra Modi

government.

"The order for the HAMMER missiles is being processed and the French authorities have agreed to supply them to us at a short notice for our Rafale combat aircraft," government sources told ANI.

In view of the urgent requirement for these missiles by the Air Force, the French authorities would be delivering the systems to India from the existing stock meant for some other customer, they said.

India, Israel developing Covid rapid testing kit for results in less than 30 seconds



The Israeli embassy acknowledged India's help when the pandemic hit that country and said Israel now wants to reciprocate.

that country and now wants to reciprocate. "In the first outbreak of Covid-19 in Israel, India gave Israel special authorization to acquire medicine, masks & protective gear. Now, Israel is proud to reciprocate this significant gesture & grant authorization for purchasing of respirators to its great friend in the east," the embassy said in another tweet. Israel's Covid-19 tally stands at

over 56,000 out of which more than 23,000 have recovered and 433 have died. Israeli ambassador to India, Ron Malka said, "I am proud to lead this Israeli delegation to India. It is at times like this that our friendship is tested, and the State of Israel is happy to lend a helping hand to India in this complicated and difficult time." During a phone conversation in June, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Israeli counterpart

Benjamin Netanyahu "agreed the post-Covid world would create further avenues for mutually beneficial partnerships in many areas", according to a readout from the external affairs ministry. They discussed potential areas in which India and Israel could expand cooperation in the context of the pandemic, including research and development in vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics.

An unprecedented anti-Covid-19 cooperation operation between India and Israel is on the anvil as the two countries are racing to develop rapid testing for the virus that could give results in under 30 seconds, the embassy of Israel in India said Thursday. "In the coming weeks, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Israel Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Health will lead an unprecedented anti-Covid 19 cooperation n between India and Israel," the embassy tweeted. "A special planned flight from Tel Aviv to New Delhi is set to carry a high ranking Ministry of Defence, R&D team which has been working with India's chief scientist K. Vijay Raghavan and DRDO to develop rapid testing for #Covid_19 in under 30 seconds," it said in another tweet. Professor Krishnaswamy Vijay Raghavan

is thr government's principal scientific adviser. The embassy acknowledged India's help to Israel when the pandemic hit

General households to cut and store waste masks, gloves for 72 hours before disposing of: CPCB

In its latest guidelines on disposal of Covid-19 waste, pollution watchdog CPCB has directed that masks and gloves used by everyone, whether infected or not, should be cut and kept in paper bags for minimum 72 hours before disposing of them.

Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) also directed commercial establishments like malls and offices to follow the same procedure with discarded protective personal equipment (PPE) from general public.

"Discarded PPEs from general public at commercial establishments, shopping malls, institutions, offices, etc. should be stored in separate bin for 3 days, thereafter, disposed of as dry general solid waste after cutting/shredding.

"Waste masks and gloves in general households should be kept in paper bag

for a minimum of 72 hours prior to disposal of the same as dry general solid waste after cutting the same to prevent reuse," the CPCB said.

This is the fourth time the CPCB has issued guidelines on management of bio-medical waste generated from coronavirus. It, however, said that leftover food and empty water bottles handled by infected patients should not be collected along with bio-medical waste but with other general solid waste.

"Leftover food, empty juice bottles or tetra packs, empty water bottles, packaging material, and any other items, generated or handled by Covid-19 patient should be collected along with other general solid waste in bags securely tied for handing over to waste collectors. "Yellow coloured bag should not be used for general solid waste,"

it said. Yellow bags are dedicated for bio-medical waste from Covid-19, as per the guidelines issued time and again. The CPCB also recommended use of bio-degradable or non-disposable cutlery to minimize waste generation. "In order to minimize waste generation, as far as possible, non-disposable items must be used for serving food, which are to be handle with appropriate precautions and cleaned and disinfected as per hospital guidelines. "If use of disposable items is inevitable, use bio-degradable cutlery. The wet and dry solid waste bags to be tied securely in leak-proof bags, sprayed with sodium hypochlorite solution and hand over to authorized waste collector. Yellow coloured bags should not be used for collecting general solid waste. Compostable bags should be used for collecting wet-waste," it said.



Ashok Gehlot asks for testing 'horse trading' audio clips in US, escalates attack on BJP minister

Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot has thrown a challenge to get the audio clips, purportedly carrying evidence of Union minister Gajendra Shekhawat's involvement in alleged attempts to dislodge Rajasthan government, tested in a forensic lab in the United States to prove its veracity. Gehlot also said that those, whose voices are alleged to be on the audio clips, should get their voice tested to clear their names in the MLA

horse-trading case being investigated by the state police. "If they think they don't trust the Rajasthan government, then they can send the audio-tapes to the FSL agency in the US for a voice test. They should step forward and undergo a voice test," Gehlot was quoted as saying by news agency ANI.

In an indirect reference to Shekhawat, Gehlot added that Union ministers, MLAs or MPs give speeches and

therefore their voice is easily recognizable. Shekhawat, a senior BJP leader from Rajasthan, has denied his involvement in the case and rejected claims that one of the voices on the three audio clips being probed by the police is his. Gehlot dismissed Shekhawat's defence and said that the truth will win in the end.

"Still, the first reaction always is 'it wasn't my voice'. They are also threatening people. Nothing is going to work. Satyamev Jayate," the news agency quoted him as saying. Gehlot has

upped the ante against Shekhawat and demanded that he subjects himself to the investigation in the case of alleged horse trading of MLAs aimed to overthrow his government. He and his party has accused BJP leaders of hatching the alleged plot in connivance with Congress rebels led by Sachin Pilot, the former deputy chief minister and head of the party's state unit. Gehlot even wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi last Sunday naming Shekhawat as one of the BJP leaders allegedly involved in the act. He also referred to Sachin Pilot and

MLAs supporting him as "over ambitious leaders" in his own party, who were purportedly hand in glove with the BJP to bring down his government. Sachin Pilot has denied involvement with the BJP and rejected conjectures that he may join the party soon.

The BJP leaders in Rajasthan have, however, rejected Gehlot's accusations and said his government was in trouble due to internal differences with his own party and alleged failure in governance. Gehlot's government is also locked in a legal battle with Sachin Pilot and his

followers over a disqualification notice served to 19 party rebels by the assembly speaker. The Rajasthan High Court is expected to announce its verdict on a petition filed by Pilot, challenging the disqualification notices. Congress has also petitioned the Supreme Court in the same case asking it to prevent any interference in the proceedings before the speaker takes a decision on the matter. The SC, however, refused to stop the high court from announcing its verdict in the case.

India's second national-level plasma bank opened in Tamil Nadu

The Tamil Nadu health minister also said that the state has conducted 2 million tests for Covid-19 so far and has the highest number in terms of testing compared to other states.

After national capital, India's second national-level plasma bank was opened in Tamil Nadu at a cost of Rs 2.34 crore, C Vijaybhaskar, health minister, Tamil Nadu said here on Thursday.

"We were earlier conducting the plasma method on a trial basis.

Four people in Madurai successfully underwent the process in the early stages and a few more banks will be set up in nearby districts. We now have the approval of the Indian Council of Medical Research and have opened the second plasma bank at the national level with a

total budget of Rs 2.34 crore," said Vijaybhaskar. He added, "After a Covid-19 patient is discharged, the patient has to wait for 14 days before they can donate their plasma. Plasma will be separated from the blood, which can be stored and used for up to one year."

Vijaybhaskar also mentioned that a committee was constituted to discuss the death count and it was recommended that 444 deaths be added to the Covid-19 deaths toll in the state. "We have conducted 2 million tests so far and have the highest number in terms of testing



compared to other states," reported a total of 186,492 Covid-19 cases, including 51,765 active cases, 131,583 recoveries and 3,144 deaths.

EC defers bypolls for one LS, 7 assembly seats due to 'extraordinary circumstances'

The Election Commission has deferred by-elections for one Lok Sabha and seven assembly seats due to "some extraordinary circumstances peculiar to these constituencies" and the poll panel will meet on Friday to discuss scheduling of these bypolls. The states where the bypolls have been deferred are --Valmiki Nagar Lok Sabha seat in Bihar, two assembly seats each in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, and one each in Assam, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala. Most of these seats fell vacant due to the death of sitting members. A senior EC official said the Covid-19 pandemic and the flood situation were two reasons behind the decision. As per the electoral law, EC has to hold bye-elections within 180 days (six months) of a seat falling vacant, another official pointed out. The six-month deadline to hold by-elections in these eight seats was ending on different dates in July, August and September respectively.

When the EC assessed the situation, it found that it is difficult to adhere to the six-month deadline in these seats, and approached the Union law ministry to

defer the polls, the official said. Under the Representation of the People Act, 1951, in certain cases, the EC, in consultation with the Central government (the Union law ministry), certifies that it is difficult to hold the by-election within the six-month period. Using this provision, the poll panel issued a certificate on July 22 to defer the elections in these eight seats. In a statement, the Commission said on Thursday that "this matter of timing etc of by-elections is also slotted for discussion in the Election Commission meeting to be held tomorrow" (Friday). The statement said the total number of by-elections due is 56 assembly constituencies and one Lok Sabha seat (including the eight deferred). However, a letter written by one of its senior officers to the law ministry regarding the eight bypolls is "causing some confusion", the EC said and clarified that it was only "in respect of eight constituencies regarding which a reference to Ministry of Law and Justice was made ... due to some extraordinary circumstances peculiar to these constituencies."

Kerala gold smuggling case

After outrage, transfer of customs officials deferred for now

Following the outrage over the transfer of key customs officials who are investigating the Kerala gold smuggling case, the order was withdrawn on Thursday. The Union Home Ministry has expressed serious reservations over the issue saying such a controversy should have been avoided when the investigation was continuing on the right track, a senior official familiar with the development said. The sudden transfer order of six superintendents and two inspectors attached with the Kochi unit of the Customs who are part of the ongoing investigation was issued by Mohammad Yousaf, Commissioner of Customs, late on Wednesday. After the issue triggered a controversy, the Customs department made it clear that it was a routine transfer and it was deferred for the time being. "There are enough pressures as the investigation is progressing. The transfer drama can be part of it. It seems many who are part of the syndicate are rattled," said a

senior official, who did not want to be identified. He said the multi-agency probe is moving in the right direction. The gold smuggling case came to light on July 5, when P S Sarith, a former employee of the UAE consulate in the state capital, was arrested when he came to receive a consignment in the name of an official of the consulate. Later, 30 kg gold was retrieved from the consignment. Five days later, Swapna Suresh, a senior IT official and her friend Sandip Nair were arrested from their hideout in Bengaluru.

The Enforcement Directorate has formally arrested three key accused, Sarith, Suresh and K T Ramees, another accomplice. The ED had registered a case against them under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act and the NIA court had earlier allowed it to question the accused. Opposition Congress and BJP said since the transfers were deferred they will not comment on the issue.

Inauspicious time for laying Ram temple foundation stone: Swaroopanand Saraswati



Swaroopanand Saraswati the Shankaracharya of Jyotishpeeth has expressed his unhappiness at the timing of laying the foundation stone of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and called it inauspicious. "We don't want any position or to be a trustee of the Ram Temple. We only want that the temple should be built properly and the foundation stone should be laid at the right time, but this is an 'ashubh ghadi' (inauspicious time)," ANI quoted him as saying Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to lay the foundation stone of the Ram temple in Ayodhya on August 5 after a request by the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirtha Kshetra. In February, Swaroopanand Saraswati had expressed unhappiness with the composition of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra trust constituted by the Centre to oversee construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. He particularly objected to the inclusion of Swami Vasudevanand Saraswati in the trust as a Shankaracharya, despite different courts having ruled against his use of the title. Swaroopanand had also said that as a Shankaracharya, he should have been made the head of the trust. The groundbreaking ceremony in Ayodhya is scheduled to take place amid a surge in Covid-19 cases in Uttar Pradesh. To cut down the risk of infection, the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirtha Kshetra has decided that there will not be more than 200 people, including 150 invitees at the foundation stone laying ceremony to ensure that social distancing can be properly maintained. Ahead of the groundbreaking ceremony, PM Modi is scheduled to offer prayers to Lord Ram at the temple and Lord Hanuman at Hanuman Garhi Temple in Ayodhya.

End of Covid-19 to begin with start of Ram Temple's construction: BJP's Rameshwar Sharma

Earlier on Wednesday, Treasurer of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirtha Kshetra Trust Swami Govind Dev Giri had said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone of Ram Temple on August 5.

Madhya Pradesh Assembly Protem Speaker Rameshwar Sharma said that the end of the coronavirus pandemic will begin with the start of the construction work for Ram Temple in Ayodhya. The 'Bhoomipujan' for Ram Temple is scheduled to be held on August 5. "He (Lord Ram) had reincarnated for the welfare of mankind and to kill demons at that time. As soon as the construction of Ram Temple begins the destruction of the Covid pandemic will begin too," Sharma told reporters here on



Wednesday. "Not only India but the entire world is suffering due to coronavirus. We are not only maintaining social distancing but also remembering our holy figures. The Supreme Court has ordered that Ram Temple will be built," he further said. Earlier on Wednesday, Treasurer of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Tirtha Kshetra Trust Swami Govind Dev Giri had said that

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone of Ram Temple

on August 5. He said that social distancing norms will be ensured at the program, with not more than 200 people attending the ceremony. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone of Ram Temple on August 5. To ensure social distancing at the programme, we have decided that there will not be more than 200 people, including 150 invitees (at the event),"

Giri told ANI. "The Prime Minister will visit Hanuman Garhi, Ram Lalla Temple, plant a tree and later do the 'bhoomi puja'," he said. With the spike of 37,724 new cases, India's Covid-19 count stood at 11,92,915 on Wednesday. The Union Health Ministry said that the toll has gone up to 28,732 with 648 deaths in the last 24 hours. The Health Ministry also stated that India

registered the highest ever 28,472 recoveries in a single day, taking the number of patients who have recovered to 7,53,050. This has strongly boosted the recovery rate among Covid-19 patients to 63.13 percent, it added. The total number of cases include 4,11,133 active cases, 7,53,050 cured/discharged/migrated, and 28,732 deaths, the Health Ministry informed.

Rahul Gandhi says PM failed to come with a vision to deal with China

He said that as an opposition leader, it is his responsibility to question the prime minister, who in turn has to give a vision. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has failed to come up with a vision to deal with China even as he advocated a changed approach to resolve the border standoff. He said that as an opposition leader, it is his responsibility to question the prime minister, who in turn has to give a vision. "And I know that the prime minister is an opponent. My responsibility is to question him. My responsibility is to ask questions and to put pressure on him so he does his work.

His responsibility is to give the vision. It's not there," Gandhi said in a video message issued on Thursday.

"I can tell you, guaranteed, it's not there and that's why China's is in there today," he contended. The short video is the third in a series on the India-China border face-off. Through the brief videos, Gandhi wants to share his thoughts on national issues. In the first video issued on Friday, he said India's "troubled economy, foreign policy and neighbourhood" had prompted China to take an aggressive stand against the country. In the second video titled "China's Strategic Game Plan",

Gandhi talked about how the Chinese had triggered the border issue to pressure Modi. In one of the sharpest attacks on Modi over the India-China border standoff, he said the Chinese are attacking his image as "they understand that for him to survive as a politician, he has to protect the idea of 'Chhapan Inch' (56-inch)". Gandhi added that "if [Modi] allowed the Chinese to understand that they can manipulate him because of his image, the prime minister will no longer be worth anything for India". In the third video titled 'How should India respond to China?', Gandhi listed different measures to deal with the Chinese.

Ahead of Raksha Bandhan festival, demand for Chinese rakhis fall

Ahead of the Raksha Bandhan festival, the demand for Chinese rakhis have fallen this year, according to shopkeepers from several parts of the country. People are refusing to buy Chinese rakhis due to tensions between India and China. Women are preferring India-made rakhis to Chinese rakhis. The locals also intend to boost the Indian economy by buying local rakhis. In Himachal Pradesh's Shimla, Aanchal, a customer, said, "We always used to get Chinese rakhis. This year I am buying India-made rakhi. Why should

we boost the economy of a country that is a threat to us? I would not tie a rakhi to my brothers which are made in China, the country that attacks our soldier brothers." "We are not going to buy any Chinese products. This is beneficial for the local artisans as well. I would appeal to all to buy India made rakhis only," she added. The local traders are also not buying or selling Chinese rakhis for Rakshabandhan. The traders said that India-made rakhis are also increasing employment among locals. "Customers are refusing to

buy Chinese rakhis. Their first question is whether the rakhi is Chinese or not. Local handmade rakhis are selling. This would also affect the Chinese market, and benefit the locals. The money used to go abroad earlier, now it stays within the country," said Mahesh Kumar, shopkeeper. Similarly, customers in Uttar Pradesh's Moradabad have said that they will buy India-made rakhis only. "We have to courier rakhis so we are here. We will buy Indian rakhis only. We are checking if the rakhi is Indian or not. We won't buy Chinese



rakhis at any cost. Be Indian buy Indian," said Sanjana, a customer. "There is a demand for India-made rakhis only. No one bought Chinese rakhi. We have got rakhis from Jaipur and Kolkata. Less people are stepping out due to Covid-19," said Ajay, shopkeeper.

Putin extends condolences to PM Modi over loss of lives in floods in various parts of India

“Russia shares the grief of those who lost their loved ones to the rampant elements, and hopes for a speedy recovery of all those injured,” Putin said in the message.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday (local time) extended condolences to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the loss of lives due to floods in various parts of India. “Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his deepest condolences to President of India Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi over the tragic consequences of the floods in sev-

eral states of the country,” the Russian President’s office said in a statement. “Russia shares the grief of those who lost their loved ones to the rampant elements, and hopes for a speedy recovery of all those injured,” Putin said in the message. As per the India Meteorological Department (IMD) reports, northeastern states will continue to experience heavy downpour while parts of north India

will experience heavy to moderate showers in isolated locations. The flood situation in Assam again deteriorated on Wednesday as two more persons died in Barpeta and districts, taking the death toll to 89. Around 26.32 lakh people in 26 of the state’s 33 districts have been affected by the floods, as per the state’s disaster management authority. Several parts of Bihar have been

submerged in floodwaters with Director-General of NDRF Satya Pradhan had said that a total of 19 teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) are being deployed in the state to deal with the floods situation. Several people have been forced to set up camps along the national highway (NH-27) after their homes got partially submerged in floodwaters in Muzaffarpur’s Kanti area of the state.

Security agencies red-flag Chinese fronts in education, not just power and telecom

In a high-level meeting attended by national security planners and a select group of secretary-level officials, much of the discussion revolved around a presentation made by security agencies that put the spotlight on two core areas: telecom and higher education.

An exercise to minimise the role of power and telecom companies believed to be linked to the Chinese government could be expanded to cover other critical sectors such as higher education as well, people familiar with the development said after a July 15 review of the penetration of such companies and institutions in the Indian economy.

The high-level meeting attended by national security planners and a select group of secretary-level officials comes against the backdrop of the Chinese army’s

aggressive moves along the Line of Actual Control that led to a stand-off from May this year. The two sides earlier this month started disengaging at the face-off points in eastern Ladakh after several rounds of talks but Beijing has been slow to pull back its troops.

Last week’s exercise was aimed at coming up with a comprehensive assessment of the footprint of Chinese companies and institutions that could be a proxy for the Chinese government or have close ties to the ruling communist party. “The

initiative was driven by the top political leadership,” a government official said.

Much of the discussion at the meeting revolved around a presentation made by security agencies that put the spotlight on two core areas; telecom and higher education. Security officials who briefed the top civil servants spoke about several instances of universities and colleges tying up with Chinese institutes through Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) without the requisite approvals.

A classic example cited by the



security establishment was the Chinese-government funded Confucius Institutes to promote Han Chinese language and culture - typically set up in association with a local partner institution.

In the telecom sector, security agencies pointed to the telecom department’s instructions to state-run phone company Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited, BSNL, to amend its tender to exclude Chinese equipment makers from a large 4G upgrade project.

But private phone companies often prefer Chinese equipment because they are cheaper. There have also been allegations that large tenders are tailored to suit Chinese companies. Industry body COAI had last month spoken against restrictions on private companies, insisting that geopolitical issues should be kept separate from corporate decisions.

The education and telecom ministries have been asked to review the Chinese involvement in the two sectors in light of the presentation made by the security agencies and chart the next steps for the sector.

The rule that requires approvals from the education ministry, home ministry and the external affairs ministry before signing pacts with Chinese institutions

or universities isn’t new. On 1 October last year, the higher education regulator University Grants Commission told universities about the need for approvals for its courses. But it is unclear if the government followed up to ensure compliance.

That exercise is expected to start soon.

Beijing started setting up Confucius Institutes across the world in 2004 to promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries. But as China started rolling out the institutes across the world, the Chinese government-funded outposts also started increasingly coming under the scanner of agencies in host countries. The initial concerns were only about academic freedom, institutional autonomy and reported instances of censorship. But some institutes started to shut after lawmakers expressed concerns that these served as a platform for Chinese intelligence and political agenda. Some more, after the law prohibited the defence department from funding Chinese language programmes at institutes that host Confucius Institutes. These institutes have run into trouble in other countries as well including the UK, Canada, France, Australia and Sweden.

15-year-old Uttarakhand girl allegedly raped in Haridwar hotel, relative and three others booked

A 15-year-old girl was allegedly raped in a hotel in Haridwar by a youth who befriended her at a wedding, the police said. The incident took place on Monday, but came to light on Wednesday when a case was registered. The youth, along with three others including one of her relatives who took her to the hotel have been booked, the police said. Ac-



According to the police, the girl is a student of Class 9 in a city-based school and her father is a businessman. Yogesh Dev, police inspector who is among the investigators, said, “On Wednesday, the girl’s father lodged a complaint against four men accused of conspiring and raping her in the hotel. Based on the complaint, a case has been registered in which one of them has been booked for raping her while three oth-

ers, including her distant relative, has been booked for conspiring in the crime.”

“So far in the initial probe, it has been found that on Monday, her distant relative asked the girl to join him in a car ride. Trusting him, she agreed after which he took her to the hotel where the rape occurred and two more people joined them,” he said.

The four took her to a room in the hotel which was already booked. There, one of the four raped her. However, when she cried, they all became nervous and then dropped her near her house and fled.

“After reaching home, she didn’t tell anything to her family members. However, seeing her tense, her family members asked the girl the reason for it after which she finally narrated her ordeal. A complaint was then lodged today,” said Dev.

Overcome the malaise of defection

Create a new framework to govern actions of legislators, election of speaker, role of governor



This is not about Rajasthan (full disclosure; I am arguing for the speaker in the high court) nor Madhya Pradesh or Karnataka, though paradigms can be extrapolated from these. This is state- neutral, party-neutral, and politics-neutral. It is about an institutional malaise called defection and party-hopping. It is about every major stakeholder — governor, speaker, defecting Members of Parliament (MPs)/Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs), ruling party defenders and Opposition opportunists — having mud on their face. It is about the need to root out this “constitutional sin” by root surgery.

The body politic needs to decide whether acting like Brutus or changing parties midstream for the loaves and fishes of office is sinful. Innumerable Supreme Court (SC) judgments say it is, as do the elaborate parliamentary debates preceding the anti-defection law enacted in 1985. But the “true” Indian politician has circumvented the best-drafted laws through inimitable and unsurpassable jugaad. Here is how.

First, if the ruling party wants to prolong itself in office with support from other parties’ legislators acting against their own parties, individual pliant speakers are available to never decide disqualification petitions against them for years. The SC’s lament in the Manipur case (2020) is an example. Worse was Tamil Nadu, which footballed the issue between the high court and a non-deciding speaker for years, while a minority government continued. The SC decided the issue by not deciding in time. The second jugaad is the

engineered resignations of legislators in a ruling dispensation by a desperate Opposition promising them lucrative ministerships if they ensure that the Opposition comes to power. It helps that these “toppling” agents are entitled to at least six months of ministerial portfolios in the new government, even if they fail to get re-elected.

Third, there is always the office of governor readily available for misuse. The governor seems to

be at his master’s bidding, wrongly ready to interfere by giving unsustainable directions to Speakers to have floor tests within 48/72 hours, only to assist the defectors to topple the government and preclude the speaker from discharging his 10th Schedule duties.

Fourth, clear defectors, even after being subjected to ongoing disqualification hearings before the speaker, are advised by lawyers to file no-confidence motions against the speaker

under a misconception of law that the SC, in the Nabam Rebia case, rendered a speaker lame-duck and paralysed him the moment a no-confidence was filed against him. Rebia only cautioned against speakers already facing prior and serious pending no-confidence motions from deciding disqualification issues against their accusers. Otherwise, every pending and prior disqualification proceeding could be rendered infructuous

by the simple expedient of defectors filing subsequent no-confidence motions against the speaker, rendering the 10th Schedule a dead letter.

While individual speakers can certainly be aberrant, generalisations are dangerous. It is forgotten that the speaker is the sole persona designata who can decide disqualification petitions under the 10th Schedule. His job is non-transferable and non-delegable.

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The power gap with China

Economic growth is key to foreign policy. Fix it

In a conversation on Monday, external affairs minister S Jaishankar laid out the big picture about how the world has changed and how India sees the world, four decades after he first entered South Block as a junior diplomat. He made a series of significant points. The old bipolar politics of the Cold War between the United States (US) and Soviet Union, with elements of a multipolar system, has given way to a multipolar system with elements of bipolarity between the US and China. The world is more globalised, but it is also, now, witnessing an era of protectionism. Non-alignment was a strategy adopted at a particular time, and while India would not be a part of any alliance system, it could not stay out on critical global issues and once it was in the game, it had to play the game.

These interventions give a



glimpse into the Indian worldview. But Mr Jaishankar’s most important point was about the power differential between India and China. He suggested that while the two countries had similar economic trajectories and growth rates in 1988, when Rajiv Gandhi made his historic visit to Beijing, China has leapfrogged since then — by focusing on economic growth

and embracing the world and opportunities therein. India, by contrast, grew too, but as Mr Jaishankar acknowledged, it wasn’t able to industrialise to the extent it should have; manufacturing remained a weak spot; embrace of the world was somewhat limited; and free trade agreements did not yield the dividends India had hoped for. This power differential

— and India’s recognition of the power differential — is significant. It shows a realistic appraisal of the challenge at hand, and underlines what India has to do to compete more effectively. For India, the best foreign policy is a high growth rate. Unless India is able to get its economy right — and what is visible is a slump — its global ambitions will never be met. It will continue to pale in front of China. It will find managing the neighbourhood more difficult. It will become less attractive to its western partners and global businesses. It will not be able to modernise its military. It will not be able to provide global common goods which earns both soft and hard power. And it will be a story of opportunities lost. The minister’s assessment is a plea to get the economic story right, for foreign policy to be effective in a new world.

Covid crisis underlines false urban-rural binary, neglect of urban areas

Trump right to shut Chinese consulate in Houston-it was a massive spying operation



It is more vital today to talk about urban policy than ever before since the COVID-19 pandemic is most active in cities. The congestion that plagues large cities has turned out to be their worst enemy during this crisis.

This congestion is most evident in slums in large cities and poses a grave health and environmental challenge. The risk of contagious diseases is more potent in these areas as residents also suffer from a lack of basic services such as safe drinking water and sanitation. To ask them to navigate congestion and practise social distancing seems most ironic. It is no surprise then that many slums in Mumbai and Delhi have become COVID-19 containment zones. Unfortunately, the Swachh Bharat Mission has disregarded the gravity of the sanitation and hygiene crisis in cities — the Centre's allocation for the rural component of the Mission is about seven times more than for urban areas.

The health systems in megacities like Delhi and Mumbai are also overburdened and face a shortage of hospital staff and beds. Class I cities (more than a lakh population) have 1.4 beds per 1,000 people. Delhi has 1.5 beds per 1,000 people whereas Mumbai has one bed per 1,000 people. However, the urban support under the National Health Mission is just three per cent of the total allocation, while 97 per cent of the funds are set aside for rural areas. The growth of large cities can be attributed to their role as economic engines in a rapidly globalising world. Urban development programmes such as the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (2005-2014) allocated the bulk of funds to large cities (70 per cent to large cities and 30 per cent to smaller towns). Current infrastructure development schemes, including the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) and the Smart Cities Mission, focus on Class I cities. Both these schemes focus on development projects and provide funds for the more developed cities that already have relatively better

infrastructure and overlook the nearly seven crore people who live in smaller towns (population between 20,000 and one lakh). These are towns that lag behind in services and infrastructure as compared to the big cities.

The return of migrant workers from large cities to smaller towns has signalled the significance of the latter. These towns are now forced to provide not just healthcare but also some form of livelihood to those arriving from the big cities. This is bound to stretch their capacities. The low number of COVID-19 tests conducted in these towns reveals a lack of capacity, which, in turn, distorts the scale of the current crisis. While the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) provides employment opportunities to rural households, there is no equivalent scheme for the poor in urban areas.

The state of our cities has been a matter of concern for decades. Be it air quality and unsafe drinking water, or now, the virus, the precarious nature of urban living has never been more pronounced. In contrast to the imagination of the city as a hub of social and economic activity, it is now perceived as the centre of disease and distress. The pandemic has forced us to reflect on the unequal and unplanned development of urban settlements and the absence of infrastructure to provide for the teeming millions. Oversimplified notions of the rural-urban binary have influenced policy formulation and created huge disparities in the allocation of public resources. The challenges of urban poverty and congestion cry for more attention, more government support. Further neglect will lead to grave health and environmental challenges.

Small towns that are urban in nature but rural in character are the most neglected in the current policy environment. They are forced to exist with poorer services and policy neglect while having to meet the demands of a large population. They are most prone to plunge into distress, as the current crisis has revealed.

This week smoke billowed from the courtyard of the Chinese consulate in Houston as employees burned sensitive documents. Typically, consulates carry out services such as issuing visas and engaging in cultural exchanges. But the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) outpost in Houston was far from a typical consulate. Instead, the consulate served as a front for the CCP and a central node in the massive spying operation that China uses to undermine the United States. This network carries out all sorts of espionage — political, defensive, industrial, academic, and commercial — to try to gain a strategic edge over the U.S. by cheating and stealing.

America's adversaries, including China and Russia, use their consulates to conduct all sorts of nefarious activities. For the CCP, the Houston consulate served as a base of operations to exploit commercial joint ventures for state purposes and to gain access to advanced technology, proprietary information, and intellectual property in order to advance Beijing's efforts to undermine U.S. economic and national security. Critically, the Houston consulate covered China's activities in seven states, including my home state of Florida. The Chinese diplomats had been involved in stealing scientific research, as well as facilitating travel to China using falsified paperwork. The consulate also had used CCP-controlled community groups to cultivate Texas elites. And considering this occurred in Houston, the malign Chinese activity likely involved theft and

espionage connected to the U.S. energy and health care sectors.

The Trump administration's decision to shut the consulate down is exactly right and sends a strong message to China, Russia and other adversaries that this illegal espionage will no longer be tolerated.

This isn't the first time the Trump administration has had to deal with this sort of behavior. Just last December, it was forced to expel two Chinese Embassy officials on suspicions of espionage, after they were caught attempting to access a sensitive military installation in Virginia.

We cannot simply ignore the prolific increase of Chinese espionage and political influence operations, especially on American soil. Sometimes a hammer is required to send a message. As the consular staff members pack their bags, we must also remember that the Houston consulate was a cog in a much larger system of exploitation.

The CCP is seemingly unable to conduct international relations without spying, especially on the people the party claims as its own, such as Chinese-Americans — wherever they are and in every facet of their lives. Chinese espionage and data collection are evident all throughout their diplomatic corps — from excessive visa application requirements on Chinese Americans, to exerting control over Chinese community organizations, to pushing co-opted Chinese students toward sensitive research areas.

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 The South Asian
INSIDER
 Voice of South Asian Community

ISSN No. 1554 06X

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A Publication of Media Partners Capital, Inc.

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Let's talk about Kanye West's damaging and inaccurate claims about Harriet Tubman

By Richard Reddick

Kanye West's campaign rally in South Carolina on Sunday drew our attention with his appalling misinterpretation of Harriet Tubman's legacy when he said Tubman "never actually freed the slaves." Although his comments received much backlash, followed by an intense tweetstorm about his personal life and family, it was too easy for people to dismiss the comments as just a trivial viral sensation.

But it's imperative that we pause and think about how his commentary on Black History gives us a great deal to process about celebrity culture and social media, especially during a time of heightened awareness to systemic racism.

Some are probably wondering, "Why should we listen to Kanye to begin with?" The short answer is that it's less about "why we should" and more about "who will listen." Most have some familiarity with West's creative work. As a talented producer, musician and designer, he has a social media platform that rivals other entertainers and world leaders, so he naturally draws eyes and ears. It is not inconceivable to think that people, who are unaware of African American history and seeking answers, may take what West said as a fact or, at the very least, that his

rhetoric planted a seed of doubt about Tubman's legacy.

In the past, West has recounted his battle with bipolar disorder, so many of us felt we were witnessing a mental health crisis, with someone who needed the intervention and support of loved ones.

It seems that the right reaction was the one captured on social media, when Toni Fulton, who attended and filmed the rally said, "Yo, we leavin' right now," in response to West's false claim about Tubman.

Maybe as a viewing public, we too should leave right now and hope that West gets the support he needs.

On Wednesday, Kim Kardashian West issued a statement on Instagram about her husband. She wrote, "As many of you know, Kanye has bi-polar disorder. Anyone who has this or has a loved one in their life who does, knows how incredibly complicated and painful it is to understand. ... Those who are close with Kanye know his heart and understand his words sometimes do not align with his intentions." She didn't mention any of his comments specifically.

While I and many others hope that West gets the help he needs during this time, it's important that we don't overlook his damaging and inaccurate claims about

Harriet Tubman. His words have power during a time when many people are trying to learn more about Black history while the discussion of systemic racism is at the forefront of international discussion. Accuracy, truth, and humility will bring us all to a common understanding of Tubman's -- and other historical contributors -- work toward social justice and racial equality.

West's mash up of celebrity culture, politics and popular music seems far afield from the zeitgeist 30 years ago. In 1990, hip-hop pioneers Boogie Down Productions released the album *Edutainment*. The group posited that hip-hop can merge education and entertainment to inform listeners of issues impacting the Black community -- paralleling the hip-hop group Public Enemy's Chuck D, who said, "Rap music is the invisible TV station that Black America never had." Implicit in these ideas and comments are the responsibilities inherent in that role.

I would categorize the responsibilities of the socially and politically engaged edutainer/artist/celebrity into three categories: amplification, clarification and magnification. Amplification of the voices of knowledge producers -- academics, scholars, journalists and

artists -- who do not have access to the same platform as celebrities. Clarification works in concert with humility -- the ability to acknowledge new information and note when you're wrong (and bring voices with knowledge to prominence). Magnification is bringing attention to issues overlooked by media, such as the focus on Breonna Taylor's death at the hands of police in Louisville, Kentucky.

In many ways social media has significantly bridged the gap between celebrities and the public; information can be shared in an instant with millions of followers. However, no Instagram post or Twitter thread can substitute for the in-depth analysis and research that comes from engaging with texts and other media -- especially considering the limited average attention span of human beings.

A more hopeful view would be that celebrities leverage social media as a starting point for followers to learn more about a topic. Indeed, social media can elevate traditionally marginalized scholarly voices. For example, movements like #CiteASista are providing ways to ensure that the scholarly contributions of Black women are not on the periphery but are instead centered. **(Contd on page 32)**

India's "Vaccine Games" On Covid-19 Come At Great Risk

Our penchant for somehow "topping the class" is deeply embedded in our cultural psyche. Now, we want to be the first in the world to develop and produce a Covid-19 vaccine, even though many other potential vaccines in the fray are far ahead on the developmental trajectory. One way to win this race is to just declare that we will get there first - and even announce a deadline for the exact date on which this will happen. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) - the nodal public agency that leads the official fight against the Covid-19 pandemic - did just that in its letter of July 2, 2020. It stated that "it is envisaged to launch the vaccine for public health use latest by the 15th August 2020 after completion of all clinical trials"! The reference was to Covaxin, a vaccine being developed by Bharat Biotech, a company in Hyderabad, in collaboration with ICMR. The unprecedented fiat that such a short deadline must be met, and the tone of the letter, was met with huge backlash. The main issue is that the numbers relating to the timeline just do not add up, apart from numerous other problems.

The clinical trial of a vaccine, involving humans, begins after a pre-clinical phase. In this phase, the vaccine is

tested on animals and human trials are proposed only if the results look promising.

Phase I of human trials involve only a few candidates, a few tens. The objective is to test safety and dosage levels. Because this is the very first injection of the vaccine into humans, it is often started with just a few individuals in the first few days, who are observed 24X7 for any adverse reactions and tested for their immune system response. This phase can last up to a few months.

Phase II expands the trials to a larger group of people, ranging up to several hundreds. The groups are diverse - for instance, in terms of age and gender - so that different responses can be captured. The aim here is also to assess safety, and the kind and level of antibodies that get generated. Only if the right type of antibodies develop and persist in significant concentrations, does the trial proceed to Phase III.

Phase III is to check if the vaccine is really effective in very large groups of people (efficacy), as large as tens of thousands. The objective is to assess the prevalence, or lack of, the disease in a "real life" scenario. Placebo testing also happens in this phase. This trial can take years because it is

across a large group of people.

Finally, time is also taken for manufacturing large numbers of doses for public consumption.

As of today, there are around 135 vaccines in the pre-clinical stage, and around 30 in human trials.

Where does Covaxin stand in this whole scenario? It has been approved for Phase I and II trials; volunteer recruitment was to end on July 7 but even now safety screenings of volunteers - to check for existing infections, health checks - are being conducted.

Many other vaccines are already in Phases I, II and even III. Oxford COVID-19 vaccine began Phase III trials on July 1, 2020 and exciting results are expected anyday; Moderna vaccine development group published their interim results from Phase I trials this week. For Covaxin, even the data from the pre-clinical phase, which apparently lasted around 50 days, is not available in the public domain - something which is unacceptable for a scientific endeavour. The period seems to be too short by comparison with other vaccines under trial. Phase I is proposed to last for 28 days and involve 375 subjects; phase II for about 14 months involving 750 volunteers. The submissions from Bharat Biotech

themselves state a total period of 15 months for these two phases. So even these two phases will not be completed till August 15, 2020.

ICMR issued a "clarification" that the letter of July 2 was only "meant to cut unnecessary red tape, without bypassing any necessary process"; The Health Ministry too "clarified" that trials would be done "without compromising on safety and security concerns". These clarifications are peculiar "official-speak" in that they do not actually clarify the main contention - of the deadline - but instead dwell on generic assurances which are not compatible with the announced date for public use. In a somewhat aggressive swipe, the ICMR statement also said, "The best of India's medical professionals and research scientists should not be second guessed for their professionalism or adherence to the highest scientific rigour." This is a clever deflection as no one attacked medical or research staff but the ICMR leadership for the declared deadline. The statement issued by the Indian Academy of Sciences, which also has medical and research professionals, said clearly that the "announced timeline was unreasonable and without precedent". **(Contd on page 32)**

Stop building hydropower projects in the Northeast

They don't fill any gap; are financially unviable; lead to displacement; there's a high risk of geological mishaps



The Northeast in general, and Arunachal Pradesh in particular, is considered to have immense hydropower potential. Yet, what is little known is that these projects are financially unviable and are likely to burden India's financial institutions with non-performing assets, while adversely affecting the health of state electricity distribution companies.

First, thanks to sustained investments, increased efficiency and attractive pricing in the solar and wind energy sector, and recently-commissioned power assets, there is a supply glut in the energy market. The market for energy is saturated and there is a negligible shortage in peak demand (which was only 0.7% in the last 18 months). This is likely to continue in the future,

well beyond the current decade.

Over the years, hydropower has been justified as being necessary to provide power at night, when demand peaks and solar energy is absent. This rationale is no longer applicable for new projects, as hydropower loses ground to hybrid solutions — a mix of solar and spare thermal capacity, for instance — that offer round-the-clock power and are priced at low, competitive rates. Power storage — specifically battery technology — is rapidly evolving. A report by McKinsey & Company, *The New Rules of Competition in Energy Storage*, predicts: "The total cost of energy-storage systems should fall 50 to 70% by 2025 as a result of design advances, economies of scale, and streamlined processes".

Second, the proposed hydropower projects in the Northeast are financially unviable and it is likely that most of them will end up as stranded assets. An analysis of the Etalin Hydropower (3,097 Megawatts) project shows cumulative cash flow during the loan life-cycle of 23 years to be negative, despite a highly favourable levelled tariff of Rs 4.32 per unit. At prices being offered in auctions for round-the-clock power supply today (prices are likely to drop further in future), the project will be unable to even service its loan of Rs 17,500 crore.

Third, there is a high risk of geological accidents: Arunachal Pradesh is categorised as Zone V (maximum risk) in the mapping of seismic zones in India, and there is a recent history of numerous quakes above five on the Richter scale. In 2011, an earthquake at the Teesta Dam site left 16 people dead and damaged the project. Regular landslides in the monsoons have also been disruptive. A study by the Institute of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Potsdam, Germany, estimates that at least 25% of hydropower projects in the India, Nepal and Bhutan's Himalayas are likely to face

severe damage from quake-triggered landslides. Then there are risks from glacial melt and lake bursts due to the unpredictable nature of the volume and velocity of the water.

Fourth, long gestation period: A hydropower project in Arunachal Pradesh will, realistically, take eight to 10 years or more to be operational, after considering the terrain, monsoon activity and the clearance of forest cover. The economics of power generation are likely to change substantially in favour of consumers in this decade, which will affect revenues and profitability.

Fifth, hydropower projects will lead to further deterioration in distribution companies (discom) finances. If the government supports the Etalin Hydropower project, for example, by mandating a Power Purchase Agreement at Rs 4.32, the estimated implicit taxpayer-funded subsidy (considering the current opportunity options available) would be about ~11,480 crore. This does not consider the inevitable power transmission losses from a remote location in the Northeast to its user destination. In a recent interview with the Mint, the chief operating officer of the

Indian Energy Exchange predicted that, in future, the discoms would emphasise more on lowering costs and increasing consumer choices, which imply a lowering of tariffs and consequent increase in financial losses.

Sixth, hydropower projects in India have a notoriously poor record in engaging with local communities and their concerns of livelihood and displacement; these concerns have been met with indifference and, at times, force. The existing projects in the Northeast are no different and do not pass even the most basic tests in the social responsibility checklist that financial institutions seek from their borrowers.

Hydropower projects in the Northeast are today a poor financial investment and need to be shelved for the larger common good. Instead of providing subsidies to the power-generation value chain, the urgent imperative is to encourage power conservation (by introducing, for instance, a variation of surge pricing during peak hours), reduce distribution losses, promote optimum utilisation of existing energy infrastructure and popularise rooftop solar energy.

India must overcome the pandemic, security threat

Disasters and external aggression end civilisations. But there is an opportunity for India to emerge stronger

By Shashi Shekhar

The are three reasons why the world's oldest and most powerful civilisations generally ended — epidemics, natural disasters, or foreign invasions. An example is the Indus Valley civilisation; it had magnificent cities, architecture, maritime, and overland trade; it was thriving well before the birth of Jesus Christ. Yet, it came to a sudden end. Scholars attribute this variously to a natural disaster or an external attack.

India is grappling with both at the moment — the Covid-19 pandemic and Chinese aggression on the border. Let us look at natural disasters first. The havoc caused by the coronavirus continues unabated, though the pressures of the lockdown have begun to ease up. Even

in these moments of despair, there are some rays of hope. Immediately after the coronavirus outbreak began, people were fearful about its repercussions thanks to mixed signals from the political establishment. While there is official determination to combat the virus, we are hobbled by our limited health facilities. In such a situation, political leaders should refrain from any blame game, and many have risen to the occasion.

Let us look at the three leaders who are the most strident critics of the central government. Delhi's chief minister Arvind Kejriwal won his last two elections amid the Modi wave, which was sweeping the country. When the pandemic began to spread in Delhi, disputes between the Centre and the state government peaked. But as the situation

deteriorated, Kejriwal and the Centre started cooperating. Home minister Amit Shah took command, and on several occasions, Kejriwal tweeted his appreciation and gratitude to the Centre for its support.

Similarly, West Bengal chief minister, Mamata Banerjee, was initially very vocal on the lockdown, operation of trains, and central subsidies. But now, we hardly hear criticism from her. Maharashtra chief minister, Uddhav Thackeray, broke away from Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) only recently. There was bitterness on both sides. Thousands of migrant labourers gathered at Bandra station after the first lockdown ended on April 14. In many parts of Mumbai, especially in the slums of Dharavi, Covid-19 began to spread rapidly. Here too, Amit Shah took the initiative and both



the governments were on the same page. Uddhav's son and cabinet member Aditya Thackeray tweeted: "The Centre has taken immediate cognisance of the issue and is assisting the state actively. I'm thankful to PM & HM for understanding the situation while trying to ensure the safety of home states of migrants." The kind of positivity political parties have shown after the initial

setbacks has strengthened the Constitution's federal nature. Is that enough? Beyond this crisis, India has to start thinking big in terms of its future security. The jury is still out on whether the virus is natural or man-made. Even if it is natural, there is no doubt that a totalitarian government or terrorist group can use it as a weapon in the future.

(Contd on page 32)

Covid: The State-citizen trust deficit

This distrust has shaped official communication, relief and the health response to the pandemic

For three months during the national lockdown and the Unlock 1.0 phase, a torrent of confusing and bewildering orders from the Union home ministry, instructing citizens on every aspect of their daily lives, was the primary mode of Covid-19-related communication between the government and the people. As the lockdown lifted and cases surged, it became clear that the “orders” did little to achieve their goal of disease containment. But they have served to entrench a policy approach that privileges coercion and compliance as an instrument to manage Covid-19. The State will “order” you, discipline you (lockdowns have been enforced with the visible use of the stick) and survey you (using technology aids) to control Covid-19. Yet, as any public health expert will tell you, globally, public participation is the critical ingredient that makes health interventions successful. This requires a relationship of trust between citizens and the State. And trust is the one missing link in India’s current practices of Covid-19 management.

Historically, the relationship



between the State and citizens and ironically, that within the hierarchy of the bureaucracy, has been mired in distrust. In responding to Covid-19, this distrust has become sharper in three distinct ways, shaping bureaucratic communication, the relief response and the health response.

First, bureaucratic communication, through endless orders laced in legalese. Ethnography has traced the bureaucratic penchant for orders to a culture of distrust rooted in the dynamics of colonial rule. In my research on the local bureaucracy in India, I have

witnessed first-hand the deep control of the “government order” on the everyday functioning of the bureaucracy. Compliance with orders is the primary instrument through which superiors monitor their subordinates. And in turn, it is the orders and associated penalties for non-compliance that drive performance on the ground. Faced with the challenge of Covid-19, the bureaucracy relied on the one instrument it was familiar with — the orders, except this time it became their default mode of communicating with the public, leaving in its wake confusion and fear. Second, the relief

response. Historically, distrust has also shaped the dynamic of myriad everyday interactions between bureaucrats and citizens. Access to bureaucratic paper — ration card, voter identification — is the key to determining whether citizens are eligible for benefits. And, the onus is on citizens to furnish these documents and prove their eligibility. The absence of such documents is an important reason why the bureaucracy found itself unable to provide foodgrains to migrant workers at the peak of the lockdown, requiring them to apply for e-passes and other

paperwork, even though giving grains to anyone who asked for them, was what was so urgently needed. In the eyes of the citizen, the State’s failure to respond to their needs has only widened the trust deficit. Third, the health response. Here, the trust deficit poses an even greater challenge. In the public health response, the urgency of citizen participation is amplified because of the many uncertainties about the disease, its spread and appropriate medical responses.

Participation is critical to ensure symptoms are reported to enable early detection and speedy provision of medical care. It is also essential to ensure long-term behaviour shifts (think: masks and social distancing). As health economist, Jishnu Das, argued in a recent interview, the public health response for Covid-19 needs the government to get people (and governments) to act together. The State has failed to do this for most infectious diseases but Covid-19 presents unique challenges in two ways. One, stigma and fear have spread far and wide.

(Contd on page 32)

It is time to move India’s higher education online

By M Jagadesh Kumar

Education plays a dominant role in addressing the challenges a country faces and coming up with possible solutions. This has the potential to make a country self-reliant and resilient. While we understand the need for a greater share of public funding for supporting education, a country such as India needs to evolve innovative methods to spread mass education within the available resources. Undoubtedly, there is an increasing social demand for accessible, affordable and good quality higher education as the increasing gross enrolment ratio (GER) indicates. Covid-19 has given us the opportunity to reflect upon what should be the structures of higher educational institutes (HEIs), and in what forms we can ensure accessible education during and after the pandemic. Those who question the need for adopting online education even post the pandemic should look no further than the non-equity in most of HEIs’ admission policies, which are based on elimination rather than selection. I see two arguments advanced against adopting online education. One, the issue of the digital divide. This criticism is not as reliable as it may first appear. While it is true that Internet access has to improve, statistics tell a different story. In 2020, the Internet penetration rate in India is 50%, and is rapidly increasing. The good news

is that the National Broadband Mission (NBM) is progressing fast enough to provide access to every village by 2022. NBM is expected to enable all rural and remote areas to have equitable and universal access to broadband services. In the near future, three million km of optical fibre cable will be laid and the towers are expected to increase from the existing 565,000 to one million. The speeds are expected to reach 50 mbps. Therefore, broadband Internet connectivity will not be a hindrance in providing online education in the future. In India, mobile data charges too are at least 30 times lower than the global average, making it cheaper to access digital content. The second argument is the belief that we cannot recreate the physical classroom experience. Therefore, some critics say that the online mode of education will dilute the quality of education. Unfortunately, the dilution is already embedded in the physical mode of teaching, with most students playing only a passive role in the classroom. This is one of the reasons why the teaching-learning outcomes in many HEIs are not up to the mark. The lack of student engagement and positive interactions through discussions in the classroom has led to the present situation, leading to increased absenteeism and poor performance by the students. We need to

set this right before we criticise online education. Further, we should not import the bad practices of the physical classroom to the online classroom. And this is the right time to do it correctly by redressing the shortcomings of the past. When we shift to online education, more attention needs to be paid on how we impart it. Online education can happen in two parts. First, at their own leisure and pace, students will go through the digital resources made available to them. Second, students can interact with the teachers in real-time live online classes, discussing what they have already studied from guided online resources. It is in the second part that, teachers can play an important role. The teaching can be made enquiry or discovery-based, through inclusive and active involvement of students. Moving to online classrooms gives us the opportunity to create “non-didactic flipped classrooms” as students are expected to attend these after having gone through the pre-lecture materials. This is what we also call blended learning. We could have done this in the physical classrooms too but we missed the bus riding on outdated practices. But nothing stops us from implementing a flipped classroom in online mode. As many people assume, HEIs do not necessarily need to possess state-of-the-art technology and lecture recording systems

to be able to offer online courses. There are many educational technology companies which can provide the technologies for recording, editing, hosting online courses and arranging proctored evaluations while HEIs can work on pedagogy, curriculum, teacher training and improvement of the quality of education. This is also an opportunity for public-private partnership (PPP) in higher education. HEIs must embark on offering skill-oriented online degrees, diplomas and certificate programmes. This is where prospective industries can join hands with the HEIs in designing the curriculum and offering job guarantees to the enrolled students provided their performance record crosses the desirable threshold. Being funded by non-governmental resources through PPP is the best guarantee for academic and financial independence of HEIs. The Institutes of Eminence and other HEIs with top National Institutional Ranking Framework scores should mandatorily offer skill-oriented online programmes at a moderate tuition fee. This way, online education has the potential to enhance the social mobility of those who could not easily access quality education from premier HEIs. Covid-19 has provided us the opportunity to be flexible in higher education replacing the ineffective educational practices that we have clung on to for too long.

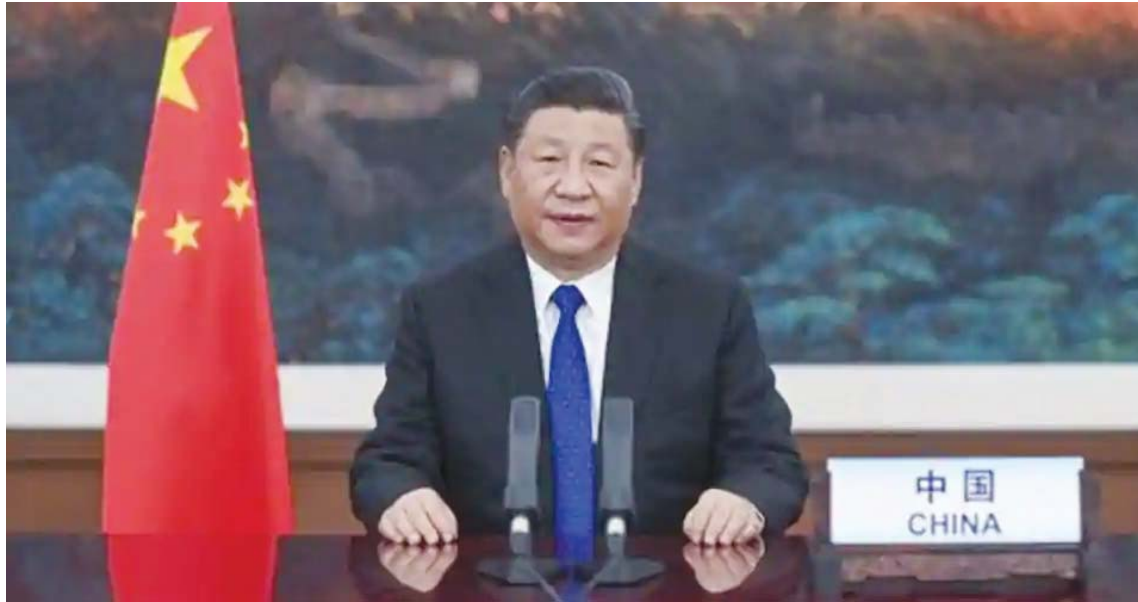
China's belligerence: We are all Hong Kong now

Hong Kong is a signal that China is willing to incur costs, but not coexist with other systems. Pay attention

In recent decades, the combination of a slow-but-certain incrementalism — couched in parables attributed to Confucius and other Chinese notables — had made Beijing's diplomatic behaviour inscrutable, and yet, viewed as benign. It gave the country an advantage in being able to change facts on the ground, and attract zero retaliation and minimal critique. It was the perfect excuse for western and Indian companies and governments to look the other way, and continue with the high profits that this authoritarian regime brought.

This has now dramatically changed. The rest of the world has a red hot smoking gun of Beijing's new diplomacy. As two astute American analysts, Kurt Campbell and Mira Rapp-Hooper put it, "Beijing appears less image-conscious now than in the past." And they argue, "Xi (Jinping) has endured the reputational damage of his government's 'Wolf Warrior' diplomacy (named after a series of nationalistic action films), likely calculating that China 'will gain more by flexing its military and economic muscles even if it loses some of its soft power along the way'."

Recall, China's big advantage for the last decades has been its incrementalism. Especially in its foreign policy, its method was to move little-by-little, step-by-step, under-the-radar. This was a strategy of managing



to stay just below the level of a full-blown provocation, such that any concrete retaliation by injured parties would look like a hysterical overreaction. In fact, one can apply this insight to other aspects of China's behaviour too. The World Trade Organization (WTO) is a case in point. China has slowly, deliberately, and quietly chipped away at the rules that underpin the multilateral trading system, but attracted scarce attention. In contrast, President Donald Trump's diatribes against the WTO, and in-your-face decision to paralyse the Appellate Body of the Dispute Settlement Mechanism, has led even allies to view the United States (US) with disappointment and anger. There is considerable irony in the fact that a sulky US — the guarantor of trade multilateralism for decades — has chosen not to join the parallel interim dispute

settlement mechanism (created by the European Union (EU), Norway, Canada and others), but China has. Similarly, deeply frustrated with the World Health Organization (WHO)'s apparent complicity with China, the US announced on May 29 that it would withdraw from the organisation. In doing so, the US has attracted the ire of the great and the good of the world. China, in contrast, for all its mishandling of the pandemic, and in spite of the threats that it issued to countries that demanded an enquiry (such as Australia), still manages to present itself as being on the side of the angels by reiterating its commitment to WHO.

The international community cannot dismiss Hong Kong as it has done Chinese excesses in Xinjiang. The issue goes to the heart of international jurisprudence and China's new aggressive

interpretation of its sovereignty. Hong Kong is not "just" another unit in China's domestic jurisdiction; underpinning the handover of Hong Kong to China was the guarantee of "one country, two systems". Hong Kong is not "just" another artificial island, being quietly militarised, somewhere in a faraway sea that the West does not need to bother about — in many ways, it is a cornerstone of a liberal, English-speaking, democratic West. Hong Kong is not even "just" another fatal border conflict with India, which the West can dismiss as a product of misperceptions over unclear boundaries drawn by careless colonial masters.

What has happened in Hong Kong should matter to all of us because of the deeply worrying repercussions it carries for its citizens. But as foreign policy is too seldom about values, here's a

straightforward reason why all realists should also be concerned about Hong Kong. China's actions in Hong Kong are a clear signal of the heavy costs that its government is willing to bear to openly assert, consolidate, and further expand its power.

The costs for China are huge, both reputational and financial. Hong Kong — along with Taiwan — was a symbol of reassurance that China, despite its different model of governance and development, could co-exist peacefully with other models based on freedom, democracy, and free markets. Besides, the financial attractiveness of Hong Kong stemmed from the fact that there was rule of law, transparency, independent judiciary, checks and balances. Companies knew that they would be given a fair deal, if they entered into conflict with a state-owned enterprise. With these advantages gone, financial costs will be inevitable — and China has shown that it is ready to incur them. This does not augur well for Taiwan, for the region at large, or for global order. And this is why banal statements from all defenders of the liberal multilateral order need to stop. German chancellor Angela Merkel, for instance, still talks remarkably of the need to "seek dialogue" with the Chinese government on the basis of a "relationship of trust". EU high representative, Josep Borrell, also stated "It is clear that China has a global ambition. But, at the same time, I do not think that China is playing a role that can threaten world peace". No, Mr Borrell, think what you may, there's no way you can really know that. None of us can. Because ultimately, we can never know the intentions behind the actions of states. But when states take actions entailing high costs — especially to themselves — these are signals that must not be ignored. We could all be Hong Kong tomorrow. And this is why — and not only for altruism — we should all be acting with one voice, with the people of Hong Kong now.

In Delhi, the good and bad news

The outcome of the serological study shows the spread of the coronavirus disease

One-fourth of Delhi's residents have possibly been infected by Covid-19. The outcome of an official serological study in the city's 11 districts showed that 23.4% have IgG antibodies. With 21,387 samples, the study was conducted at the end of June, early July, the objective was to assess the spread of Covid-19, and a rigorous sampling method, according to an official release, was followed.

The findings are deeply instructive. For one, it shows that Covid-19 has spread way beyond what official daily cases suggest. Two, the spread of the disease — and the knowledge about the spread — is not necessarily a negative thing, for

the study also shows that a majority of these cases have been asymptomatic, and patients have recovered — without even perhaps knowing it. Three, it suggests that the fatality rate due to the disease is possibly lower than what is known so far. India has had, compared to other countries, lower deaths due to Covid-19 in any case, but this is measured against the number of known cases. If the cases are higher, and if deaths are not being under-reported, then the fatality figures will go down even more.

But the study also shows the scale of the challenge. If this is the outcome in Delhi, one can assume that the disease has

spread far and wide across the country — not measured by official statistics. Delhi has done well in recent weeks by ramping up testing, being transparent, instituting home isolation protocols, increasing hospital beds and care centres. Other states must follow the lead, and the Centre should assist them in conducting serological studies. This will help them respond better. There is also a lesson for citizens who may have turned complacent in recent weeks. You could be next, if you haven't had it already. Follow basic protocols, wash your hands, wear masks, and restrict activities. You owe it to yourself and to society.

The Congress is not meant to die or wither away. It must change

Proposing an alternative leadership is not disloyalty. There is an opportunity now



By Gopalkrishna Gandhi

The Indian National Congress has given India six prime ministers — three descended from Pandit Motilal Nehru and three others. All six have left a stamp on the Republic.

It is not a party that is meant to wither away. Like the sentiments in Shelley's iconic poem *The Cloud*, it can — and must — change; it cannot die.

When Rahul Gandhi, leaving the presidentship of the party after the 2019 election results, said neither he nor anyone from the Nehru-Gandhi family was going to lead it thereafter, he signalled change. The change that was going to breathe new life into it. But the party didn't dare to face the change. It did not dare to read the writing on the wall. It reversed time, recoiled progress in standing Rahul Gandhi's bold idea on its head, and brought Sonia Gandhi, richly deserving a respite, back.

Time is walking the Congress through another reality check today, another chance to self-assess, self-renew, self-redeem. It has to but look at the arc of its six prime ministerships.

Playing on the new prime minister's first name, Gandhi blessed India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, in January 1948: "Bahut varsh jiyo aur Hind ke Jawahar bane raho..." (Live many a long year and remain India's jewel). Jawaharlal was not to live all that long; 75 is not a hoary old age. But he was prime minister for 17 consecutive years from age 58 to 75, a substantial achievement. When that span is seen against the further "plus" of him and his party winning every election held, free and fair, during that period, the accomplishment becomes all the more impressive.

India loved him during that time more than it loved any other contemporary politician. Two younger opponents of his in north India also enjoyed esteem and even adoration — Jayaprakash Narayan (1902-1979) and Rammanohar Lohia (1910-1967), with Sheikh

Abdullah being a hero for the people of Kashmir, C N Annadurai (1909-1969) with Tamil Nadu's discerning population, Phizo with the Naga people. But Nehru was all-India. Truly, Hind's jewel. Atal Bihari Vajpayee's moving tribute to the leader on his death — "surya ast ho gaya hai", the sun has set — has gone into the transactions of political Hindi literature.

Succeeding "Hind ka Jawahar" was no ordinary task. But Lal Bahadur Shastri (1904-1966) startled India by his ability to hold the reins of power with his own distinctive style of leadership — consultative in method and consolidative in effect. His

masterly handling of the military challenge posed by Pakistan in 1965 made Shastri an unexpected star. But, alas, one that shot out of the sky as fast as it had entered it.

Shastri's succession by Indira Gandhi (1917-1984) stood vindicated in the triumphant 1971 India-Pakistan war and Bangladesh's birth, though the Emergency she unleashed in 1975 spread the darkest of stains in her copybook. An un-Nehruvian cult of personality rose in her years in office, undermining institutions of governance.

Rajiv Gandhi raised India's profile globally in a technologically-transforming era as only someone as young and venturesome as he could have. And he concluded momentous accords with leaders of regional sub-nationalist movements. Ingenuously trusting untrustworthy party operatives he, not they, paid a heavy price. For PV Narasimha Rao (1921-2004), history has reserved praise for pulling India out of the foetid listlessness of the

licence-permit raj, kickstarting our economic engines of growth. When on selecting Manmohan Singh as his finance minister, Rao was asked if the man he had picked was not "too far to the Left". He said: "If the finance minister of India is not a Leftist, what else is he to be?" If Rao had been given another term in office, would he and his finance minister have ensured that equity and distributive justice were not sacrificed at the altar of growth? I believe they would have, both knowing the heart of India's living truth — disabling adversity.

As a citizen, I recall the 10 years of India's sixth Congress prime minister, Manmohan Singh, for his having made the Right to Information real, if still vulnerable; the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes (MGNREGS) also real, if patchily administered; and for changing India's stance on the climate crisis by making it part of the solution instead of the negative attitude of "we did not cause it" and getting the National Green

Tribunal Act in place. To him also goes the credit for pioneering legislation on two unlit areas — domestic violence and mental health, getting, in these life-nurturing initiatives, crucial support from Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

When, faced with the party's poor electoral showing, Congress president Rahul Gandhi resigned and said what he did, the nation waited for the party's next step. Some leaders in the party should, at that point, have offered themselves for the role. A healthy contest should have ensued with the elected victor becoming the next Congress president. With Bhopal and Jaipur, now, another opportunity knocks at the party's door. An opportunity to see — and show — that change is the only guarantor of continuity. Democratic opposition to the government is not sedition; proposing an alternative leadership to the present one in the party is not disloyalty.

"Hind ka Jawahar" is not a patented title, but a golden trophy to be won and passed on by one deserving hand to another.

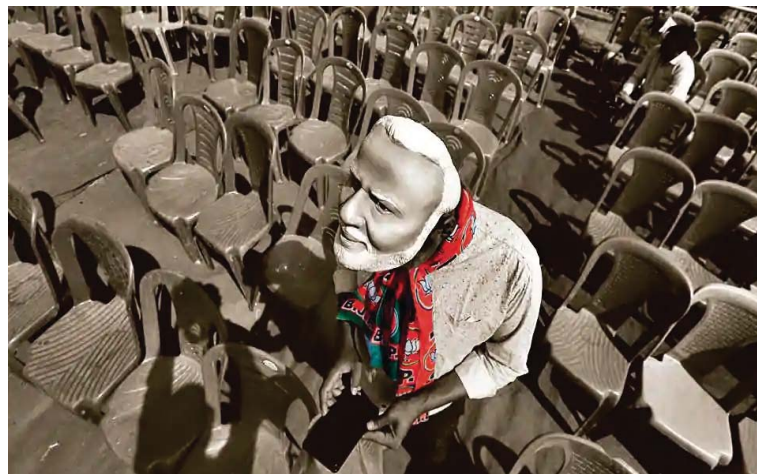
How PM Modi scores on political communication

He did not just embrace technology early; he has used it to deepen democratic accountability, reach out to citizens

Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi has reached a new social media milestone, with 60 million followers on Twitter. While this number reflects his popularity, it doesn't tell the whole story.

That story is about how PM Modi has used social media to communicate with people, establishing a new paradigm in political leadership. This is particularly relevant because political communication has become more challenging where multiple, often conflicting, constituencies and issues have to be addressed simultaneously. A leader has to be in constant communication with citizens, allay their anxieties, give them hope, keep them informed, provide guidance and boost morale, and communicate with the international community.

PM Modi's early embrace of technology is well-recognised. In his seminal book, *The World Is Flat*, Thomas L Friedman wrote that while there was no email in 1992, just over the next 10 years, the world changed so drastically that it became difficult to fathom a world without emails. That is



how quickly technology became a part of our lives. Modi was quick to understand the importance of technology in strengthening a participatory democracy, where the state is both accountable and responsive.

He has used technology for a democratic purpose and to ensure accountability. The issues of the modern world go beyond gender binaries of providing food, water and shelter. There are subgroups within groups, and all groups have to be spoken to and be heard. There are issues concerning children, transgender

communities, working professionals, homemakers, even those who do not want to be classified under any tag. The democratisation of communication, which has been fuelled by the advent of social media, has helped trigger debates on all sorts of issues. This has also put the onus on governments to respond to concerns and injustices. PM Modi has taken the challenge with amazing ease on the domestic front. Both in terms of messaging, and language — he has used different languages to communicate with citizens in his

tweets — he has reached out. He has used technology to ensure crucial nation-building tasks and fulfil governance responsibilities. Take the global context — the coronavirus pandemic, the climate crisis debate and the scourge of terrorism have led the world to adopt a multidimensional approach to communication. The need for government heads to talk directly to people has never been greater. In India, the PM has made use of his social media reach to do the needful on this front. For instance, at a time when Indians stared at despair with the sudden lockdown forcing them to stay inside their houses, Modi gave the country a sense of "we are in this together" by asking people to light diyas on their balconies and terraces. By that one act alone, he brought 1.3 billion people of the country together.

He has also used technology to enhance citizen awareness. We often don't see tall leaders talk about everyday issues. But Modi is an exception.

(Contd on page 33)

How the UP government is demolishing the mafia

Earlier, criminals had political protection. Now, with a fierce crackdown, they are being punished and eliminated

The dacoit gangs in the ravines of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Madhya Pradesh (MP), especially the Banda and Patha area of Chitrakoot of the latter, were always a serious challenge for successive state governments. But these dacoit gangs were successfully wiped out, largely in the 1980s. It was then that the terror of the urban mafia surged in UP.

The inception and subsequent rise of the urban mafia did not come out of the blue. It flourished thanks to open political patronage. The Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) are mainly responsible for its rise. Members of the mafia were not only given political protection, but, in many cases, tickets to facilitate their entry into the state legislature and Parliament.

Let us look at a few such entrants — Hari Shankar Tiwari, Virendra Paratp Shahi, Atiq Ahmad, Mukhtar Ansari, Vijay Mishra, Uday Bhan Singh, DP Yadav, Madan Bhaiyya, Umakant Yadav, Sonu, Monu Singh, Pawan Pandey, Aruna Shankar Shukla “Anna”.

This trend has continued until now with criminals such as Vikas Dubey emerging from the protective shadow of politicians. While not enough attention is being paid to the massacre of policemen at Bikru in Kanpur, an outrageous and horrific incident, people are comparing the encounter of the main accused Vikas Dubey with the incident of Telangana where four criminals, accused of a rape/murder, were killed by the police while on an evidence-gathering mission at night. It is fallacious to compare these two incidents. The Telangana killing was clearly a criminal act by the police.

Dubey was a criminal who had a history of challenging the sanctity of constitutional institutions and the judiciary. In early 2000s, he killed the then minister of state Santosh Shukla inside the premises of a court and was then absolved. It turned him into a vicious and unrestrained criminal, as was evident in the manner he killed eight policemen. He seemed to believe he could not be touched. But he did not factor in the resolve of the Yogi Adityanath government in UP.

Unlike in the encounter in Telangana, Dubey was killed after he tried to escape taking advantage of the situation as the police van carrying him



overturned. Dubey had, in fact, snatched the rifle of a policeman accompanying him and opened fire at the police party. Two constables sustained injuries because of this. The police returned fire to minimise further casualties and, in this fracas, Dubey was killed on July 10.

The police were prepared to produce him in the court to undergo the legal process. They took him from Ujjain but the unforeseen accident of the police van, and reckless and indiscreet action on the part of the criminal as the party neared Kanpur,

prompted the police to act in self-defence. Don't forget that it was just a few days earlier that he had murdered eight uniformed personnel.

In the Telangana incident, all of four accused had no case against them in any police station. In contrast, Dubey had 64 criminal cases pending against him and he was a notorious historysheeter, carrying a reward of ~5 lakh on his head.

The UP government has appointed a probe commission to enquire into this encounter. It

has also set up a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to take an in-depth look into his crimes, his political connections and other activities. The district magistrate of Kanpur has also requested the district judge to institute an inquiry under the supervision of a judicial magistrate. No such action was taken by the Telangana government.

The policy of “zero tolerance” towards organised crime and criminals adopted by the Yogi Adityanath-led government has resulted in the elimination of over

100 criminals in the approximately 4,000 encounters that have taken place in his term.

Such has been the effectiveness of the UP police's effectiveness that criminals with rewards on their heads started surrendering in police stations holding up placards. Members of mafia groups such as those run by Mukhtar Ansari and Atiq Ahmad, who controlled their empires from jail, are languishing in penal facilities in Punjab and Ahmedabad. Any mafia can be demolished if its economic backbone is broken. The Yogi government did it with precision and attacked the illegal financial network of the mafias and gangsters. In a planned manner in western UP, the properties of gangsters such as Badan Singh Baddo, Anil Dujana, Sunder Bhati, Udhan Singh Karnawal, Manish Chauhan, Yogesh Bhadoura, and Amit Kasana were attached or demolished. This dealt them a crushing blow.

It is now only a matter of time before the UP government destroys the entire mafia network in the state and makes it safer for people, especially the most vulnerable.

Stop the culture of resort politics It undermines democracy and popular mandates

The sight of legislators being packed off in buses, and lodged in comfortable, even luxurious, hotels and resorts, has become a common feature of Indian politics. It usually happens when a state government is in crisis, when a crucial election for a Rajya Sabha seat is underway and numbers are fluid, or when a rebellion is underway to change the regime in a state. A political party — or the rebel faction — then rushes to consolidate the legislators who are in its favour. The objective is to ensure that these legislators don't succumb to temptations and inducements offered by the other side; and instead remain under constant surveillance. The method then adopted is to lock them in, till the crisis is resolved one way or the other.

While Rajasthan is only the most recent example — members loyal to Ashok Gehlot were sent off to a hotel on the outskirts of Jaipur and members loyal to

Sachin Pilot were brought to a resort in Haryana — this is neither unique to one party nor to one state. Similar examples

growing pattern makes a mockery of Indian democracy, speaks poorly of elected representatives, is a reflection of the

distortions in political party structures, and is an insult to the voter. Voters elect representatives, who belong to a political party or who may be an independent, for their ideas, agenda and ideology. These representatives are, within the framework of party discipline, understood to be autonomous leaders who act in public interest. But, instead, what resort politics shows is that these legislators can shift



of resort politics were witnessed in Madhya Pradesh (rebel legislators went to Karnataka), Karnataka (legislators were brought to Maharashtra), Gujarat (to preserve numbers for a Rajya Sabha poll, legislators were taken to Karnataka), among others.

It is important to go back to first principles here, to understand how this

allegiances based on whoever can offer a better prize (either price or position); even parties have little faith in their integrity and so they are locked up; public interest is far-removed in these calculations; and money is an active determinant in how legislators make their choices. Resort politics is, in many ways, a symbol all that is wrong with Indian democratic politics.

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Civilians among 45 killed in Afghan air raids against Taliban

District governor in western Herat province says at least eight civilians killed in attack targeting Taliban fighters.

Air raids by Afghan security forces against Taliban fighters have killed at least 45 people, including civilians, according to a local official. Ali Ahmad Faqir Yar, governor of Adraskan district in the western Afghan province of Herat, said on Wednesday at least eight civilians were among the dead. "Forty-five people had been killed so far in air strikes by security forces in the Kham Ziarat area. Taliban were among those killed," he said. It was unclear how many of the remaining 37 were civilians and how many were members of the Taliban. Qari Mohammad Yousuf Ahmadi, a Taliban spokesman, said in a

statement two air raids in Herat killed eight civilians and wounded 12. Two local officials confirmed there had been two rounds of air raids.

"Such attacks would compel recently freed prisoners who wish to live normal lives to take up arms once again against the enemy," said Ahmadi. Acting Defence Minister Asadullah Khalid said on Thursday Taliban fighters were killed in the attacks. His ministry issued a statement saying it was investigating the reports of civilian casualties, and would make the findings public. "The National Defense and Security Forces have the

responsibility to protect the lives and property of the people, in this regard, they use all the opportunities and facilities and will not spare any effort," the statement said. The air raids were condemned by the US envoy trying to start peace talks involving all sides. Habib Amini, a local official in neighbouring Guzara district, confirmed the incident and said 45 people were killed and more injured. Jailani Farhad, spokesman for the Herat governor, told Anadolu news agency at least six key Taliban commanders involved in major assaults in Herat were targeted in the air raids. He said the civilian casualties were caused by

a land mine blast nearby. The US special peace envoy for Afghanistan, meanwhile, condemned the attack and called for an investigation.

"In Herat, photos and eyewitness accounts suggest many civilians including children are among the victims of an Afghan airstrike. We condemn the attack and support an investigation," Zalmay Khalilzad said on Twitter, adding that Washington also "deplored" recent Taliban attacks. The US is winding back troops under an agreement with the Taliban struck in February, which was meant to pave the way to formal peace talks



between the group and the Afghan government. However, disagreement over the release of prisoners demanded by the Taliban and rising violence around the country have hampered progress, and talks have yet to start. The fragile Afghan peace deal hinges on the prisoner exchanges. In line with the landmark US-Taliban peace agreement, about 5,000 Taliban prisoners should have been released from government prisons in

return for the estimated 1,000 captive security forces in March. But, according to the National Security Council, the government has released 4,019 Taliban so far, while the Taliban freed about half of the 1,000 prisoners it agreed to release. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission said recently in the first six months of this year a total of 1,213 civilians were killed, while 1,744 had been wounded in 880 incidents.

Teen girl kills Taliban attackers with dad's AK-47 after parents slain

A teenage girl has become a hero in Afghanistan for fighting off a Taliban attack, killing two militants with the AK-47 her father taught her to use before he was killed by the insurgent group. Now Qamar Gul, who is about 15, has been invited to the presidential palace and has already been lauded by



President Ahsraf Ghani for her bravery. Speaking to CBS News by phone from Afghanistan's western Ghor province, Gul recounted the night last week when the terrorists came to her house in the village of Geriveh and forced their way in. "It was around 1 a.m. that the Taliban knocked on our door. My mother answered and refused to open the door. They broke our door and dragged my parents into the hallway and killed them both," she told CBS News. Gul grabbed her father's rifle, which he had taught her to use, and opened fire. Two Taliban insurgents were killed in the shooting and another wounded, according to both Gul and the district governor. Villagers soon rushed over to and together they forced the Taliban to retreat. "I am proud I killed my parents' murderers," Gul told the AFP news agency in a separate interview. "I killed them because they killed my parents, and also because I knew they would come for me and my little brother." "After I killed the two Taliban, I went to talk to my parents, but they were not breathing," she told AFP. "I feel sad I could not talk to them one last time."

Eyeing China, India plans solar power park in Sri Lanka

New Delhi: India plans to set up a solar power park in Sri Lanka as part of a concerted strategy to project its presence in the Indian Ocean region, even as China aims to co-opt countries into its 'Belt and Road' initiative, said two people aware of the development. By leveraging the country's solar expertise, India's largest power generation utility NTPC Ltd plans to set up this project in the island nation under the aegis of International Solar Alliance (ISA). This comes in the backdrop of an increasing presence of China in the Indian Ocean region, which India considers its sphere of influence. Also, an aircraft carrier battle group led by USS Nimitz is conducting joint naval exercises in the area at a time of growing hostilities between India and China.

"We are looking at setting up a solar park in Sri Lanka," said a senior Indian government official requesting anonymity. State-run Ceylon Electricity Board has an installed power generation capacity of around 35.8 gigawatts (GW). India has been working on improving the energy infrastructure in Sri



Lanka. Petronet LNG Ltd had earlier announced its plans of setting up a liquefied natural gas terminal in Sri Lanka. India is also exploring the option of an overhead electricity link with Sri Lanka as part of efforts to create a new-energy ecosystem for the neighbourhood. China is already one of the biggest investors in various infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka. The proposed solar park follows after state-run NTPC Ltd's plan to set up a coal-fuelled power project in Trincomalee didn't make much headway and was eventually scrapped after Colombo asked India to change—for the second time—the location of the stalled \$500 million project. Queries emailed to the spokespersons of NTPC

and India's ministry of new and renewable energy remained unanswered.

With an installed capacity of 62.91 GW, NTPC's Sri Lanka solar foray is part of targeting similar contracts to help set up 10 GW solar capacity in ISA member countries. Green energy projects now account for more than a fifth of India's installed power generation capacity of 370 GW.

"ISA has empanelled NTPC and will soon be doing another exercise to empanel more public sector units from member countries who have rich experience in solar space," an ISA spokesperson had earlier told Mint. India's plan is to get NTPC win these contracts with the backing of ISA, the first treaty-based international government organization headquartered in

India that is increasingly being viewed as a foreign policy tool. Mint earlier reported about NTPC's plans to help Gambia and Malawi develop solar power parks and eyeing project management consultancy contracts in Sudan, Mozambique, Egypt, Uganda, Rwanda and Niger. India's largest power generation utility recently got such contracts in Mali and Togo.

India is also working on setting up the much needed solar wafer and ingot capacity and plans to come out with tenders that may provide for viability gap funding (VGF) to attract manufacturers. Wafers and ingots are the building blocks for manufacturing solar cells and modules, and are essential to India's clean energy plans. Globally, solar wafer and ingot manufacturing is dominated by China. To counter Beijing, the US is seeking a bigger role for India in stabilising and maintaining the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific region—a large swathe of land and sea stretching all the way from the west coast of the US to the shores of east Africa.

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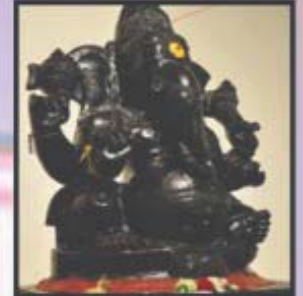
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2019 Easter Blasts: Wife of a suicide bomber escaped to India, says Sri Lanka police

Probed by the Colombo Crime Division, Criminal Investigation Department and the Terrorism Investigation Department, the probe into the Easter Sunday blasts has result in the arrest of around 200 suspects, and the investigation is in its final stages.



The wife of one of the suicide bombers who struck churches across Sri Lanka on Easter in April 2019, resulting in the death of 260 people, has fled to India fearing arrest, the police of the island nation has said. Testifying before the Presidential Commission of Inquiry, which is probing the blasts, Chief Inspector of Police Arjuna Maheenkanda said Pulasthini Rajendran alias Sarah — the wife of Atchchi Muhammadu Hastun, who

detonated his bomb at the St Sebastian's Church in Negombo — may have fled to India via sea in September 2019.

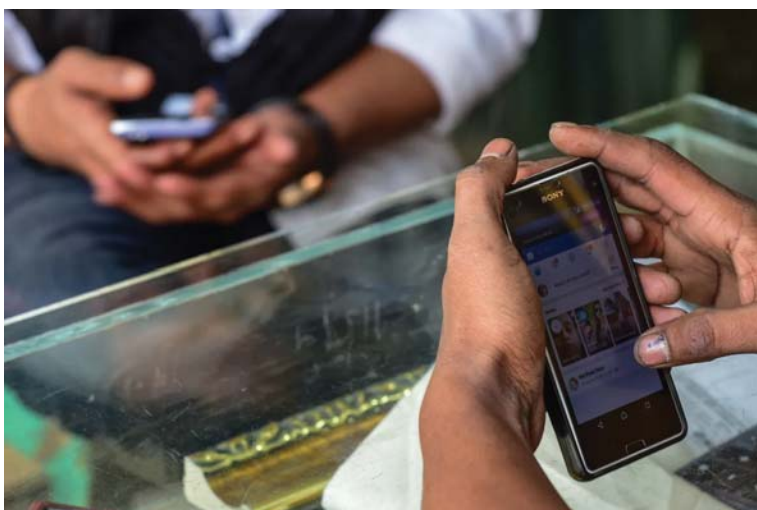
His submission was based on an input he received on July 6 this year through an informant. The information was that a woman, believed to be Sarah, who was initially believed to have been killed in the explosion at a house in Sainthamaruthu on April 26, 2019, had actually fled the scene and was in hiding before escaping to India from Sri Lanka's Mannar coast. Probed by the Colombo Crime Division, Criminal Investigation Department and the Terrorism Investigation Department, the probe into the

Easter Sunday blasts has result in the arrest of around 200 suspects, and the investigation is in its final stages. According to the Colombo Crime Division, Sarah was hiding in a village called Mankadu in the Kalawanchikudy area.

Jaliya Senaratne, director of the Police Media Division, told The Indian Express, "We do not have any concrete information about her whereabouts in India except a report that she managed to escape to India. We arrested two persons on July 13 — her relative and a senior police officer — from Ampara (an eastern province of Sri Lanka) for harbouring that lady before her

escape. They are in custody." An estimated 15 people, including four women and six children, were killed in the Sainthamaruthu blast. The explosion, which killed the families of at least four of the suicide bombers, had occurred when security forces launched an operation to capture them, a week after the Easter blasts. When The Indian Express visited Sainthamaruthu blast site two days later, the two known survivors from the explosion were the wife and daughter of Zahran Hashim, the main suicide bomber. A senior officer said Hashim's wife, who sustained serious injuries in the blast, is currently under detention.

Bangladesh regulator orders telcos to stop providing free access to social media



Bangladesh's regulator has ordered telecom operators and other internet providers in the nation to stop providing free access to social media services, becoming the latest market in Asia to take a partial stand against zero-rating deals. Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, the local regulator, said late last week that it had moved to take this decision because free usage of social media services had spurred their misuse by some people to commit crimes. Local outlet Business Standard first reported about the development. Bangladesh is one of the largest internet markets in Asia with more than 100 million online users. Technology companies such as Facebook and Twitter have

struck partnerships, more popularly known as zero-rating deals, with telecom operators and other internet providers in several markets in the past decade to make their services free to users to accelerate growth. Typically, tech companies bankroll the cost of data consumption of users as part of these deals. In Bangladesh, such zero-rating deals have been popular for several years, said Ahad Mohammad, chief executive of Bongo, an on-demand streaming service (Extra Crunch membership required), in an interview with TechCrunch. Grameenphone and Robi Axiata, two of the largest telecom operators in Bangladesh, enable their mobile subscribers to access a handful of services of

their partners even when their phones have run out of credit. Both telecom firms have said they are in the process to comply with Dhaka's order. Other zero rating deals remain in effect, a person familiar with the matter said. It remains unclear whether Free Basics, a program run by Facebook in dozens of markets through which it offers unlimited access to select services at no cost, will continue its presence in Bangladesh after the nation's order. Facebook relies on telecom networks to offer data access for its Free Basics program. In Bangladesh, Facebook struck deals with Grameenphone and Robi Axiata, according to its official website, where Facebook continues to identify Bangladesh among dozens of markets where Free Basics is operational. Several nations in recent years have balked at zero-rating arrangements — though they have often cited different reasons. India banned Free Basics in early 2016 on the grounds that Facebook's initiative was violating the principles of net neutrality. Free Basics also ended its program in Myanmar and several other markets in 2017 and 2018. Facebook did not respond to requests for comment.

Pakistan, Bangladesh premiers hold rare telephonic talk



The prime ministers of Pakistan and Bangladesh held a telephonic conversation on Wednesday in a rare occurrence of diplomacy as the two estranged countries seek rapprochement. "Pakistan is committed to deepening fraternal relations with Bangladesh on the basis of mutual trust, mutual respect and sovereign equality," said PM Imran Khan, according to a statement issued by his office. The premier reiterated his invitation to Sheikh Hasina to visit Pakistan. He extended condolences for the lives lost during the pandemic, and offered his commiserations on the material and human losses due to the recent flooding in Bangladesh and prayed for early recovery of the people affected by this natural calamity. The two leaders exchanged views on their respective steps to deal with the myriad of challenges posed by Covid-19. Imran apprised of his

government's efforts and commended his Bangladesh counterpart on the measures taken by her leadership to contain the virus. He also apprised her of his 'Global Initiative on Debt Relief' for developing countries. In the bilateral context, Imran underscored the importance Pakistan attaches to closer ties with fraternal Bangladesh and highlighted the significance of regular bilateral contacts and people-to-people exchanges. Reaffirming Pakistan's commitment to SAARC, Imran underlined the importance of both countries working for enhanced regional cooperation for sustainable peace and prosperity. He shared Pakistan's perspective on the grave situation in the Indian-occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJ&K) and stressed on the importance of a peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute for a safe and prosperous region.

Pakistan will forgive tax evaders if they invest black money in Imran's govt housing scheme



Pakistan will look the other way if people invest black money in construction projects such as PM Imran Khan's Naya Pakistan Housing Program by 31 Dec.

With revenue collections slowing amid the coronavirus pandemic, Khan is trying to tap illegal wealth that's estimated to be as large as 56% of the \$278 billion economy. The government this year cut the budget for development spending and has little recourse to raise money after taking bailout funds and an emergency loan from the International Monetary Fund.

Amnesty for tax cheats can help muster funds needed to spur housing activity in a nation where mortgage finance is almost non-existent. The government predicts 400 billion rupees (\$2.4 billion) of home constructions will start this year, according to Minister for Information and Broadcasting Shibli Faraz.

Pakistan has forgiven tax cheats earlier as well. Four of the past governments have announced such programs at least once, but none have been successful in drawing out significant amount of

black money. Khan's amnesty program is the first for the real estate sector as he's in dire need of cash and ways to stoke gross domestic product, which contracted 0.4% in the year ended June. Lockdowns to slow the spread of Covid-19 — the nation is the second-most infected in Asia — and locust attacks, are sucking state funds.

Khan's Naya Pakistan Housing Program aims to build 1 million homes each year. For investors to benefit from the amnesty they will have to register with tax authorities. Registrations began this week.

"It obviously raises questions, given the previous discussions with IMF," which dislikes tax amnesties, said Mattias Martinsson, chief investment officer of Tundra Fonder AB in Stockholm. "These are special times and everyone understands that. Countries like Pakistan don't

have the pockets of the U.S. or European Union."

Still, the program's dependence on illegal cash may not be enough. Investment into homes will pick up when incentives such as cheap mortgages and tax savings for first purchase house are introduced, according to analysts.

Pakistan's bank have extended home loans to about 100,000 customers to date, with about half of those taken up by employees, according to Ali Khizar, head of research at Business Recorder, a local newspaper.

"The priority people have is to spend on basics necessities at this point, not buying a house," said Khurram Schehzad, chief executive officer at Karachi-based advisory Alpha Beta Core Solutions. "You need to really incentivize people to spend on houses at this point in time." — Bloomberg

Karachi: Pakistan is willing to forgive tax evaders if they help fund activity in the economy that shrank for the first time in seven decades last financial year.

Authorities in Pakistan, where just 1% of the population file tax returns, will look the other way if people with illicit cash — locally known as black money — invest in construction projects such as Prime Minister Imran Khan's flagship Naya Pakistan Housing Program by Dec. 31, according

to the Federal Board of Revenue. "There is all this money with developers who have been doing tax evasion and small scale projects," Zaigham Rizvi, member of Naya Pakistan Housing Program taskforce, said in an interview. "I support the decision to bring funds from the dark economy into the tangible economy. Construction will generate some sort of tax directly or indirectly if that money is put through the value added system."

In disputed Kashmir, Pakistan accuses India of increased shelling

Pakistan's military this week said there had been an escalation in firing and shelling across the de facto border that separates Pakistani and Indian-controlled Kashmir, at a time of heightened diplomatic tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

Major General Amer Ahsan Nawaz, the commander of Pakistani troops in Kashmir, accused the Indian military of trying to distract attention from unrest in its part of Kashmir.

"If you compare it to the past years, there is a definite increase in this year," he told reporters on Wednesday near the so-called Line of Control (LoC), across which the two sides' militaries have faced off for decades.

The Muslim-majority Himalayan region has been at the heart of more than 70 years of animosity since the partition of British-ruled India into Muslim Pakistan and majority Hindu India in 1947. Two of the three wars they have fought since have been over Kashmir.

Pakistan's military said that in 2019, when ceasefire violations hit a more than decade-high peak, there were just over 3,500 incidents. Already in 2020 there have been almost 1,800 violations, the Pakistan military said, adding that the surge during



the more volatile summer season since June had been more pronounced than in previous years.

Indian army spokesman Colonel Aman Anand rejected Pakistan's allegations, saying Pakistan's military had violated the ceasefire on more than 2,500 occasions this year.

Tensions were exacerbated last year when India revoked the autonomy of its portion of Kashmir. In recent months the diplomatic relationship has worsened further as Delhi and Islamabad each ejected half of its neighbour's diplomats.

On Pakistan's side of Kashmir, which is relatively heavily

populated close to the LoC, locals said that shelling or firing was becoming a near-daily occurrence. "It can start any time day or night," said Malik Mohammad Ayub, a local deputy commissioner, who said around four civilians were killed and 13 wounded in his district since he took the job four months ago. Faiza Shabbir, 12, said she and her sisters had been afraid when shelling began in their area earlier this month. "Firing was going on, so we hid in our house, then a shell hit our roof. Three of us sisters and our grandmother were injured," she said, adding that had spent four days in hospital being treated for shrapnel wounds.

On Chabahar, India Must Recover Lost Ground With Iran Quickly

Ripples in the India-Iran bilateral relationship have risen to the surface once again, forcing the question of whether India's policy and commitment towards the development of the Chabahar Port project is unraveling. Three days after Iran's announcement that it was starting work - finally, alone - on a crucial rail link between Zahedan and Chabahar that India had committed to developing jointly in 2016, the Foreign Ministry in Delhi was forced to clarify that it had, in fact, been left to Tehran to nominate an authorized entity to finalize outstanding issues - technical and financial - after a meeting between the two sides in December 2019 to review the railway project.

For most analysts of the India-Iran relationship, Tehran's declaration that it would go it alone, seemingly because India had dragged its feet, was akin to a challenge, seeking a reaffirmation of India's commitment to the development of Chabahar, and yet another example of the sort of hard negotiation Iran engages in with India from time to time.

Against the backdrop of a deadly pandemic, for which China is already on the mat,

and subsequently, India's efforts to rally international support against Beijing for its adventurism in the Galwan Valley of Ladakh, Tehran's comments placed Delhi in a diplomatic conundrum in which both Beijing and Washington are key players. Iran's declaration to start work on the rail line alone came on the back of reports of a mega 25-year, 400-billion-dollar-worth Sino-Iranian Comprehensive Strategic Partnership being negotiated between China and Iran that paves the way for Tehran to purchase weapons and military equipment from Beijing. The two countries already have a trade agreement in place, also signed in 2016, just months before the Chabahar Trade and Transport Corridor Agreement between Iran, Afghanistan and India. And now, even if there is both internal (led by the populist Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran's parliament) and international opposition to such a partnership, Delhi needs to evolve a better strategy on Iran beyond waiting to see how the US may react, beyond having to issue clarifications in response to Iran's sudden provocations, and beyond allowing voids of partnership that China will readily fill.

New York Senate Majority Advances Legislation Penalizing Housing Discrimination

(Albany, NY) The Senate Democratic Majority will today advance legislation to hold real estate professionals accountable for discriminatory housing practices. The bill, S.6874A, sponsored by Senator James Gaughran, penalizes licensed real estate brokers and salespersons by revoking or suspend-

ing their licenses, or issuing a fine if they violate the Human Rights Law, which includes housing discrimination.

“Housing discrimination and predatory practices will not be tolerated in New York,” Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said. “By advancing this legislation,

the Senate Majority is sending a clear message that you will be held accountable for engaging in unfair, discriminatory, and racist housing practices. I applaud Senator Gaughran for sponsoring this legislation and continuing the Senate Majority’s commitment to equal and fair access to housing for all New York-

ers.” Bill Sponsor, Senator James Gaughran, said, “This legislation will ensure that real estate agents who violate New York’s Human Rights Law by “steering” minority families towards certain communities, or other racist practices that deny individuals the dignity of choosing their home and neighborhood, face license re-

vocation. Our nation’s soul is in crisis and public officials must speak out against racism and end segregation and discrimination in our society, once and for all. I thank Leader Stewart-Cousins for her historic leadership in swiftly shepherding passing this bill and fighting for a more fair, and just society.”

Senator Gaughran, Senate Pass Bill Giving PSC Power Over LIPA

(Syosset, NY) Today, Senator Jim Gaughran and the Senate passed S.6868, to give the Public Service Commission the power to order LIPA implement management and operations reforms. The bill was motivated by reports of irregularities and unauthorized editing of official state reports concerning LIPA, National Grid, and PSEG. The legislation will authorize the PSC to require LIPA implement reforms made in any audit where fraud, abuse, or mismanagement by a service provider was found. This will end the luxury long enjoyed by LIPA of ignoring audit rec-

ommendations and reforms. The PSC will have the power to revoke a service provider’s authority to operate in New York for failure to comply with this bill.

Senator Jim Gaughran “For too long LIPA has operated as a self-policing runaway authority that answers to Wall Street and its corporate interests instead of the 1.1 million customers who rely on LIPA for electricity to run their father’s ventilator and power their child’s school computer. That ends today. This bill will give the PSC desperately-needed authority to regulate LIPA -- which holds a mo-

nopoly on Long Island’s electrical grid. It’s time LIPA play by the same rules utilities across the state have to abide by. No utility should have the luxury to self-edit reports, doctor state-mandate audits, or ignore PSC’s recommendations.”

Assemblyman Fred Thiele, bill sponsor in the Assembly, said “Millions of customers across Long Island depend on LIPA to meet their energy needs. The passage of this essential legislation will bring LIPA in line with other utilities across the state and rightfully give the PSC the necessary authority to enforce audit rec-

ommendations and protect ratepayers from waste, fraud, and abuse.”

In 2018, news reports alleged a state-mandated audit of LIPA and PSEG operations demonstrated significant issues surrounding high rates, transparency, service performance, and more. After news reports on issues raised in the draft audit, the issues were deleted from the final audit submitted to the State. In 2019, news reports alleged a state-mandated comprehensive audit of National Grid’s gas and electric operations had an unauthorized outside editor, raising questions about

the audit’s lack of independent analysis.

Senator Gaughran’s legislation will give power to the PSC to regulate and oversee LIPA through recommendations contained in their statutory audit. LIPA is largely exempt from PSC jurisdiction under the 2013 LIPA Reform Act. Senator Gaughran’s bill will allow the PSC to require a date for recommendations to be fully implemented by. The PSC may levy a civil penalty against the service provider or revoke their authority to operate in New York for noncompliance with the provisions of the bill.

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COVID-19 is extremely contagious, meaning that it is easily transmitted from one person to another. If you tested positive for COVID-19 or think you might have it because of your symptoms, it is very important that you do not come in close contact with others, including people you may live with. This is called “self-isolation.” You may qualify to self-isolate in a hotel, free of charge, for up to 14 days if you do not have a safe place to self-isolate. This can mean:

- Your home does not have space for you to stay six feet away from others
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- You live with someone who is vulnerable

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Senate Majority Passes Legislation Banning ICE Agents From Making Arrests In New York's Courthouses

(Albany, NY) The Senate Democratic Majority today passed legislation to ban Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) agents from making arrests in New York courthouses. The bill S.425A, sponsored by Senator Brad Hoylman, protects New Yorkers from civil arrests while going to court and conducting or returning from a court proceeding.

"No New Yorker should fear participating in the justice system, regardless of their documentation," Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said. "The Protect Our Courts Act will give undocumented New Yorkers the peace of mind and sense of safety they deserve while visiting a court, and I commend Senator Hoylman for sponsoring this legislation. By advancing this good bill, the Sen-

ate Majority is continuing our efforts to support immigrant communities and ensure New York is a more welcoming place for new Americans."

Bill Sponsor, Senator Brad Hoylman, said, "Donald Trump's heart-

less immigration policy is a cruel perversion of justice. We cannot allow our courthouses to become a hunting ground for federal agents attempting to round up immigrant New Yorkers. Already, ICE ar-

rests in or around courthouses in New York have spiked by 1,700% since Donald Trump took office. The Protect Our Courts Act will get ICE out of our courthouses and make our justice sys-

tem more just. It will allow all New Yorkers to attend judicial proceedings, whether as a litigant, witness or family member. I'm grateful to Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and As-

ssembly sponsor Michaelle Solages for working with us to pass this crucial legislation, and thankful to the immigrant New Yorkers who made a clear, compelling moral case for why New York must pass this bill."

Gun Trafficking ring dismantled with arrests of virginia man and three queens residents following long term investigation

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz, joined by New York City Police Commissioner Dermot Shea, today announced the arrests of four alleged gun traffickers who used the notorious Iron Pipeline and smuggle guns purchased in Virginia to be sold illegally on the streets of Queens County. Police removed nearly two dozen deadly weapons from our neighborhoods, along with high capacity magazines and ammunition over the duration of the 10-month-long investi-

gation. District Attorney Katz said, "New York City has seen a disturbing spike in shootings over the last few weeks. Combating this dangerous rise in gun violence, means cutting off the supply of illegal guns coming into our neighborhoods. Illegal gun traffickers put every citizen in our borough at grave risk. I want to thank the NYPD's Firearm Suppression Section for their relentless pursuit and acknowledge the great work of my team for their tireless ef-

forts." Police Commissioner Shea said, "This case reflects the NYPD's efforts to stop illegal firearms from reaching New York City's streets. Our NYPD detectives, and law enforcement partners, remain vigilant in our work to keep these weapons out of the hands of criminals where they threaten all of our communities."

The District Attorney identified the defendants as Jessica "Cess Milla" Heyliger, 35, of Jamaica, Queens; Laquan Benson, 36, of Richmond, Vir-

ginia; Mitchell "Mitxh" Myree, 36, of Jamaica, Queens; and Sharod "Yayo" King, 32, of Woodside, Queens. The defendants have variously been charged with criminal sale of a firearm, criminal possession of a weapon and conspiracy. (See Addendum for further details on defendants).

The complaints allege that the ring operated with Heyliger as the principal dealer of the weapons – Benson as her main supplier and Myree acting as a backup. King allegedly was Heyliger's salesman.

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.
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Chinese actions are a challenge for the world community: British envoy

Following its exit from the European Union (EU), the UK will focus on healthcare, a long-term agenda for green growth and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and trade and investment while strengthening its ties with India, Barton said during his first news briefing after presenting his credentials.

China's actions around the globe, including imposing a national security law in Hong Kong and the border standoff with India, are a challenge for the world community and Britain will work with partners to call out violations of international law, UK high commissioner Philip Barton said on Thursday. Following its exit from the European Union (EU), the UK will focus on healthcare, a long-term agenda for green growth and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and trade and investment while strengthening its ties with India, Barton said during his first news briefing after presenting his credentials. "There are challenges around the world on all sorts of Chinese actions, for us Hong Kong particularly is a focus, clearly for India the LAC (Line of Actual Control) is a particular focus," he said. "These are concerning things and our hope would be that there can be de-escalation, and tensions do seem to have eased over the last week or two after the tragic loss of

lives," he said, referring to the death of 20 Indian soldiers in a clash with Chinese forces along the LAC on June 15. Barton welcomed progress by India and China in managing tensions and the commitment by the two Special Representatives on the

border issue to disengage and de-escalate. "I hope we're not about to see a change in that," he said. Britain, he said, has its own concerns about a range of Chinese actions and has decided to remove Chinese technology giant Huawei's equipment from all its

telecommunications networks by 2027 because of concerns highlighted by the UK National Cyber Security Centre. "We don't have a border with China but we have particular responsibilities for Hong Kong and the new national security law which China has imposed

there, we see this as a very clear and serious violation of the UK-China joint declaration," he said, referring to the agreement that laid out the administrative arrangement for Hong Kong when the former British colony was handed over to China in 1997.

Portland mayor tear gassed after speaking with protesters on presence of federal agents

Mayor Ted Wheeler was tear gassed in downtown Portland early Thursday morning, according to video and posts on Twitter from a New York Times journalist. The video shows Wheeler, wearing goggles and a face mask amid a crowd of people, hold his nose and close his eyes in distress as a cloud of tear gas drifts by him. "It stings. It's hard to breathe. I can tell you with 100% honesty I saw nothing that provoked this response," Wheeler said to the Times camera. "I'm not afraid but I am pissed off." It's unknown at this time who is responsible for deploying the tear gas and there is nothing to indicate the mayor was targeted. Portland Police said they did not deploy any CS gas, a commonly

used type of tear gas. CNN has reached out to the mayor's office for additional comment. The video appeared to come after Wheeler joined crowds to listen to protesters and answer their questions in response to violent clashes between demonstrators and federal forces, whose camouflage, troop-like uniforms and aggressive tactics have exacerbated the protests. It is an unconstitutional occupation," Wheeler told the crowd. "The tactics that have been used by our federal officers are abhorrent. They did not act with probable cause, people are not being told who they are being arrested by, and you're being denied basic constitutional rights." "It is an unconstitutional occupation," Wheeler told

the crowd. "The tactics that have been used by our federal officers are abhorrent. They did not act with probable cause, people are not being told who they are being arrested by, and you're being denied basic constitutional rights." President Donald Trump said federal officers were sent to the city to protect federal property, but protesters and local leaders have strongly opposed their presence. Demonstrations, many of which have been peaceful, have been ongoing for more than 50 days. "This is clearly a waste of federal resources and it's getting increasingly dangerous," Wheeler told CNN. "We did not ask the feds to be here. We do not want them here. They're not helping the situation. They're not appropriately trained, and we're demanding that they leave."

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American unemployment claims are on the rise again for the first time in 4 months

America's jobless crisis is far from over. Thursday's Department of Labor report hammered that point home: Another 1.4 million Americans filed for first-time unemployment benefits last week, marking the first increase in initial claims in 16 weeks. The weekly first-time claims peaked at 6.9 million in the last week of March and fell continuously until last week, when the trend reversed. Economists had predicted claims would remain steady this week at 1.3 million, the same amount as in last week's report. Nearly four months after the Covid-19 pandemic ravaged the health of Americans, their economy and their labor market, the upswing in economic data is tapering off. A resurgence in infections and a rollback of reopening plans in several states is making it difficult for people to re-enter the labor force following the pandemic lockdown -- and it could derail the vulnerable US economic recovery. Stripping out seasonal adjustments, the number of initial claims is slightly lower than the adjusted figure, but it still rounds up to 1.4 million. During normal times, the seasonal adjustments help smooth the data, but during the pandemic it has been less helpful. On top of regular claims for unemployment benefits, nearly 1 million people across 49 states applied for pandemic unemployment assistance, a program Congress rolled out as part of the government's Covid response.

It provides benefits to workers who aren't typically eligible, such as freelancers and the self-employed. The program stands to expire at the end of the year. Some news was less dire. Continued claims, which count people who have applied for benefits for at least two consecutive weeks, slipped to 16.2 million, down by more than 1 million from the week prior. The continued claims number trails the first-time applications by one week. So an uptick

in the continued-claims number over the next few weeks could be a bad sign for the job market recovery. Another major concern is the expiration of Washington's \$600 weekly boost to unemployment benefits. It's technically set to end July 31 -- but in reality this week is the last that the extra benefits will be paid out, because payments are provided for weeks ending on a Saturday or Sunday. July 31 falls on a Friday. "The rising unemployment claims are

a deeply concerning sign as the \$600 weekly unemployment benefits soon expire for tens of millions of unemployed Americans," said Glassdoor Senior Economist Daniel Zhao in emailed comments. An estimated 25 million Americans are receiving the extra payments on top of their state unemployment benefits, and it's pumping an additional \$15 billion into the economy, according to The Century Foundation, a progressive nonprofit think tank.

Three arrested in killings of three men who were going fishing in Florida

Three people have been arrested in connection with the shooting deaths of three Florida men who'd set out to go fishing -- killings authorities say came shortly after the suspects encountered one of the victims at a store. Tony "TJ" Wiggins, 26, has been arrested on suspicion of shooting and killing the three men near a lake in the central Florida community of Frostproof on Friday night, Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd said. Wiggins' girlfriend, Mary Whittemore, 27, and his brother, William "Robert" Wiggins, 21, have been arrested on charges of accessory after the fact of a capital felony.

The arrests were announced five days after the killings of three friends -- Damion Tillman, 23, Keven Springfield, 30, and Brandon Rollins, 27 -- the latter of whom called his father and said "help" before his death, Judd said. The three victims were planning to fish Friday night, but a truck carrying the suspects followed them, and TJ Wiggins eventually got out and shot them in a rural area of Frostproof, about a 75-mile drive east of Tampa, Judd said. "When we found these people ... massacred ... we thought, my goodness, what could have happened there. Now we know," Judd told reporters Wednesday. At the crime

scene, sheriff's investigators found a Dollar General bag and receipt dated Friday night, according to a statement from the sheriff's office. Surveillance video showed Damion Tillman making purchases at the store and a clerk told investigators that Tillman said he was going fishing, according to the sheriff's office. Surveillance video showed the suspects in the store and the clerk told investigators the suspects heard Tillman say he was going fishing along with one of the three victims, according to the sheriff's office. On Monday, detectives searched a plot of land where TJ Wiggins, a convicted felon, and Whittemore lived in a travel trailer in Lake Wales, Florida, authorities said.

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भारतीय-अमेरिकन कम्युनिटी द्वारा घोर निंदा

आइएस ने शांति हनुई महिला को अमेरिका ने एट्री देने से किया इंकार

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 PUNJABI DUNIYA Weekly
 Vol. 14 Issue 15 Wednesday 02 Jan to 08 Jan, 2019 www.PUNJABI DUNIYA.com
 Published Weekly from New York

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

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The differing digital journeys of India, China

There is resistance against Chinese dominance. India needs to fix its domestic landscape to take advantage

Over the last two decades, India and China have become significant players in the digital ecospace with profiles that are different but convergent. India may be the world's back office, but its presence in products — software and hardware — is relatively small. China, on the other hand, is big in both domains. On the basis of a back-of-the-envelope calculation, the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of their digital sectors over the past two decades appear roughly comparable: India's digital sector has grown, on average, annually by around 35%, while China has recorded 50%+ growth. However, thanks to compounding of the difference in growth rates over 20 years, the final picture today is different. In 2019, China's digital economy claimed to have crossed \$5 trillion or over a third of the country's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In comparison, India's current digital economy is estimated around \$300 billion, or nearly 12% of the GDP.

China's digital surge has not only reinvented the economy, but has also bolstered the nation's growth rate. In 2019, for instance, its digital sector's 15.5% growth was

the biggest contributor to the national GDP growth of 6.1%. Globally, China's digital economy is second only to the United States (US). Although the US still dominates with 18 companies in top-30 digital companies by market capitalisation (2019), China has seven companies in the list, including Alibaba (\$402 billion), and Tencent (\$398 billion).

Recently, however, there are signs that this lopsided China-India's digital paradigm might be correcting. China's domestic digital economy is getting saturated and its attempt to expand globally is encountering increased resistance. Last month, India banned 59 Chinese apps. The United Kingdom (UK) reversed its decision to allow Huawei to operate 5G telecom system, and, in this, joined a number of western countries uneasy about Chinese digital exports.

In contrast, India's digital economy seems to be getting a tailwind. Over the past three months, Jio, the largest Indian telecom operator, has managed to get Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) of over \$20 billion from 13 global investors for its platforms.

Google has announced its intention to invest \$10 billion in India's digital economy over the next five to seven years. Foxconn, which assembles Apple phones here, intends to ramp up mobile production by investing \$1 billion in India, already the world's second-largest mobile manufacturer. Despite the enormous global economic challenges, the four Indian technology majors have had healthy growth in their turnover during Q2/2020. While these may be early hopeful signs of gains in India's digital journey, we need to acknowledge its strategic importance.

At this juncture, we need to study the Chinese strategy over the last two decades to become a digital superpower. In the late 1990s, China realised the potential of these emerging technologies and leveraged them. Foreign digital companies received permissions to ply their wares in China's huge market, but these were withdrawn soon in a seemingly systematic manner, and the entire domestic digital ecospace reserved for its home-grown entities. Thus, China is the only major economy where Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft and Google (FAAMG) are either absent or remain marginal players.

Their Chinese clones took full advantage of a near-monopoly to grow exponentially. Meanwhile, China invested heavily in digital hardware technologies from chip-making to telecom systems and acquired companies and start-ups abroad. Thousands of Chinese students and researchers went to western technical institutions to specialise in these domains. While many of the pathways China took to become a digital superpower are relevant to us, replicating them has since become more difficult. Having lost China, FAAAM are determined not let go of India. They have also become more possessive about their technologies. On our side, too, the ecosystem has often rendered only tepid support to the home-grown digital companies. Indian IT companies grow despite the government. There is little point in rediscovering the wheel — we should try and leap-frog into the future.

To this end, a strategy leveraging our market size and competence to foster alliances between domestic and foreign digital companies will serve us best. The government can and should make this possible by creating a positive and forward-looking framework and adopt

best global practices, particularly on Intellectual Property Rights, data security, taxation, land acquisition and employment.

A high-powered inter-ministerial entity could be created to supervise the digital sector and accelerate decision-making. Non-resident Indian (NRI) techno-entrepreneurs should be encouraged to lead this synergy, particularly in creating research and development capacity in emerging technologies, clubbed as the Industrial Revolution 4.0. We also need to develop human resources through better academia-industry interface, adopt employment-friendly syllabi and train our workforce. We also need to appreciate that unlike the brick and mortar economy, digital technologies are less beholden to lure of either geo-economics or size. If the country's digital economy soars, it will have comprehensive spin-offs for the Indian economy and society — from faster growth to higher employment generation to greater self-reliance in an area, both critical at present and strategic in the future. These are reasons enough for us to act — particularly in the current challenging economic times.

Undermining Sushant Rajput's tragic death

Interrogate power structures, but don't launch a witch-hunt

Sushant Singh Rajput died by suicide last month. This was tragic. Rajput — a young man from outside the world of cinema — had truly come into his own in the Mumbai film industry, with a range of critically-acclaimed and commercially-successful films. His death sparked an outpouring of grief in the film industry, in his home state of Bihar, and across urban and semi-urban India.

But the tragedy has now taken a somewhat bizarre turn. His death should have triggered a conversation about mental health, and the insecurities that are driving young people to take extreme steps. It should have triggered a conversation

about the structure of the film industry, and the pressures even stars — and Rajput was a star — work under. And yes, it should have triggered a debate about the power matrix in the industry. But what has happened is that, driven by social media, an entire narrative has been constructed about how Rajput was a victim of a nepotistic industry, which only favours its own. Nepotism is a real problem in Bollywood. And that debate must take place. But this narrative, and all kinds of conspiracy theories, have now found their way into the police investigation into Rajput's case. A suicide merits an investigation. But in this case, film reviewers who may have rated Rajput's

films poorly are being called for questioning; producers who may not have done a project with Rajput are being held accountable; talk show hosts who may have joked about Rajput are being blamed; actors who had little to do with Rajput are using it as an opportunity to project themselves as the subaltern battling an entrenched elite. This is not the way structures of power can be interrogated. Instead, it smacks of mob justice. It ignores the complex factors that drive a person to the end. It appears driven by political motivations. And it undermines Rajput's life, legacy, and tragic death.



India's regional challenge

China and nationalism have made it more complex for Delhi

Last week, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi offered his explanation on why the Chinese decided to be aggressive at the border at this juncture. Among other reasons, he attributed this to the failure of the Narendra Modi government's foreign policy, in particular, when it comes to the neighbourhood. External affairs minister S Jaishankar countered Mr Gandhi — and on the neighbourhood, listed out India's engagement with smaller countries, the development assistance being offered, and landmark deals. Between the political black-and-white worldview — where Mr Gandhi sees a failure in India's handling of the neighbourhood, and Mr

Jaishankar sees success — lies a complex truth. India is more invested in the neighbourhood than it has been, but it has also become more challenging for New Delhi to secure its interests in the region. This is due to two factors. The first reason is the increased presence of China. Beijing has decided to engage with political parties, official institutions, media, businesses, and societies in South Asia — with the objective of increasing its control, and eroding Indian influence. India has historic advantages of connectivity, people-to-people linkages, and cultural convergence. But it lacks the resources, single-minded determination, and is often caught between conflicting

objectives and ad-hoc policymaking, which makes meeting the China challenge more difficult. The second reason is the nature of democratic contestation in the neighbourhood. Given India's size and role in the domestic politics of Nepal, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka, there is a "nationalist" constituency in each of these countries that earns political advantage by being seen as adversarial to India. These domestic constituencies then become a natural, receptive partner for China. These twin challenges affect the policy matrix in Delhi. The government has sought to break out of this challenge by taking a firm position against hostile



governments and encouraging friendly parties which have come to power (Maldives), working with supposedly antagonistic partners to neutralise their hostility (KP Oli in Nepal, the Rajapaksas in Sri Lanka), or backing its allies (the Awami League in Bangladesh). But these methods are not foolproof, and have thrown mixed results, and will be a challenge for New Delhi. As the neighbourhood gets more complex, India's government and Opposition should develop a bipartisan approach. Mr Gandhi and Mr Jaishankar should go offline, and have a chat about these complexities.

US move to shut China's Houston consulate draws questions about political motives

The US demand Wednesday that China shut its Houston consulate within 72 hours triggered Chinese threats of retaliation, the latest escalation between the two nations as the Trump administration intensifies its campaign against Beijing in the run-up to November's elections.

Deputy Secretary of State Steve Biegun pointed Wednesday to "a growing number of disputes" between the US and China over Beijing's "increasingly hardline and aggressive actions" that have led the administration to take action, including closing the consulate in Houston.

Lawmakers, former officials and experts said strong pushback is needed to counter China's cyber and industrial espionage, its human rights abuses in Hong Kong and Xinjiang and aggressive expansion in the South China Sea -- but some suggested the Houston consulate was a politically driven and very carefully calibrated target, one chosen to create the appearance of toughness while avoiding the risk of a major clash.

White House officials have privately outlined a strategy of getting tough on Beijing to bolster President Donald Trump's sagging poll numbers before the election, partly to deflect blame for the disastrous and economically damaging White House response to the coronavirus pandemic, but also to return to economic nationalism themes that carried Trump to victory in 2016.

'Red meat' for the base

Jeff Moon, a former assistant US trade representative for China, noted the State Department said the Houston order was a response to Chinese intellectual property theft and said that raised questions about why only one consulate

was targeted.

If that were the real reason, the US would close the San Francisco consulate, which covers Silicon Valley," said Moon, who was among those who suggested politics might be at work. "This action is red meat for Trump supporters who are eager to retaliate against China and divert attention from Trump's disastrous Covid-19 policy."

US State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortogus said the consulate was directed to close "in order to protect American intellectual property and Americans' private information," but did not immediately provide additional details of what prompted the closure. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who is scheduled to give a speech on China Thursday and just completed a trip in Europe to urge a tougher stance against Beijing, declined to offer details about the consulate decision. The State Department didn't respond to requests for further explanation.

Sen. Angus King, an independent of Maine who caucuses with Democrats, told CNN's John Berman on "New Day" Wednesday that he was not aware of any "recent intelligence of particular Chinese activities, either with regard to our elections, or the whole confrontation between our two countries -- theft of intellectual property" that may have driven the decision.

"There certainly is a good reason to confront China. My concern is, escalating this tension, is it really about confronting China, or does it have something to do with an election in four months?" King, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said.

A former official who left the Trump

administration last year said that Trump often pushed back on advisers who urged him to impose tougher punitive measures on China out of concern that it would jeopardize trade negotiations.

Even so, as Covid-19 began devastating public and economic health in the US, the President's Republican allies and influential White House staff, including Jared Kushner, began arguing that one way to energize the President's political base is by blasting China over its failure to stem the spread of the disease early on, administration officials and three people familiar with Kushner's thinking have told CNN.

Moon, who now runs China Moon Strategies, a consultancy on US-China trade and economic relations, said targeting the Houston consulate was a way for the President to thread the needle between appearing tough yet not taking on much risk.

The US and Chinese governments informally pair their consulates, with China's Houston facility informally linked to the US consulate in Wuhan. Moon noted that the Wuhan consulate reportedly remains closed due to coronavirus, "so China could 'close' and escalate the diplomatic war as little as possible."

A 'vast network of spies'

On Wednesday, Biegun told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that Trump moved to close the consulate because of increasing aggression by China.

Biegun pointed to "commercial espionage and intellectual property theft from American companies; unequal treatment of our diplomats, businesses, NGOs, and journalists by Chinese authorities; and abuse of the United

States' academic freedom and welcoming posture toward international students to steal sensitive technology and research from our universities in order to advance the PRC's military capabilities."

"It is these factors which led the President to direct a number of actions in response, including yesterday's notification to the PRC that we've withdrawn our consent for the PRC to operate its consulate in Houston, Texas," he said.

On Wednesday, Trump said "it's always possible" that he will order more Chinese consulates closed, adding that US officials thought there was a fire at the Houston consulate but apparently "they were burning documents."

Republican Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida, the acting chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, wrote on Twitter Wednesday that closing the Houston consulate "needed to happen," and claimed it is a "central node of the Communist Party's vast network of spies."

Asked about that allegation, a current US intelligence official agreed, telling CNN that "of course it was" used for spying. "We've been watching them for a while," they said. That official declined to comment on why the decision was taken now to close the Houston consulate. The Justice Department's top national security official said the closure was unrelated to federal charges unsealed Tuesday against two Chinese hackers for a 10-year campaign to steal intellectual property from hundreds of businesses across the globe, including recently from four American companies researching the coronavirus.

Decoding the crisis in the Congress

This isn't about Rajasthan — just as what happened in March wasn't about Madhya Pradesh.

The crisis in the Rajasthan unit of the Congress — it is still unclear how things will play out — is actually symptomatic of the larger crisis in the party.

It is a crisis that has been in the making a long time — but when a party is in power, it is possible to paper over the cracks and keep going, and the Congress was in power for 55 of the 67 years between 1947 and 2014.

When a party is in power, in the Centre, and also in some states (and the Congress was in power in a lot of states in its glory years), leadership is often just about maintaining the status quo. Managing people is easy because there are opportunities aplenty to accommodate their ambitions. But the Congress hasn't been in power since 2014, and it has been a fading force in Indian politics since the mid-1990s — despite a surprise lease-of-life in 2004 and a brief blaze of (former) glory in 2009.

Even as it has found itself incapable of presenting a compelling counter-narrative to that of the Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the party has been fractured from within by once-papered over cracks.

Like many problems in organisations, the Congress' issues start at the very top. Sonia Gandhi retreated after the 2014 Lok Sabha debacle (the party won 44 seats), but it took over three years for her anointed heir Rahul Gandhi to take charge as Congress president. He

introduced his own ideas, created a team which had a mix of older and younger leaders, and ran energetic poll campaigns. But with the Lok Sabha defeat in 2019 (52 seats), he resigned, and appeared to blame everyone but himself. He suggested that neither he nor anyone from the Nehru-Gandhi family would take charge — but Sonia Gandhi returned as interim chief shortly after. There has been no effort by the party to appoint a new president — despite there being several worthy candidates. The party could have opted for age and experience, or youth and energy.

It is believed that Sonia Gandhi and some of her loyalists want Rahul Gandhi to return. And it is believed that he is reluctant. And there things stand — in limbo. No one in the party is sure of what it should do now to revive itself as the BJP marches on, even managing to effect a smooth transition of leadership from one all-powerful party chief to the next who is now clearly coming into his own.

To revive, though, the party has to look within — and that is something the Congress has shown an unwillingness to do. After its loss in 2014, it set up a committee chaired by former defence minister AK Antony, but did nothing with the report that it submitted. After its loss in 2019, the party didn't even bother to go through the motions of setting up a committee. And so, it has been business-as-usual. There

has neither been any significant national-level restructuring of the Congress organisation nor a recalibration of its ideological framework. In the absence of the two, many of the party's younger leaders are beginning to ask: What next? This is a generational leadership problem that is common in the world of business — companies that stop growing or which become unprofitable find it difficult to meet the aspirations of many of their younger leaders. Rahul Gandhi's ascent to the presidency of the party seemed to signal a generational change in the Congress. But with his resignation, the senior leaders — the Old Guard in popular parlance — have returned, consolidating their control over the levers of power. Many of these senior leaders are competent, but the future of a party that needs to reinvent itself cannot be outsourced to those who are in their 70s.

The old-young divide itself is a bit of a misnomer. Many of the younger faces are in their 40s and early 50s, and have already spent two decades or more in politics. Yet, they are still being told to "wait for their turn".

Still worse, based on what happened in Madhya Pradesh in March and is happening Rajasthan now, the top leadership of the party, the Gandhis, seem loath to intervene when a young leader, even one from the inner circle, expresses disquiet at what is happening. No

one wants to mediate till it is too late, and the party lacks both platforms for grievance redressal and mechanisms for conflict resolution.

Their ambitions, frowned upon, their popular appeal, discounted, and their possible, future, role in reviving the party, not taken into account, many of these young leaders simply choose to leave. Again, the BJP has done better on this front, although what can be said of the Congress in power can also be said of it — that there are enough opportunities to go around.

The reason why the Congress' internal issues matter to the country at large is because they are

preventing the party from doing its job — as the primary Opposition party. A legitimate case can be made against the government's management of Covid-19, the economy, or even the China issue. But besides perfunctory statements, the Congress is unable to mount this case. And till it can do that, voters will not repose faith in the party — be it in 2024 or 2029.

Over 110 million voters backed the Congress in 2019. The party owes it to its voters, to its own rich legacy, and most importantly, to Indian democracy, to get its act together. A first step may be to hold elections to its working committee, the highest decision-making body.

How PM Modi scores on political communication

He spoke about people throwing garbage on roads and spitting in the open on August 15, 2014. His appeal to people to take to yoga to make health a priority now has made the world follow suit with June 21 being celebrated as World Yoga Day. His accounts have also showcased examples of courage and exemplary citizenship. He has recognised unsung talent, and amplified stories of grit and innovation that had so far remained untold. Finally, he has used technology to ensure peace and harmony. The sheer size of the country and the magnitude of its population opens the room for many fissures and conflicts. But when a leader keeps the channel of communication with his people open, resolutions can be found quickly. It is not just Twitter. To achieve these objectives, there is hardly any

social media platform which hasn't been put to use by the PM. To take his voice deeper into the hinterland of India, Modi took to the radio. With 66 episodes till June 28, Mann Ki Baat is a programme people look forward to every last Sunday of the month. From the economy to Swachh Bharat, from health and spirituality to beating the fear of exams, Modi has spoken his heart out to people and invited citizen participation. With the responsibility to govern a country that prides itself as the world's largest democracy, the fact that the PM is committed to communicating with citizens shows his democratic commitment and skills. The Twitter milestone is thus just a glimpse of what Modi's leadership has meant in the past six years.

Northeast has potential to become India's growth engine: PM Narendra Modi

"The Northeast has the potential to become the growth engine of the country. Day by day my faith is getting deeper because peace is now being established in the entire region. The mantra of peace, progress and prosperity is echoing in the Northeast," the Prime Minister said.

"While blockades in Manipur have become a part of history, Assam has witnessed a phase of violence for decades. In Tripura and Mizoram too, youth have abandoned the path of violence. Now Bru-Reang refugees are moving towards a better life," he said.

The Prime Minister said modern infrastructure is being built in the Northeast emphasising that connectivity in the region is important, not for only ease of living, but also for achieving the goal for self-reliant India.

He said that tourism potential of the region, including Manipur, is still unexplored.

"Natural and cultural diversity of the Northeast is a great symbol of cultural strength. In such a situation, tourism also gets a lot of strength when modern infrastructure is built. Tourism potential of Northeast, including Manipur, is still unexplored," he said.

"Connectivity of Northeast is important for ease of living of people here. But it is also

substantial for 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'. On one hand, it strengthens our social and trade relations with Myanmar, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, while also strengthening India's Act East Policy," he said.

The Prime Minister said that India's Northeast, in a way, is the gateway to our ancient cultural relationships with East Asia and the future of trade, travel and tourism.

"With this thinking, there is a constant emphasis on connectivity-related infrastructure in the entire Northeast, including Manipur. Modern infrastructure is being laid in the Northeast along with roadways, highways, airways, waterways and i-ways as well as gas pipelines. Thousands of crores of rupees have been invested in the infrastructure of the region in the last six years," he said.

"Efforts have been made to connect the four capitals of the Northeastern states, 2 lanes to the district headquarters and all-weather road to the villages. Under this, about 3,000 kilometres of roads have also been prepared and projects are going on for about 6,000 kilometres," he said.

Asserting that there is a huge change in the area of rail connectivity in the region, the Prime Minister said that the work of connecting the

capitals of every state of the Northeast with a good rail network is going on at a rapid pace. He highlighted that there are about 13 operational airports in the Northeast today. "To expand the existing airports in the region, including Imphal Airport, more than Rs 3,000 crores are being spent to build modern facilities there," Modi added.

"Another major work is happening for the Northeast, in the area of inland waterways. Work is now underway on more than 20 national waterways. In the future, connectivity here will not be limited to the Siliguri corridor," he said.

"Now clusters are being developed for value addition and marketing in local products under the self-reliant India campaign. In these clusters, all the facilities will be given to agro startups and other industries.

The Prime Minister said that the region has the potential to replace India's bamboo import with local production. "There is such a huge demand for incense sticks in the country. But for this also, we import bamboo worth billions of crores of rupees. A lot of work is being done in the country to change this situation," he said. Hundreds of crores of rupees are being invested under

the National Bamboo Mission for bamboo farmers, artists associated with handicrafts and other facilities. This will benefit the youth of the region, the startups here," he said.

The Prime Minister said that many institutes are now being built in the region for health, education, skill development, start-ups and other training. "With the formation of sports universities and world-class stadiums, Manipur is becoming a major hub for the country's sports talent," he said. The Prime Minister said that ease of living is the right of everyone and his government is doing a lot of work in this direction. He said that the whole of India, including Manipur, is free from open defecation. The Prime Minister said that almost every family in the country is connected with electricity. "Today LPG gas has reached the kitchen of the poorest of the poor. Every village is being connected by a good road. Good homes are being provided to every poor homeless. There was a big shortage of clean water, so to complete it, work is also going on on the mission mode," he said.

Rajasthan crisis explained in 10 point From Pilot, Gehlot to ED and Malinga

Here's a recap of Rajasthan political crisis in 10 points:

1. LATEST IN SUPREME COURT

In what could be a dampener, even if momentary, for the Gehlot camp, the Supreme Court refused to order a stay on the Rajasthan High Court order that restrained Assembly Speaker CP Joshi from disqualifying Sachin Pilot and 18 other Congress leaders before Friday. Sachin Pilot too filed a caveat seeking that no ex parte ruling be pronounced by the Supreme Court.

2. SPEAKER IN A HURRY

Appearing for Joshi in the Supreme Court, senior Congress leader and lawyer Kapil Sibal wanted the top court bench to "suspend the order" directing the Speaker not to disqualify the MLAs before Friday. The Supreme Court responded by saying the high court order does not use the word "direction" but "request" while asking the Speaker to wait till July 24.

3. PILOT SLOWING IT DOWN

Sachin Pilot, meanwhile, told the court that the rebel MLAs have expressed dissent within the party. His point might have been taken well by the Supreme Court as Justice Arun Mishra had a poser to the Speaker: "Can a person elected by people not express his dissent...Voice of dissent cannot be suppressed. In a democracy, can somebody be shut down like this?"

4. GEHLOT PLANS 'FINAL' MOVE

Gehlot is holding meetings with ministers and Congress party leaders to weigh his options and

challenge Sachin Pilot camp to a final political duel. Till now, Pilot camp has countered the disqualification notice by asserting that the action of rebel MLAs is not defection but dissent against CM Gehlot.

The rebel camp also challenged the whip to attend the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) meet saying this constitutional tool can only be used in the case of voting on the floor of the house. By convening assembly session and putting a bill on vote, Gehlot camp will be throwing "make or break" bait to the Pilot camp.

5. BACKROOM PLAYERS

The political battle in Rajasthan involves many backroom players. The BJP is one of them. The alleged involvement of a Union minister and the incidental raids by central agencies make the Narendra Modi government another player in the political slugfest in Rajasthan.

Gehlot made it official by shooting off a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday. Gehlot alleged that Union Minister and the BJP leader from Rajasthan Gajendra Shekhawat is involved in horse-trading to topple his government in the state.

6. UNION MINISTER IN 'DOCK'

Back in Rajasthan, the Gehlot administration has already registered a case against Shekhawat. An FIR has been registered against him in connection with the alleged attempt to topple the Gehlot

government. To top this up, a Rajasthan court on Tuesday directed the police to probe Shekhawat's role in an alleged Rs 900 crore Sanjivani Credit Cooperative Society scam.

7. THE SOG CONNECTION

This scam is being probed by the same Special Operation Group (SOG) of the Rajasthan Police which is probing the alleged attempt to topple the Gehlot government and which earlier served summons to Sachin Pilot when he was still the deputy chief minister of the state.

The SOG has been investigating the credit cooperative society scam since last year and a case was registered in August 2019. Shekhawat's name was not originally mentioned in the chargesheet filed by the SOG.

8. HEAT TURNS ON GEHLOT SENIOR

There is another theatre where the Rajasthan political drama is being played out. Ashok Gehlot's elder brother Agrasen Gehlot has come on the radar of the Enforcement Directorate (ED). Raids were conducted at 13 places across four states -- Rajasthan, Gujarat, Delhi and West Bengal -- in connection with an alleged corruption case.

Agrasen Gehlot with business interests in the farm sector is accused of exporting subsidised fertilisers during 2007-09. Subsidised fertilisers are meant

for Indian farmers and cannot be exported.

9. THE UPA LINK

Agrasen Gehlot's firm, Anupam Krishi allegedly exported fertiliser, Muriate of Potash (MoP), to Malaysia and Singapore and claimed a subsidy worth Rs 60 crore when the UPA government was in power.

10. BACK TO SACHIN PILOT

Now, let's go back to the protagonist of Rajasthan's political drama, Sachin Pilot. The rebel Congress leader is facing a serious possibility of being disqualified by Speaker CP Joshi, who is a Congress MLA. Joshi has to decide on a notice of disqualification against Pilot and 18

Congress MLAs.

The Congress has alleged they all have engaged in anti-party activities, and colluded with the BJP to topple the Gehlot government. As evidence, the Gehlot camp has spoken of audio tapes, whose admissibility remains unclear.

But a Congress MLA, Girraj Singh Malinga, came forward as some sort of witness to allege that Sachin Pilot offered him Rs 35 crore as bribe to side with the rebels and join the BJP. Sachin Pilot has now sent a legal notice to Malinga seeking Re 1 as damages and a written public apology from him for leveling false allegation.

A million cases, and counting

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.

Trump right to shut Chinese consulate in Houston-it was a massive spying operation

Chinese surveillance and influence operations can be pointed to different ends. Some influence agents are tasked with swaying members of Congress as well as state and local politicians under the auspices of diplomatic relations. Others steal commercial secrets from defense contractors or in important sectors like advanced manufacturing. The United States has tried to work productively with China to reduce these tactics and mend relations. For example, in 2015, both of our governments agreed to stop using their intelligence services to steal technology for commercial gain. That agreement lasted just weeks, and the Trump administration made clear to Beijing that Americans would not allow China's underhanded treachery by indicting three Chinese government-affiliated hackers for stealing economic secrets in 2017. The message went unheeded. China's exploitation of American companies continued relentlessly. Just this week, the Justice Department accused two Chinese hackers working for Beijing's spy service of trying to steal information pertaining to the creation of a COVID-19 vaccine. By closing the Houston consulate, the United States signaled the status quo between the United States and China is unacceptable.

Overcome the malaise of defection

What is the solution? The common citizen may be forgiven in saying "Plague upon all your houses" to all stakeholders in such a pessimistic scenario. Idealistic lectures and sermons, by commissions/ committees or even the SC, is not going to change the nature of the beast, which is actuated by personal, pecuniary and partisan considerations. But there is a comprehensive solution.

One, we should abolish all artificial distinctions which, under the 10th Schedule, earlier had endless wrangles between defection and split, and the later amendment, which now legitimises defections if you are able to induce two-thirds to join you. The 10th Schedule should be replaced with a simple provision itemising all activities, culled from established SC cases, both inside the House and outside it, which will automatically disqualify you and force you to be re-elected in case of anti-party activities.

Two, no one who resigns or is disqualified under this new listing, should be allowed to be a minister or corporation post holder, for six months or a year even after re-election. It is instructive to go back to a parliamentary standing committee, which had observed: "...there is possibility for defection ..as the defectors can be accommodated in the

Council of Ministers through the other route i.e., by offering a seat in Rajya Sabha/Upper House in the States. Stringent law, which debars defectors who later become Members of the Rajya Sabha to get the post of Ministership, is required."

Three, we should start electing speakers, as in the old British tradition, by all or majority of parties unanimously selecting an appropriate person before each general election as presiding officer and not putting up a candidate against such a pre-selected speaker. The moral and political authority of such a person will be humongous.

Four, the governor should be constitutionally and explicitly barred from anything but a ceremonial role in the legislature to prevent meddling in the running of the House and the government.

British administrator John Owen once said, "Be killing sin or it will be killing you." The time has come to kill this constitutional sin. The Indian experience of the dynamics of defection and anti-party activities validates William Shakespeare's negative recognition of pessimistic reality: "Some rise by sin, and some by virtue fall." India's constitutional democracy must put right this upside-down balance.

Let's talk about Kanye West's damaging and inaccurate claims about Harriet Tubman

West's inaccurate commentary on Tubman's contributions evidence a gap in not only his, but also many Americans' knowledge of Black history, which tends to be piecemeal and incorrect because many details of Black history are not integrated into school curricula -- for White and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) students alike. For instance, many are aware of the Tuskegee study conducted from 1932 to 1972 by the US Public Health Service, but

mistakenly believe that Black men were injected with syphilis by the government, rather than having treatment withheld. Many are familiar with the iconography of the Black Panthers, but know little about their contributions to food justice, establishment of health clinics, and educational programs in collaboration with other marginalized communities. I urge people who are seeking knowledge to read history books and engage in curricula that meaningfully

address the Underground Railroad, the Civil War, Reconstruction and other aspects of history that BIPOC individuals and communities have contributed. We also have access to public intellectuals. Celebrities can show respect to knowledge generators -- educators, scholars, journalists and artists -- by accessing them, engaging critically with their work and encouraging others to do the same. Erica Armstrong Dunbar's "She Came to Slay: The Life and Times of Harriet

Tubman" is 176 pages of carefully researched information about one of America's most heroic women; surely her contribution to history is worth taking the time to read and interpret. Most importantly, we can use this moment to model to our peers and the next generation: let's move from soundbites and posts, to deep engagement with the questions of our history and sociopolitical reality, use social media to share what we've learned -- and inform others of how we filled our knowledge gaps.

India's "Vaccine Games" On Covid-19 Come At Great Risk

These trials are to be conducted in 12 institutions - how some of these were chosen remains a mystery. As this article indicates, many of these institutions have not received approval from their ethics committees whose job is to ascertain whether the institution is equipped to do the trials (e.g. detailed monitoring, emergency response to adverse reaction) or not; also, in some of the institutions, the ethics committees are less than a year old!

There are many deeper issues hidden in the background of this situation. First is the issue of due diligence. A vaccine trial involves the administering of something alien into the bodies of volunteers. Despite all the prior work there always remain chances of short and long-term

adverse reactions. Some of these can be unexpected and some can be severe. In some cases, there are chances that the vaccine can actually worsen the disease (vaccine-enhanced disease). Therefore, Phase II trials are absolutely necessary to determine vaccine safety. Unknown efficacy - the kind that is determined from Phase III trials - can lead to a situation where many vaccinated people may just end up being bearers of a false anti-viral shield, and actually remain at high risk of getting infected. As the Indian Academy of Science statement said, "The Academy strongly believes that any hasty solution that may compromise rigorous scientific processes and standards will likely have long-term adverse impacts of unforeseen magnitude on

citizens of India."

Second, episodes of this kind raise doubts about the autonomy of professional public agencies. Specific agencies are then looked upon as politically partisan, and not professional. Their credibility assessment now passes through the prism of political orientation as well. This also has international repercussions and can create impressions that we are not serious players in science. The scientific community becomes subject to scorn and derision.

Third, there is the much larger issue of damage to the credibility of scientific agencies and science in general. Episodes like this tend to engender impressions that scientific bodies "say anything", are unreliable and

therefore, it is not necessary to believe or follow what they recommend. It can be expected that when the declared deadline for public release of the vaccine is missed, many people will develop a disdain for official pronouncements. This is very dangerous in a situation where recommendations of public health agencies must be followed in order for individuals to not get infected and the chain of infection to be brought under control. So, then, why wear masks or wash hands or do social distancing, just because some agency says so? It would be the last straw on the camel's back if important agencies were to lose credibility. Lastly, in today's world, so much "learning" happens through the nonsense

that pervades social media and messaging platforms (the infodemic about Covid-19 cures, for instance). Expertise - and science - is devalued every now and then, when significant sections of the population believe that there is no one truth, it is my truth versus someone else's, so what is so special about theirs? Low-quality research papers in prestigious journals - retracted after publication, and bizarre statements made by powerful Presidents about Covid-19 cures, have muddied the waters enough. There is a need to be extremely careful about what we publish and what we say.

Science cannot be done by fiat because the laws of biology, physics, chemistry - and mathematics - are not subject to human desires.

India must overcome the pandemic, security threat

India has to prepare itself for the eventuality of a bio-terror attack even though that prospect seems distant at the moment. We have to strengthen our health services and make them easily accessible. The good news is that the Finance Commission, headed by NK Singh, has started preparing a proposal to increase health expenditure to 2.1% of the Gross Domestic Product in the next five years. Now it is the turn of the state governments.

On the external front, the recent incursions on our borders by the Chinese army tell us two things. The first is that our defence system is not as effective as it should be. Second, Indians easily forget our defeats. The generation which grew up in the 1960s was apprehensive about China in the early stages. The defeat of 1962 strengthened this sentiment. What happened in Galwan Valley this time has shown that even though India is far more powerful today than it was in 1962, it still falls short of the mark. To change this, it is

necessary to strengthen the economy. Most strategic successes in the world have been buttressed by economic successes. An aggressive China is more proud of its economy than it is of its army. Beijing's ruling class seems to feel that the time has come to overpower, not just its immediate neighbours, but even take on the United States (US).

India needs to reduce its economic dependence on China. Just as the wounds of the 1962 war eventually healed, so will the scars of Galwan. We have to look inward at our traditional industries to strengthen our economy. After the coronavirus crisis, immigration laws will be made more stringent across the world. It may result in the flight of talent to greener pastures. This means that India needs to provide avenues for talent to flourish internally. It was in order to dominate the erstwhile Soviet Union in the 1980s that the

US, and other western countries made China the world's manufacturing hub. Today China and Russia together have become a threat to many countries in the West. This provides an opportunity for India

to position itself as an attractive destination for business and services. China's paramount leader Deng Xiaoping did this in the 1980s. If China is the world's factory, then we can become the world's office, in

this era of work-from-home. If we are able to do so, we, the descendants of the Indus civilisation, will create a new history. We will have turned natural disasters and invasions into opportunities.

Covid: The State-citizen trust deficit

Newspapers have daily reports of Covid-19 patients being shunned by communities they live in and even by health workers, who in turn are victims of stigma. Indian politics has only exacerbated this. The blaming of one community in the Tablighi Jamaat incident set the stage for a discourse on Covid-19 that blames patients rather than emphasises the provision of care. Two, India's failed health system which has long broken any semblance of trust that citizens may have with its ability to provide affordable and quality care. Ironically, it is the informal private market that most of India relies upon. Yet, when it comes to Covid-19, from testing to the provision of care, it is the government that is now in charge. This is necessary. Infectious diseases have large externalities (and costs on the poor), which require governmental intervention. But the lack of trust in the government risks driving the epidemic underground as people may not be willing to enter the government system. This is evidenced by the

fact that in cities such as Delhi, one decision that changed the game was a shift in strategy from government to home isolation for quarantine and mild cases.

The answer to this challenge does not lie in getting the government out of the way. It simply can't exit. Rather, the focus needs to shift to building trust in the public health system. The repeated use of orders and coercion to change behaviour, combined with the continued lack of transparency in data and decision-making at the national and state level (why for instance, has West Bengal chose to undergo a two-day-a-week lockdown while Bihar is in a month-long lockdown?) are significant barriers to building trust. This needs to change. At the same time, proactive efforts need to be made to reach out credibly to communities. Where the government did this, in Dharavi for instance, it has been effective. But these successes need to be understood in the context of the enormity of this trust deficit.

A Very Dangerous Game

US Congress - Act now. Extend unemployment benefits for struggling workers

The week is drawing to a close without a new coronavirus relief package from Washington. The CARES Act sailed through Congress in March with bipartisan support for an extra \$600 per week for anyone collecting unemployment. But those payments are about to stop, and Republicans, who control the Senate and White House, are balking at an extension. That's bad news for laid-off workers in Massachusetts, which has the nation's highest unemployment rate. The state's congressional delegation is worried about benefits expiring, unless there's a deal soon.

Republicans are playing a very dangerous game with Americans' lives," said Rep. Katherine Clark, vice chair of the House Democratic Caucus. "Twenty million Americans will see their weekly income fall by half if the Republicans allow these unemployment benefits to expire." No state would be hit harder than Massachusetts, with its 17.4% unemployment rate — more than 6 points higher than the national average. Republicans correctly



point out that the extra \$600 per week allows some people to collect more than they made when working. Rep. Lori Trahan, a Lowell Democrat, said her party may be open to a compromise that lowers the payment. "Absolutely we should be having that discussion," she said. "I'm open to tweaks, but letting the benefit expire or dwindling it down to a place where it's no benefit at all will have long-lasting and devastating

effects." Trahan said she's concerned about effects on the Massachusetts economy and public health. Laid-off workers won't be left with nothing if the extra payments run out. They'd still get the state's standard unemployment benefit, which amounts to about half of their regular earnings. Rep. Stephen Lynch, a South Boston Democrat, said they shouldn't have to settle for that. "I'm optimistic" about a deal with

Republicans, Lynch said. "I think that because of the way some of these Southern states are now lit up with coronavirus, they realize that their constituents are in a difficult position. So, I think that's helping the argument over in the Senate." Lynch is betting lawmakers from red states will want to send extra help to their own communities, especially with fall elections approaching. And a new federal relief package would also benefit unemployed workers in Massachusetts. Rep. Joe Kennedy, the Newton Democrat challenging Sen. Ed Markey, said in a statement that "the Senate must take up the HEROES Act," referring to a bill House Democrats passed two months ago that would have paid the extra \$600 unemployment benefit through the end of January. The bill "not only provides the much-needed cash assistance to help hardworking American families get through these times," Kennedy added, "but it also brings in the money states need for testing, tracing and more to ensure we can fight off this pandemic."

Delegation Worries Unemployment Benefits May Expire

Next week, thousands of North Carolinians who are out of work due to COVID-19 will see a drastic reduction in their unemployment benefits despite this pandemic being far from over.

The additional \$600 a week unemployed workers have received from the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation program has been a lifeline for struggling families and communities over these past few months.

But unless the federal government acts quickly, these benefits will expire this weekend and many people will be without money they need to pay bills and provide for their families. I am urging Congress to do the right thing for the health of our families and the health of our economy by extending this critical program.

The people who rely on these benefits are out of work through no fault of their own. We've seen COVID-19 create the highest unemployment since World War II and completely change our way of life. But it hasn't changed the fact that people still need to pay their rent, put food on the table and make ends meet.

The federal government agreed to send an additional \$600 to unemployed workers back in March. It's irresponsible for Congress and



the president to stop providing this critical support now when the virus still is spreading rapidly and states, especially in the South, are seeing record high case counts. Hospitals and ICU beds are full in Florida and Texas, and the virus is worse than it was in March and April. North Carolina still has hospital capacity, but we know how quickly that could change. It's not safe for some people to go back to work and many don't have jobs to return to yet. Benefits from the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation program have not

only helped people pay their bills — they've been critical to the health of our local businesses when unemployed people use their benefits to put money into the economy by purchasing food, paying rent and buying other necessities. So far, between the state and federal benefits, North Carolina has paid over 815,000 people more than \$6.2 billion dollars here in our state. And this spring, my administration took executive action to make sure these benefits were accessible to more

furloughed North Carolinians. This funding has a multiplier effect on our communities, going from families' pockets back into local small businesses, which helps keep our economy afloat. If these benefits are cut off, it will hurt the unemployed as well as our local economies. This extra \$600 has been particularly important in North Carolina. Several years ago, our state legislature slashed unemployment insurance benefits to one of the lowest in the nation and made them available for only 12 weeks. By comparison, a South Carolinian can receive benefits for up to 20 weeks and a Virginian for up to 26 weeks. Legislators had the opportunity to change this during their last session but did not. I urge our legislature to re-evaluate our state's own unemployment compensation when they return. But, right now, North Carolinians need immediate action from Congress and the president. For months, we have asked people to do their part to fight this virus — wear masks, set aside family traditions, become homeschool teachers overnight. Now it's time for Washington to do its part and support the people and families who have made these sacrifices.

GOP struggles with overhaul of unemployment system, complicating negotiations over \$1 trillion stimulus

The temporary \$600 weekly benefit expires next week, and Republicans are seeking a way to scale it back

By Jeff Stein and Erica Werner, Courtesy The Washington Post

With days to go before enhanced jobless benefits expire, the White House and Senate Republicans are struggling to design a way to scale back the program without overwhelming state unemployment agencies and imperiling aid to more than 20 million Americans. The hangup has led to the surprising delay in the introduction of the GOP's \$1 trillion stimulus package. Administration officials and GOP lawmakers have said they want to cut but not outright eliminate enhanced federal unemployment benefits, but the final shape of the plan remains in flux. The White House and Senate Republicans are now racing to find a solution, hoping to unveil their joint plan early next week, just a few days before the \$600 weekly federal payment runs out. "We realize there are a lot of hard-working Americans because of covid [who] still won't have jobs," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told reporters on Thursday. Typically, state unemployment pays about 45 percent of a worker's prior wages. In March, Congress approved a \$600-per-week emergency bonus for every unemployed worker on top of that traditional payment, funneling hundreds of billions of dollars to newly jobless Americans as the novel coronavirus pandemic hit the country.

That federal benefit, currently being received by more than 20 million people, is set to expire at the end of this month. And it comes at a time when a



federal eviction moratorium is also ending, a dynamic that could put enormous pressure on cash-strapped families.

In practice, the jobless benefit lapse means that millions of workers are seeing their last enhanced benefit payment this week. In recent days, senior congressional Republicans and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin have discussed replacing this universal federal bonus with one tied to workers' income before their job was lost. Instead of sending a \$600-per-week bonus to every unemployed person, under this plan the federal government would provide a bonus amounting to about half of the existing state bonus, according to three senior GOP officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe fast-moving and internal deliberations. Mnuchin and President Trump have said publicly that they want to have the new payments replace

roughly "70 percent" of a worker's prior income. This would represent a combination of the nearly 50 percent state contribution of a worker's prior income plus an additional 25 percent kicked in by the federal government. Republican lawmakers have discussed extending the flat payment at about \$200-per-week instead of \$600 to give the states time to adjust to the new formula and system.

"We are going to extend it on the basis of wage replacement — it's approximately at 70 percent of wage replacement," Mnuchin told reporters on Thursday about the GOP's proposed plan. Other leading Republican lawmakers have argued for cutting the \$600-per-week bonus down to \$200-per-week, these people said, with one possibility being that this amount slowly phases out over time. These GOP officials have insisted that targeted wage replacement could prove too difficult for the states to implement.

One Senate Republican aide close to the negotiations, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal matters, said that a \$200 flat payment represented the party's "default" position, with additional funding included to help states upgrade their unemployment systems. The aide downplayed the odds of the GOP approving the more complicated replacement instead of the \$200-per-week extension. The issue has helped delay the introduction of the \$1 trillion stimulus package Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) had planned to release on Thursday. Republicans debated last-minute changes to the unemployment insurance section of the proposal, according to the three people aware of the deliberations.

The legislation is now expected to be released on Monday, a delay that has prompted scorching criticism from

congressional Democrats who have been demanding action for months. Congress has not passed any coronavirus relief legislation since approving four bipartisan bills in March and April that pumped around \$3 trillion into the economy. McConnell wanted to wait and see how the unemployment benefits and other programs approved in that unprecedented stimulus effort played out before taking additional action. "This weekend, millions of Americans will lose their unemployment insurance, will be at risk of being evicted from their homes, and could be laid off by state and local government, and there is only one reason: Republicans have been dithering for months while America's crisis deepens," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) said in a joint statement Friday.

'A very dark feeling': Hundreds camp out in Oklahoma unemployment lines Workers are pushed to the brink as they continue to wait for delayed unemployment payments

If adopted, the new unemployment plan could complicate negotiations with congressional Democrats, who favor extending the \$600 weekly payment through January. And it's unclear if balky state processing systems would have the bandwidth to implement a complicated new formula on such short notice. "We're dealing with the mechanical issues associated with that," Mnuchin told reporters about the wage replacement plan.

Congress set for brawl as unemployment cliff looms

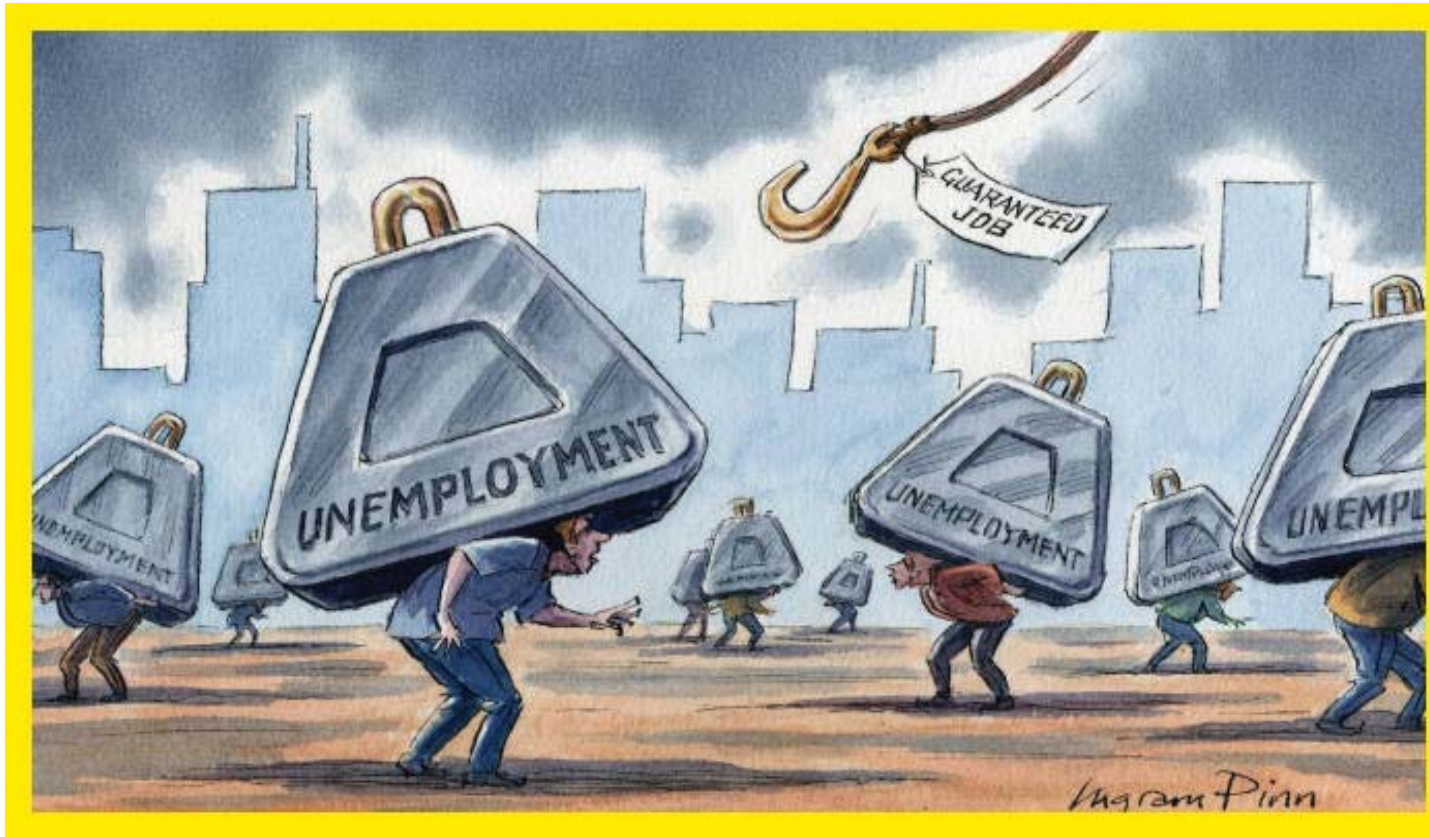
Congress is barreling toward a showdown over federal unemployment benefits, with millions of Americans hanging in the balance. As part of the March \$2.2 trillion coronavirus bill, Congress agreed to a \$600-per-week boost of unemployment benefits, but those are set to start expiring in a matter of days. What to replace it with is shaping up to be a clash as lawmakers and the White House prepare to negotiate the fifth coronavirus bill. "What's going to happen on Saturday, all the pain, all the suffering ... did not have to happen," Sen. Ron Wyden (Ore.), the top Democrat on the Finance Committee, said of the looming deadline. The statistics are stark: 1.4 million Americans applied for unemployment insurance last week, according to Department of Labor data released Thursday, the first increase since March. Roughly 32 million Americans are unemployed and the national

jobless rate is just above 11 percent. But a lapse of the current federal benefit appears unavoidable. Both the White House and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) say they want a deal by the end of next week, when the benefits drafted as part of the March bill will expire. But Congress is all but guaranteed to not meet that deadline; Republicans won't unveil their coronavirus proposal until early next week and bipartisan negotiations on the next package are largely nonexistent. Even if Congress somehow managed that herculean task they are likely already out of time to prevent a lapse: Because the end of the month falls on a Friday, states would need an extension before July 25 or July 26 to fully cover the last week of July, which spills into August. And the two sides remain far apart about what to replace the \$600 per

week measure with, underscoring the difficulty in getting a quick agreement. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told reporters that the forthcoming Republican proposal — which was expected to be released Thursday but slipped to Monday — will provide a roughly 70 percent wage replacement compared to what an individual was making before they were laid off through the end of the year. "We are not going to extend it in a scenario where we're paying more people to stay home than to work. I think that's a concept that every American understands. This is about wage replacement. And we don't want to incentivize people not to work. So we are going to extend it on the basis of wage replacement, it's approximately at 70 percent of wage replacement. We're dealing with the mechanical issues associated with that," Mnuchin said.

GOP struggles with overhaul of unemployment system, complicating negotiations over \$1 trillion stimulus

The temporary \$600 weekly benefit expires next week, and Republicans are seeking a way to scale it back



The proposal would, in key respects, meet the conflicting political and economic pressures bearing down on the GOP and White House as the unemployment deadline looms for millions of Americans months away from Election Day. Senate Republicans and White House officials have been clear that they are not willing to extend the \$600-per-week benefit, which conservatives and many business organizations say encourages people to stay home rather than work. Many economists dispute this notion. Senior Republicans have also said they do not want additional federal unemployment benefits to go away entirely, acknowledging that some additional federal help should still be provided to those made jobless during the pandemic. The benefits are politically popular, with a recent Washington Post-ABC News poll finding close to 60 percent of Americans supporting their extension.

"We need to make sure unemployment insurance is continued," McConnell said Friday. "There is a controversy, however, over whether the provision in the previous measure that allowed people to make more money staying at home than going back to work was a good idea. That's not going to be our recommendation. But I do think basic unemployment insurance - fundamentally handled by the states but backed up by us - will be a part of" the GOP package. Trump and Mnuchin have characterized their proposed solution, replacing "70 percent" of a worker's prior income, as a reasonable middle ground. At his White House news briefing on Tuesday, Trump

expressed ambivalence about the benefit but said it would be partially extended.

"The employers are having a hard time getting [employees] back to work ... I was against that original decision, but they did that. It still worked out well because it gave people a lifeline, a real lifeline. Now we're doing it again," the president said. "They're thinking about doing 70 percent of the amount. The amount would be the same, but doing it in a little bit smaller initial amounts." Congressional Democrats and many economists say the current benefit should be extended in full to prevent a crucial source of economic stimulus from disappearing from an already wobbly economic recovery.

Given the difficulty of reaching a deal with Democrats before the existing benefits expire, Mnuchin and White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows on Thursday floated a stand-alone extension of unemployment provisions as part of a package with school funding and a type of lawsuit shield to make it harder for employees to sue their employers if they become sick. Senior lawmakers in both parties oppose this piecemeal approach, but if they are unable to reach a deal, they might be forced to pass some type of stand-alone benefit extension next week. In March, lawmakers initially discussed increasing unemployment benefits so they would represent 100 percent of a worker's prior income. Congress ultimately abandoned the idea in favor of the universal \$600 bonus in part because Labor Secretary Eugene Scalia warned that the nation's

unemployment systems could not handle the complexity of matching every individual's unemployment benefits to his or her prior income, according to Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), who led those negotiations. "Scalia said, 'It can't be done,'" Wyden said in an interview. "We have not seen a single piece of paper describing how this would be administered without the downsides Scalia pointed out months ago." Mnuchin acknowledged the technical challenges posed by converting from one system to another when addressing reporters on Thursday. He said the matter was being discussed with state unemployment offices. "Let me just say, different states are in different places," Mnuchin said. "Some states can implement this quickly. Some states will take time." White House signals openness to unemployment compromise as crucial deadline looms for 30 million Americans. Some experts are skeptical. State unemployment offices have been badly overwhelmed by the unprecedented surge in claims, and there were another 1.4 million claims last week. Thousands of the newly jobless have struggled for months to obtain their benefits, and in some states, have camped outside unemployment offices overnight to be first in line for help. The \$600-per-week bonus was chosen for its simplicity compared to targeted, individual wage replacement — but it has proven tremendously difficult for states to implement as the nation's unemployment rate spiked to 15 percent before falling slightly to 11 percent.

"You're asking states to overhaul their insurance systems in the middle of a pandemic, when they're already overloaded.

What happens if states shift to a new system and they dump beneficiaries and miss payments because of an error?" said Ernie Tedeschi, who served as an economist in the Treasury Department under the Obama administration. "It's too complicated." Andrew Stettner, senior fellow at the Century Foundation, said states would do their best but that many would struggle to pull off the change. "The state [unemployment insurance] systems are like a house built on sticks and you're throwing a match onto them," he said. Stettner added it could prove difficult for the Labor Department to figure out how to target payments for every state to reflect 70 percent of wages for every person. White House and GOP officials have discussed a transition period that would give states time to figure out how to implement the reduction in benefits. Under this scenario, Republicans could first extend the benefit at a lower amount of around \$200-per-week instead of \$600, continuing the existing flat payment at a reduced level. Democrats would be sure to demand a higher figure.

The \$200 bonus, combined with state benefits, would amount to close to 70 percent of a typical worker's prior income, although under the flat amount there would be significant variation, as some would receive more than prior income and some would receive less. "There's a way to extend this so the majority of people will get paid the 70 percent immediately," Mnuchin said. Meadows added that the \$1,200 stimulus payments expected to be included in the package would help make up the difference for Americans for whom the extension does not amount to 70 percent of prior income.

At the end of a period that may last two months, one senior GOP congressional official said, the automatic payment would go away and be replaced by the more targeted benefit. "After two months, the states say — at least most states; I think pretty much all states — say they could convert to the feds doing a percentage of the state benefit," said the GOP official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations. "Do your state calculation, and then the [federal government] will do 50 percent on top of that."

Whether the states will be able to pull off the change in a way that protects beneficiaries remains to be seen. The National Association of State Workforce Agencies recently said that it would take one to four weeks for most states even to change the bonus amount from \$600 to some other amount, according to Wyden's office.

Here's what we know is in the Republican coronavirus relief bill

Republicans do not plan to release a coronavirus relief bill until next week, but their proposal has mostly taken shape as Senate GOP leaders and the White House say they have reached a tentative deal.

Congress faces pressure to pass more legislation in the coming days to combat the damage from a raging outbreak. States will stop paying out the \$600 per week enhanced federal unemployment benefit at the end of the week as the U.S. reports more than 4 million Covid-19 cases and at least 144,000 deaths from the disease.

As Senate Republicans and the Trump administration hammer out final details of a bill they previously hoped to release this week, provisions in the plan could change. Democrats, who passed their own relief package in the House in May, will look to reshape major parts of the GOP legislation.

Senate Republican leaders and White House negotiators outlined much, but not all, of what the proposal would include this week.

It would extend enhanced federal unemployment insurance but "based on approximately 70% wage replacement," according to Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has described a continuation as "temporary." As of earlier this week, Republicans were considering paying out the supplemental aid through December, sources told CNBC.

The plan would send another round of direct payments to Americans. It is unclear now if the bill would keep the same terms of eligibility as the stimulus checks approved in March (\$1,200 to individuals and \$2,400 to couples, which started to phase out at an average income of \$75,000 per person and ended



completely at an average income of \$99,000). On Friday, McConnell said "we do envision another round of direct cash payments particularly those making \$40,000 a year and less in the hospitality industry."

It would protect businesses, doctors and universities from coronavirus-related lawsuits except for cases of "gross negligence and intentional misconduct," according to McConnell. He has described the provision as a "red line" in talks with Democrats.

The legislation would include \$105 billion to help schools restart, with at least part of the funding contingent on them opening their doors in the fall.

The bill would authorize what Republicans have called a targeted second round of Paycheck Protection Program loans for small businesses hit particularly hard by the pandemic. Mnuchin said the aid could go to companies whose revenues have fallen more than 50%.

In addition to those pieces of the plan, Republicans have said their bill will include \$16 billion in new funds for coronavirus testing and tax

incentives to encourage companies to rehire workers and adopt safety measures.

GOP officials still need to come to a consensus among themselves even before Democrats join the discussions. On Thursday, McConnell said the Trump administration "has requested additional time to review the fine details."

Then on Friday, he said Republicans were developing a proposal they plan to release on Monday. After its release, "we'll be sitting down with the Democrats to see what we can agree to do going forward," he added.

Letting the extra unemployment benefit lapse even for a few weeks could have major ripple effects. The payments will end around the same time a federal moratorium on evictions does. The additional funds have not only helped the roughly 30 million people still getting some form of unemployment insurance cover food and housing costs, but also have boosted consumer spending at a time when many businesses are still closed.

Democrats have blamed Republicans throughout the week for the delays in passing new relief. In a joint

statement Friday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said "we had expected to be working throughout this weekend to find common ground on the next COVID response package."

"It is simply unacceptable that Republicans have had this entire time to reach consensus among themselves and continue to flail," they said. "Time is of the essence and lives are being lost."

McConnell said Thursday that when the GOP releases a bill, he hopes Democrats "meet our serious, fact-based proposal with the productive and bipartisan spirit that got us the CARES Act, rather than the cynical partisanship that led them to block" a Republican-written police reform proposal last month.

Democrats have signaled they will push Republicans to make changes on several major pieces of the plan. On Thursday, Pelosi said she will continue to call for extension of the \$600 per week unemployment benefit at its current level.

She reiterated Friday that she would not agree to a short-term extension of the

unemployment benefit while Congress negotiates a broader bill, saying she wants to pass a full relief package.

The bill that passed the House in May would extend it into January. Schumer previously signed on to a proposal that would automatically reduce the benefit as state unemployment rates fall below certain thresholds.

Pelosi and Schumer have also insisted on nearly \$1 trillion in aid for states and municipalities as governments facing lost revenue and increased expenses during the pandemic consider laying off workers. National Governors Association Chair Larry Hogan, a Republican from Maryland, and Vice Chair Andrew Cuomo, a New York Democrat, have repeatedly called on Congress to

approve at least \$500 billion more in relief for states. The GOP proposal would give states and municipalities more flexibility in how they spend aid approved earlier this year but would not authorize new money. Democrats also want to include rent and mortgage assistance in the developing bill.

How Low Can Dems Go On Unemployment Benefits?

Dealmaking is about to go down - and so is that extra \$600 a week in extra jobless benefits unless Democrats put up a big fight.

WASHINGTON: The extra \$600 a week Congress added to unemployment benefits is set to expire in a matter of days, and Republicans and Democrats remain as far apart as ever on a deal to extend the money? both between their parties and within them. Senate Republicans have delayed unveiling their own legislation to extend the benefits all week, with Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) now saying Republicans in his chamber will release their bill on Monday.

Democratic leaders won't have much time to negotiate before benefits expire. In fact, even though the extra money was supposed to last until the end of July, many recipients will get their final \$600 on Saturday or Sunday, because most states pay benefits on the weekend and July 31 is a Friday. (Regular state unemployment benefits, which are much lower, will continue.)

And when lawmakers finally get around to hashing out final language with Republicans, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) may find that many Democrats in her own caucus won't accept an amount lower than \$600.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.), co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, told HuffPost this week that it would be difficult for her to vote for anything less than "the full \$600." "They passed a \$2 trillion tax cut," Jayapal said of Republicans, referring to their 2017 tax law. "Now they want to say that they're not going to give 600 bucks to people at a time when they've lost their jobs, they've lost their health care, they've lost all certainty, they're under so much stress. People are dying." When HuffPost asked if there was a number she could live with, given that Republicans are strongly opposed to extending the full \$600 over their concerns that people might make more on unemployment than they were at their jobs, Jayapal said it was "crazy" that anyone would talk about cutting the dollar amount. "Why would you under any circumstance talk about cutting that number, when we have so much devastation?" she asked. Jayapal also wants automatic



(Agencies)
(Insider Bureau)

triggers so that the \$600 phases out only as economic conditions improve and not on an arbitrary deadline? like in January after, say, Joe Biden wins the presidency and Republicans suddenly start claiming they care about the deficit again.

And Jayapal isn't alone.

A number of liberal Democrats that HuffPost talked to this week seemed extremely hesitant to talk about any amount less than \$600. And some said they wanted additional assurances beyond the current policies. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) said she didn't know why automatic triggers weren't included in the legislation passed in March. She added that it would be tough for her to vote for any deal short of the current \$600.

"We will have to see the conditions and the circumstances. There may be some sort of trade-off in terms of length," Ocasio-Cortez said, mentioning that if the extra benefits went for a full year, she could maybe consider a lower amount.

But Ocasio-Cortez said she didn't see how Democrats could come down significantly from \$600 and still meet people's needs.

A full year of benefits, automatic stabilizers, and a renewal of the entire \$600 is far from the deal Republicans are considering.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said that when Republicans finally unveil their coronavirus bill, it will "continue some temporary federal supplement to

(By Our Staff Reporter)
unemployment insurance while fixing the obvious craziness of paying people more to remain out of the workforce." (Agencies)

Democrats originally pushed for \$600 because they wanted the government to match laid-off workers' lost wages, but state labor departments use ancient software that couldn't handle millions of individualized federal payments. So they went with \$600 because it's roughly the difference between the average weekly wage and the average state benefit.

Republicans have been coy about how much extra money they want to give workers. Some have suggested dollar amounts as low as \$100 or \$200. Some have said they should replace the benefits with a "return to work bonus" that would provide a lump sum for people who return to their jobs. And others are now talking about seeing if state workforce agencies are ready to figure out how to pay individualized sums to match a portion of people's previous earnings.

Unemployed workers, for their part, have consistently reported that they can't even get their state unemployment department to pick up the phone if they have a problem with their claim.

Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, who has represented the administration in Capitol Hill negotiations, said Thursday the Republican proposal would be "based on approximately 70% wage replacement." If he had in mind a flat dollar amount, 70% wage replacement would imply something between \$300 and

\$400.

Congress has never supplemented unemployment benefits like this. In every recession since World War II, lawmakers have tacked on extra weeks of benefits for workers who use up the standard 26 weeks provided by states. The only other time Congress gave the jobless an actual raise was in 2009, when a stimulus bill added just \$25 to weekly benefits.

The extra money is a testament to the depth of the coronavirus recession, with the highest jobless rate since the Great Depression. And the economy could suffer further if the extra money goes away.

On top of unemployment, lawmakers are also trying to find a balance on a number of other sticking points, including a state and local government bailout, individual stimulus checks, more money for coronavirus testing and contact tracing, funds for school reopenings, hazard pay for workers, and family leave policies. The House passed a Democratic bill that did all those things back in May, while the Senate confirmed some judges as unemployment claims mounted and the academic year loomed with no national plan for schools to reopen safely.

All of this is to say that a final deal would be complicated and doesn't look like it could quickly materialize, though White House chief of staff Mark Meadows has told reporters in the last two days that lawmakers and the

administration have advanced the ball from their own 20-yard line to their own 35-yard line.

The slow progress has led to some lawmakers toying with the idea of a temporary extension for the extra unemployment benefits? just long enough so that Congress can come up with a deal without benefits lapsing, but short enough to keep the pressure on.

But even that idea is controversial. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) told reporters this week that he doesn't favor a temporary extension because he wanted to give people "the security they are not going to be let down and fall through the cracks in September and October."

And chief deputy whip Dan Kildee (D-Mich.), who is the sponsor of a bill to extend the extra \$600 for the rest of the year, said a temporary extension would just add uncertainty for families and the economy.

"Everybody knows what they need to know now to make this decision," Kildee said.

But most rank-and-file Democrats told HuffPost they would absolutely support a temporary extension.

Rep. Mark Pocan (D-Wis.), Congressional Progressive Caucus co-chair, said he would support anything that prevented a lapse for people receiving those benefits, and that sentiment was echoed by nearly every Democrat we talked to.

"As opposed to letting it lapse? Yeah," Budget Chairman John Yarmuth (D-Ky.) said.

Beyoncé, couture and palaces: India's growing taste for mega-weddings

When it comes to elaborate nuptials, few can rival the mega-weddings of India's super-rich. Recent months have seen a slew of high-profile ceremonies, from a rare Bollywood-Hollywood union (Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas) to what could be one of history's most expensive weddings (when Isha Ambani, daughter of Asia's richest man, wed Anand Piramal, the son of a billionaire industrialist).

Eye-watering amounts of money were spent on haute couture bridal wear, food from the world's top chefs and opulent palace venues. Ambani and Piramal even splashed out on a private show by Beyoncé.

But it's not just India's elites. In a country where up to 12 million weddings take place a year, the growing middle classes are increasingly putting on lavish ceremonies to emphasize their status.

Industry sources estimate that the country's wedding industry is worth \$40 billion to \$50 billion, representing significant growth from the widely-cited \$25.5 billion figure reported in 2012. Around half the gold bought in the country each year is for items used at wedding ceremonies.

While weddings can be expensive affairs in any country, in India they are especially important as symbols of strength and status, according to sociologist Parul Bhandari, a visiting scholar at St. Edmund's College, University of Cambridge, who researches wedding cultures, marriage trends, gender and social class.

"For many societies, particularly India, marriages are more than simply a union between two individuals," she said in a phone interview. "A marriage marks the coming together of two families, lineages, and at times, larger groups like whole villages or communities ... Marriage is an important rite (of) passage that signals an individual and their family's status -- economic, social, political, royal.

"Pushing one's financial limits at a wedding can, of course, be seen as an attempt to achieve higher social status and respect within the wider community.

"The Piramal-Ambani wedding constitutes, in every way, the epitome of a 'Big Fat Indian wedding,'" she added, referring to a term commonly used to describe high-profile weddings on



social media. "(It) was indeed a show of power and money, as much as it was about rituals and traditions."

According to Bhandari, the rise of extravagant ceremonies is linked to an "increasing penchant for consumerism (and) the influence of Bollywood."

For those who can afford to host in a spectacular palace, the Indian state of Rajasthan, renowned for its royal heritage, has proven an in-demand wedding destination, according to Bhavnes Sawhney, director of Mumbai-based wedding planners Wedniksha. Its popularity may continue to grow following the publicity of the Ambani-Piramal and Chopra-Jonas weddings, both of which took place in the northwestern state. "Rajasthan is known to uphold many ancient traditions," Sawhney said. "And the grandeur of its royal forts and palaces not only serve as a beautiful backdrop but also give an authentic cultural touch to a ceremony."

"People are now going for quality instead of quantity," said Priyanka Gupta, head wedding planner at My Shaadi Wale Wedding, a Bangalore-based wedding planning company.

"Earlier, you might have up to a 1,000 guests, now people are cutting down to 200 to 250 of their closest (friends and family) and holding destination weddings (instead)."

Gupta puts the average amount spent by an upper-class family at \$400 per guest, per day. She speculated that the Chopra-Jonas and Ambani-Piramal weddings may have cost up to \$2,000 per guest, per day.

Regardless of a couple's social status, Indian weddings are often spread across several days,

according to Sawhney. It is India's "cultural pride that gives rise to intricate planning," he said.

"These lavish and big Indian weddings are never a one-day affair," he added. "Most weddings span from a couple of days to a ten-day celebration."

This is partly because of the various customs involved. While last year's celebrity weddings made headlines for their extravagance, they were all steeped in Hindu tradition. (For the Ambani-Piramal nuptials, Bollywood legend Amitabh Bachchan took on the role of emcee, explaining the numerous customs to overseas guests.)

Hindu weddings account for around 80% of marriage ceremonies in India, with Sikh, Muslim and Christian nuptials accounting for much of the remainder. While there are regional variations, a number of elaborate rituals have become common to almost all Hindu weddings across the country.

For instance, pre-wedding celebrations usually include a "mehndi" (henna) ceremony, held the day before the wedding, during which the bride's hands and feet are decorated with intricate patterns. And even if you can't afford Beyoncé, a "sangeet" (an evening of music and dance) is now a norm among Indian couples.

On the morning of the wedding, the bride and groom apply "haldi" (turmeric, which is mixed with milk into a paste) to their hands and face to ward off evil spirits. The wedding ceremony itself often takes place beneath a "mandap," a pavilion embellished with opulent drapes and decorations. This is where the bride and groom pledge their

vows (known as the "saat phere," or seven circles) around the "agni," a holy fire considered a witness to the ceremony.

The ritual sees the couple walk around the fire seven times reciting the Hindu pledges of marriage that address strength, prosperity, wisdom, health, offspring and friendship, after which the marriage becomes binding.

At the end of the ritual, the groom applies "sindoor" (red vermilion powder) along the parting of his bride's hair and ties a "mangalsutra" (a bridal necklace) around her neck to signify that she's a married woman.

Hindu women usually opt for a sari embroidered with intricate patterns, or a "lehenga" (a type of long skirt) paired with a matching blouse and "dupatta" (a long shawl-like scarf that's draped over the head and shoulders).

More broadly, red is a favorite for brides -- especially for Hindu ceremonies. The color symbolizes fertility and prosperity, as well as representing Mars, the planet of

marriage in Hindu astrology (although a significant number of brides now wear cream, a color commonly used by Western brides, reflecting a growing modern trend for lighter, pastel shades).

The timing of ceremonies also reflects nationwide trends: Winter wedding season, which usually runs from November to February, is considered an auspicious period in the Hindu calendar. Couples often turn to the stars, and their zodiac signs, to pick a date that will ensure a long and happy marriage.

All of India's recent mega-weddings -- which also included Deepika Padukone's high-profile marriage to fellow actor Ranveer Singh -- sparked waves of social media reaction from both in and outside India.

Amid public fascination, the ceremonies have also attracted criticism for being overly ostentatious. Such shows of excess stand in stark contrast to the poverty and poor living conditions found in places across India.

A representative for the Ambanis told CNN that the family set up a bazaar to showcase the work of local artisans. They claim to have donated enough food to feed over 5,000 local people three meals a day for four days. "Lamentably, today's elites seem more keen to display their power through an unabashed embrace of their privilege and status," said Bhandari.

This, in turn sparks emulation, she said: "Some segments of society view trends set by elites as the 'authentic' and 'real' ways of being Indian, or believe that by engaging in these extravagant celebrations they too can claim elite status."



Bail for ex-Fortis Healthcare promoter Shivinder Singh in money laundering case

The high court imposed various other bail conditions on Shivinder Singh, including that he shall not tamper with the evidence or influence witnesses, directly or indirectly.



The Delhi High Court Thursday granted bail to former Fortis Healthcare promoter Shivinder Mohan Singh in a money laundering case related to alleged misappropriation of funds at Religare Finvest Ltd (RFL). Justice Anup Jairam Bhambhani, who pronounced the order through video conferencing, granted the relief to Shivinder in furnishing of a person bond of Rs one crore and two sureties by family members of Rs 25 lakh each. The judge also directed the investigating officer of the ED to request the Bureau of Immigration to open LOC in Shivinder's name to prevent any unannounced exit from the

country. The high court imposed various other bail conditions on him, including that he shall not tamper with the evidence or influence witnesses, directly or indirectly. He was arrested in the money laundering case last year. The high court had reserved

its order on the bail plea on July 16 after hearing arguments from the counsel for Shivinder and Enforcement Directorate (ED). ED had opposed the bail plea saying that in the present case, money was diverted through a complex web of transactions and

finding the trail was not easy.

RFL is a group firm of REL - Religare Enterprises Ltd, which was earlier promoted by Malvinder Singh and his brother Shivinder Singh.

The EOW registered an FIR in March last year after it received

a complaint from RFL's Manpreet Suri against Shivinder, Godhwani and others, alleging that loans were taken by them while managing the firm but the money was invested in other companies. ED lodged a money laundering case based on this.

No timeline for Vijay Mallya's extradition to India, says UK envoy

The envoy declined to answer a question during a virtual news briefing on whether Vijay Mallya had sought asylum in the UK, saying the British government never comments on individual asylum cases.

The UK cannot give a timeframe for the extradition of fugitive businessman Vijay Mallya though the British government and courts are clear on their roles in preventing people from avoiding justice by moving across national borders, UK high commissioner Philip Barton said on Thursday. Barton declined to answer a question during a virtual news briefing on whether Mallya had sought asylum in the UK, saying the British government never comments on individual asylum cases.

"The UK government and the courts, [which] are independent of the government, are absolutely clear about their roles in preventing people avoiding justice by moving to another country. We are all

determined to play our part in any case, and to make sure that we're working together to ensure that criminals can't escape justice by crossing national borders," he said. Mallya's extradition was ordered in February but "there is an ongoing legal case and I can't comment any further on that and I can't say anything at all about timescales", Barton said. "The UK government understands the importance of the case," he added.

Last month, India said it had asked the UK not to consider any asylum request from Mallya, currently on bail pending his extradition, as there are no grounds for his persecution in the country. India has also said it has sought the early extradition of

Mallya from the UK. The UK has so far only said a "confidential" legal issue was holding up Mallya's extradition but that it was trying to deal with the matter as quickly as possible. Britain's stance gave rise to speculation the 64-year-old businessman, wanted in India to face charges of financial irregularities, could have applied for asylum.

Mallya lost his appeal in the UK high court in April against the 2018 order to extradite him. Last month, the high court also refused Mallya permission to appeal in the UK Supreme Court. He is wanted in India to face charges of financial offences involving Rs 9,000 crore borrowed by his now-defunct Kingfisher Airlines from several Indian banks.

STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS

Help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like COVID-19.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

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

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The Missed Opportunities Of Netflix's New Hit "Indian Matchmaking"



South Asian communities. At no point does it make any effort to interrogate or dive deeper into these attitudes.

Arranged marriage is one of the ways Indian families self-isolate within their own social classes and groups, entrenching age-old divisions. While there are laws prohibiting different forms of discrimination in India, matchmakers and matrimonial advertisements - which are still carried in newspapers across the country - continue to draw on biases.

Numerous studies over the past decade have found evidence of caste discrimination among marriage-seekers in India. Other research has documented how women face pressure to be "fair," while dark-skinned women experience significant colorism. Only an estimated 2 percent of marriages are between different religions, while wealth, class and language also play a role in arranged marriage. Many of these prejudices are brought up by clients and families in the show - caste and skin tone most frequently - but little is said to condemn or address these discriminatory criteria.

What about people who don't want to get married or have children but are pushed to find matches because of parental or societal expectations? It was clear that many of those featured weren't actually ready to get married, including Pradhyuman

from Mumbai, who apparently rejected 150 potential brides. And what about the millions of LGBTQ+ Indians, including those who may be in the closet, who are often pressured into heteronormative relationships in a country where bigotry and stigma are common? The show doesn't feature anyone looking for a same-sex partner.

Then there's the question of what happens to people who find partners outside of the narrow criteria set by families and society. In India, couples can be excluded from households, families and communities, and can even face violence, for their choices. Families may also demand exorbitant dowries (which are illegal but still prevalent in India) for marriages between social groups. The clients on the show - all of whom were from wealthy families in India or had comfortable livelihoods here in the United States - probably wouldn't experience this. Yet these patterns continue to affect many

young Indians, and not just those from low-income or marginalized backgrounds.

Of course, it would be unrealistic to expect Taparia, the matchmaker, to address these issues directly. Mundhra, meanwhile, tackled some of these questions head-on in her 2017 documentary "A Suitable Girl." But "Indian Matchmaking" had ample opportunity to offer more context and repeatedly passed up the chance. What we see is an incomplete picture of marriage and matchmaking in India.

The highlight of the show is the plot line surrounding Ankita, an independent business owner who overcame her insecurities and decided that she found her career more fulfilling than a relationship. Her entire arc was a breath of fresh air that left me craving more, precisely because it confronted the ramifications of societal pressure. But her story is the exception within the show - just as it is in Indian society more generally.

It's common to see Indian weddings portrayed as Technicolor fantasies - in Bollywood films, in the images of Priyanka Chopra's wedding to Nick Jonas in 2018 and in stories about the extravagant wedding of Isha Ambani, the daughter of one of Asia's richest men, with a bill that ran into the millions.

But "Indian Matchmaking," the Netflix reality show released last week, makes clear the Indian wedding industrial complex is no fantasy, and not just because none of the show's couples actually make it to the altar. Instead, it highlights how the marriage market is uniquely besieged by the same divides and prejudices that run through large portions of Indian society.

The show, directed by Smriti Mundhra, follows "Mumbai's top matchmaker," Sima Taparia. Armed with stacks of "biodata" - carefully vetted profiles that list a person's qualifications and background - Taparia attempts to pair up not just compatible couples but also compatible

families.

Though Taparia is shown repeating chants to ensure "good vibes" and visiting astrologers for horoscope readings, the show doesn't just present archaic caricatures of arranged marriage. It carefully explains to non-Indian audiences that arranged marriages are actually considered the default for much of India - the most common way couples get together.

"In India ... there is marriage and then love marriage," Taparia says early on. Many of her clients have deeply relatable reasons for turning to her for help: wanting to find someone "serious," looking for a partner who understands their culture, trying out alternatives to dating apps. There are also clips of successful couples who met through matchmakers and have been happily married for decades.

But the show also depicts people who unthinkingly normalize some of the most pernicious biases that plague

IFC Films will release A CALL TO SPY starring RADHIKA APTE in theaters & VOD on October 2



Directed by | Lydia Dean Pilcher
Produced by | Sarah Megan Thomas
Written by | Sarah Megan Thomas
Edited by | Paul Tothill
Cast | Sarah Megan Thomas,

Stana Katic, Radhika Apte, Linus Roache, and Rossif Sutherland
Acclaimed Bollywood star Radhika Apte makes her American film debut in A CALL TO SPY as Noor Inayat Khan, the real-life British spy of Indian descent who became the first female wireless operator sent by the Special Operations Executive (SOE) to aid in the French Resistance. Throughout her career, Radhika has been praised by the South Asian community, receiving recognition from The Vijay Awards, GQ India Awards, Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles and the International Indian Film Academy among many others. In the beginning of WWII, with Britain becoming desperate, Churchill orders his new spy

agency--SOE-- to recruit and train women as spies. Their daunting mission: conduct sabotage and build a resistance. SOE's "spymistress," Vera Atkins (Stana Katic of CASTLE), recruits two unusual candidates: Virginia Hall (Sarah Megan Thomas of EQUITY), an ambitious American with a wooden leg, and Noor Inayat Khan (Radhika Apte of SACRED GAMES), a Muslim pacifist. Together, these women help to undermine the Nazi regime in France, leaving an unmistakable legacy in their wake. Inspired by true stories, this original screenplay draws on SOE, OSS, and CIA files. This is the untold story about the personal sacrifice of courageous individuals who put their lives on the line to fight for freedom.

Teenage fan of Sushant Singh allegedly dies by suicide in Chhattisgarh's Durg



A 13-year-old girl who is said to have been depressed over the death of actor Sushant Singh allegedly died by suicide in Chhattisgarh's Durg district on Wednesday night, police said Thursday. The family said the girl was a seventh standard student and was a big fan of Sushant Singh who dies last month.

Trinath Tripathi, Station House Officer (SHO), Bhilai Nagar police station said the girl's parents were not at home when the incident took place. "When her parents returned, they found the door was locked from inside. The father entered the house from the backyard and found his daughter hanging from the ceiling," Tiwari said. Durg's Superintendent of Police, Prashant Thakur said police have found a suicide note. "We have recovered a suicide note purportedly written by her that said that she was ending her life because she did that actor Sushant has left the world. We are investigating the case from all angles and matching the handwriting of the girl." The teenager's father told local media that she was a fan of Sushant Singh and was depressed after his death and was continuously watching his videos and songs of his movies.



Thinking of Buying/Selling

Baldev Singh

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See Full page advt on P : 10

Decoding the crisis in the Congress

This isn't about Rajasthan. The crisis in the Congress is symptomatic of a larger crisis within the party. It is a crisis that has been in the making for long. But when a party is in power, it is possible to paper over cracks and keep going



(Story on Page 29)

A million cases, and counting



(News Agencies) 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. (Contd on page 30)

Rajasthan crisis explained in 10 point: From Pilot, Gehlot to ED and Malinga

Rajasthan political crisis began on July 11 night when Sachin Pilot, then deputy chief minister, drove a group of Congress MLAs towards Delhi. The dissidents announced that the Ashok Gehlot government is in minority.



(News Agencies) It has been almost two weeks but the political crisis in Rajasthan refuses to get resolved. The stalemate between the Sachin Pilot-led rebel faction and Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's camp in the Congress still continues. The Supreme Court has refused to stay the Rajasthan High Court order on the matter. Gehlot is now mulling convening an assembly session in Rajasthan. He has written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi complaining against a Union minister. And, central agencies have upped their ante against some personalities close to Gehlot in corruption cases.

(Contd on page 30)

Northeast has potential to become India's growth engine: PM Narendra Modi

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) Speaking after laying the foundation stone for the Manipur Water Supply Project today, through video conferencing, the Prime Minister highlighted that modern infrastructure is being built to improve connectivity. Northeast has the potential to become India's growth engine, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday while asserting that peace has now established in the region. Speaking after laying the foundation stone for the Manipur Water Supply Project today, through video conferencing, the Prime Minister highlighted that modern infrastructure is being built to improve connectivity. (Contd on page 29)



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ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ

PUNJABI DUNIYA