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India Sees Daily Jump of over 64,000 New Covid-19 Cases, 1,092 Deaths as Infections Cross 27.67 Lakh

There are 6,76,514 active cases of coronavirus infection in the country which is 24.45 per cent of the total caseload, while the number of recoveries has surged to 20,37,870.

With 64,531 people testing positive in a day, India's COVID-19 tally increased to 27,67,273 on Wednesday, while the recoveries crossed the 20-lakh mark pushing the recovery rate to 73.64 per cent, according to the Union Health Ministry data. The death toll climbed to 52,889 with 1,092 people succumbing to the disease in a span of 24 hours, the data updated at 8 am showed. Case fatality rate has declined to 1.91 per cent.

There are 6,76,514 active cases of coronavirus infection in the country which is 24.45 per cent of the total caseload, while the number of recoveries has surged to 20,37,870.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on

August 7.

According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), a cumulative total of 3,17,42,782 samples have been tested till August 18 with 8,01,518 samples being tested on Tuesday.

Of the 1,092 fresh deaths, Maharashtra reported the highest number of fatalities at 422 followed by 139 from Karnataka, 121 from Tamil Nadu, 88 from Andhra Pradesh, 70 from Uttar Pradesh, 55 from West Bengal, 35 from Punjab, 20 from Gujarat, 13 each from Madhya Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, 12 each from Delhi and Jharkhand and 11 from Rajasthan.

Nine fatalities each have been reported from Odisha and Puducherry, eight each from

Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Telangana, seven from Haryana, six each from Assam, Kerala and Uttarakhand, five from Goa, three each from Ladakh and Tripura, while Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Sikkim and Manipur have registered one fatality each. Of the total 52,889 deaths, Maharashtra has reported the maximum at 20,687, followed by 6,007 in Tamil Nadu, 4,226 in Delhi, 4,201 in Karnataka, 2,820 each in Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh, 2,585 in Uttar Pradesh, 2,528 in West Bengal and 1,141 in Madhya Pradesh.

So far, 898 people have died of COVID-19 each in Rajasthan and Punjab, 719 in Telangana, 557 in Haryana, 561 in Jammu and Kashmir, 476 in Bihar, 362 in



Odisha, 262 in Jharkhand, 203 in Assam, 175 in Kerala and 164 in Uttarakhand.

Chhattisgarh has registered 158 deaths, Puducherry 123, Goa 116, Tripura 65, Chandigarh and Andaman and Nicobar Islands 30 each, Himachal Pradesh 19, Manipur 18, Ladakh 17, Nagaland eight, Meghalaya six, Arunachal Pradesh five, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and

Diu and Sikkim two each. The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

US provides second shipment of 100 ventilators to India to help fight Covid-19



The US on Wednesday donated the second shipment of 100 ventilators to India to help in the country's fight against Covid-19, saying it had fulfilled President Donald Trump's commitment to provide critically needed supplies.

The US-made ventilators are compact and easy to deploy, and will provide India flexibility in treating patients. In addition to the ventilators, US Agency for International Development (USAID) is funding a package of support that includes warranties

The first shipment of 100 ventilators was donated by the US government in June. These machines have been deployed to support the care of Covid-19 patients at the eight regional All India Institutes of Medical Sciences.

and additional supplies and components needed to operate the machines.

The first shipment of 100 ventilators was donated by the US government in June. These machines have been deployed to support the care of Covid-19 patients at the eight regional All India Institutes of Medical Sciences.

US ambassador Ken Juster said, "We are very pleased to hand over the final tranche of 100 ventilators to India, fulfilling President Trump's commitment to provide these

critically needed supplies to support India's pandemic response."

USAID is also working with the Indian government to enhance the capacity of health facilities using the ventilators by facilitating setup, orientation, and clinical training for healthcare personnel responsible for operating the machines.

USAID's efforts have strengthened the India's healthcare system's readiness and response capacity in several states with a high burden of Covid-

19 cases. As of August, a total of three million people in India have directly benefited from USAID support, said a statement from the US embassy.

USAID has also trained 40,700 health workers on best practices to integrate Covid-19 prevention and risk mitigation into essential health services, and 46,000 frontline workers on risk communication. It has provided 950 healthcare facilities with support to increase social distancing, infection prevention control, and patient management.

Punjab Man Who Ran His Car over Dog Arrested from Kapurthala, 12 Canines Recovered from His House



26-year-old man who allegedly ran his car over a dog was arrested from Punjab's Kapurthala district on Wednesday, said the police.

The arrest came a day after BJP MP Maneka Gandhi shared a video on social media in which he could purportedly be seen running his vehicle over a dog.

Kapurthala Deputy Superintendent of Police Sarwan Singh said Gurjinder Singh has been arrested. Police said 12 dogs have also been recovered from his house.

Gurjinder Singh has been booked under relevant sections of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the Indian Penal Code on the complaint of a representative of the People for Animals, police had said.

Gandhi on Monday had posted a video on Twitter, saying: "He is a breeder and seller of dogs for dog fights. This is what he does to dogs when they are no longer useful. This dog died after 30 minutes of being in excruciating pain."

Odisha man builds memorial for electrocuted elephant to honour his mother's word

Respecting her mother's wish, Dr Naik, a retired Odia teacher in a local college in January 2019 erected a 35-foot tall memorial for the dead elephant on the same paddy field and called it "Hathi Minar".

The death of an elephant in a region where they get electrocuted, run over by speeding trains and trucks, or hunted by poachers is mostly a matter of statistics for state wildlife department, but a 62-year-old tribal man in Keonjhar district was determined not to let it remain just like that.

In November 2009, when a tusker from Jyotipur reserve forest stomped towards paddy field near Jali village of Champua block in Keonjhar district on Odisha-Jharkhand border, little did it know about the sagging electric lines. But no sooner did it reach the paddy field of Padmini Naik to chew on the ripening paddy after quenching its thirst at the nearby river, the tusker raised its trunk only to touch the sagging high

voltage power lines. Within seconds it fell to the ground as huge amounts of electric current coursed through its body. "My mother was too shocked about the elephant dying on our field as she considered her vehicle of Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth. She asked me to build a memorial for the dead elephant on our paddy field where it died. She was so heartbroken over the death that she did not take food for next 2-3 days," said Dr Krushna Chandra Naik, son of Padmini.

Respecting her mother's wish, Dr Naik, a retired Odia teacher in a local college in January 2019 erected a 35-foot tall memorial for the dead elephant on the same paddy field and called it "Hathi Minar". "After the elephant's death, my mother kept telling me and

my younger brother that the pachyderm's death was a bad omen. The next year my younger brother died in a road accident and a year later, my mother passed away too. The twin tragedies steeled my resolve to build the elephant memorial at any cost," said the retired teacher.

With her mother's last wish to see a memorial for the elephant uppermost on his mind, Naik started earmarking a portion of his profits from the farm and dipped into his personal savings. Though villagers suffered crop loss to rampaging elephants, they also came forward to help him in construction of the memorial. He donated five acres of land to develop the site into a children's park and planted 30,000 saplings for a herbal garden.

"In January 2019 I opened it to the public where people could come and pay tribute to the fallen elephant. More than 5000 people had gathered at the site for inauguration of the Hathi Minar. Since then, people have been flocking to the place," said Naik. "I hope the memorial makes people aware of the importance of elephants who are facing a massive crisis of habitat."

After the death of the tusker in 2009, there have been numerous incidents of elephants being electrocuted in Keonjhar district, known for iron and manganese mines. In June this year, two elephants - an eight-year-old tusker and a 30-year-old female elephant - were found electrocuted dead in Baitarani reserve forest of the district raising suspicion



of poaching. The district, Noted elephant conservationist Biswajit Mohanty said Padmini Naik deserves a posthumous award for her enormous contribution to the area for neighbouring elephant conservation awareness for public. "The distressed elephants of Odisha face an uncertain and dangerous future and the safety of our national heritage animal in Odisha is in peril. Once the pride of Odisha, the state has turned into a graveyard for elephants. I hope more and more people would visit the elephant memorial so that they become a little more sympathetic towards the majestic animal," said Mohanty.

Centre withdraws 10,000 soldiers from Kashmir to send a message

The partial troop withdrawal and the appointment of a senior politician Manoj Sinha as Lt Governor of Jammu and Kashmir is not a coincidence, a senior official said.



A security review last week on Jammu and Kashmir led the government to order the withdrawal of 10,000 troops from the union territory, a move that is seen as part of the Centre's outreach to the Kashmir valley. The review was ordered by the Home Minister Amit Shah when he was still recuperating in a Gurugram hospital earlier this

month. The review, and the withdrawal of about 100 companies of central security forces, comes around the time that the government has spotlighted development activities and appointed senior politician Manoj Sinha as Lieutenant Governor of the centrally-administered territory. An official underscored that the

timing of the two developments, one after another, was not a coincidence, but designed to message people that the government was willing to address their concerns. One view has been that far too many security personnel are deployed in the union territory to prevent about 200 hardcore terrorists trained across the

border from carrying out strikes. At last week's security review, there was some acknowledgement within the security establishment that the forces could do with fewer numbers, particularly given its successes over the last one year in eliminating top terrorist commanders. Security officials have also claimed that there has been some improvement in how the public responds to counter-terror operations. A team of security officers next travelled to Jammu and Kashmir on 15 August to interact with field commanders and lay the groundwork for the troop withdrawal. A few hours before the team landed, Prime Minister Narendra Modi - addressing the nation from Red Fort in Delhi - described the past year as 'a very important milestone' for the development journey of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh regions and spoke about

assembly elections in J&K as soon as the election commission completes the delimitation exercise. "It was felt that the kind of force deployed in J&K may be fairly construed to be disproportionate under the existing security situation, which could lead to inconvenience to the local population," a top police officer who was part of the process told Hindustan Times. Apart from top army commanders, top officers of the Border Security Force (BSF), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Central Industrial Security Force and other central and forces were part of the review. There was a view that instead of relying too much on check-posts in Srinagar and elsewhere in the valley, the security establishment should step up reliance on technology to target terrorists.

6 lakh may have been coronavirus-infected in Hyderabad: Study



(News Agencies)- There may be at least six lakh people in the city who have been infected by coronavirus with a large number of them asymptomatic and need no hospitalisation, a study said on Wednesday.

Conducted by CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology and CSIR-Indian Institute of Chemical Technology, the study said individuals infected by SARS-CoV-2 shed virus not only through nasal and oral routes but

also through faeces.

In a joint effort, CCMB and IICT harvested the sewage samples of different sewage treatment plants (STPs) in the city to estimate the number of potentially infected individuals, it said. According to the study, 80 per cent of the STPs revealed nearly two lakh people are shedding viral materials and only 40 per cent of the sewage reach STPs which may indicate that about six lakh people in the city carried or are carrying the virus. "This study, covering about 80 per cent of the STPs in Hyderabad, revealed that there are nearly 2 lakh people who are shedding viral materials.

Since only 40 per cent of the

sewage reach STPs, this data can be used to extrapolate the overall number of potentially infected people, which turned out to be approximately six lakh, that is, around six per cent of the population, which includes symptomatic, asymptomatic, and also recently recovered individuals in a time window of about 35 days," the CCMB said. The findings are posted on preprint server MedRxiv, which is yet to be peer reviewed, it added.

According to a press release from the Telangana government, as on August 18, there are 95,700 positive cases reported in the state. Director, CCMB, Rakesh

Mishra said if such studies are carried out in coordination with civic bodies, it would help identify the hotspots and take necessary measures.

"Our finding clearly indicates that a large proportion of the affected individuals are asymptomatic and did not need hospitalisation.

This is also in agreement with the observation that hospitalisation rush or mortality is way lower than otherwise expected with such a large infection rates at a given time," the CCMB director said. "It explains why our healthcare system has been able to handle reasonably well the situation during the pandemic," he said.

Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari gets additional charge of Goa

Koshyari took oath in Konkani, Goa's official language reading out from the text and despite some fumbling appeared fairly deft at the language.



(News Agencies)- Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari was sworn in as the Governor of Goa on Wednesday evening at a simple ceremony hosted at the Raj Bhavan.

Koshyari, who succeeds Satya Pal Malik, will hold additional charge as the Governor of Goa.

Earlier today, Malik left Goa in a special flight from Goa's Dabolim airport and is expected to take charge as the

Governor of Meghalaya succeeding Tathagata Roy.

The Governor was sworn in by the Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court Dipankar Datta, who also flew down to Goa for the ceremony.

Koshyari took oath in Konkani, Goa's official language reading out from the text and despite some fumbling appeared fairly deft at the language.

On his arrival, Koshyari was welcomed to the state by chief

minister Pramod Sawant, Leader of Opposition Digambar Kamat, chief secretary Parimal Rai.

Malik it is believed was transferred out of Goa as his relationship with chief minister Pramod Sawant quickly soured due to his differences with the chief minister on at least three occasions. He also regularly hosted delegations of people and politicians who sought his intervention on various issues.

Babri mosque demolition case in last leg, CBI told to file written reply

A special CBI court in Lucknow that completed the recording of statements of the accused in the 1992 Babri mosque demolition case last month has asked the premier investigation agency to file its reply by August 21.

The trial in the Babri Masjid demolition case is set to enter its last stage after the Central Bureau of Investigation was asked to submit its written reply in the case by Friday.

A special CBI court in Lucknow that completed the recording of statements of all the 32 accused in the 1992 Babri mosque demolition case last month, including senior BJP leaders LK Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Kalyan Singh and Uma Bharti, among others, has asked the premier investigation agency to file its reply by August 21.

The CBI had to file its reply on Tuesday, but its lawyers sought two more days' time.

"The court has ordered the CBI to file its written reply in the Babri

Masjid demolition case by Friday (August 21). The central agency had to file its reply on Tuesday but could not do so," said lawyer Manish Tripathi, who is representing BJP MP from Kaisrganj parliamentary seat in Bahraich district, Brij Bhushan Saran Singh. He is one of the 32 accused in the Babri Masjid demolition case.

The trial in the Lucknow court is going on in regard to the demolition of the disputed structure in 1992 in pursuance of the two FIRs lodged with the Ayodhya Police.

The Supreme Court on July 19 last year had extended by six months the time frame for completing the criminal trial in Ayodhya case and also set a

deadline of nine months for the final order. The deadline expired on April 19 this year and the special judge wrote to the apex court on May 6, seeking an extension.

The Supreme Court on May 8 issued a new deadline of August 31 with instructions to deliver the judgment by then.

However, legal experts are of the opinion that the CBI court will need further extension of about two months to deliver judgment in the case.

"Legal documents in the case run into several thousand pages. It is no easy job to document all proceedings in the case. I think the CBI court will need another extension to deliver its judgment," said lawyer KK



Mishra, who is representing senior BJP leader LK Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi, among others, in the CBI court.

On April 19, 2017, the Supreme Court had ordered the special judge to conduct a day-to-day trial, concluding it in two years. Calling the demolition of the disputed structure a crime which shook the "secular fabric of the Constitution", it allowed the CBI plea for restoration of criminal

conspiracy charge against the VIP accused.

The court had termed the Allahabad high court's February 12, 2001, verdict dropping conspiracy charges against Advani and others as "erroneous".

Before the 2017 verdict of the apex court, there were two sets of cases relating to the demolition, going on in Lucknow and Rae Bareli.

China's J-20 fighter jets near India border? State media downplays report

China's armed forces have so far not made any announcement about deploying fighter aircraft near the border though it is likely fighter jet squadrons are stationed near the long and disputed border with India.

The deployment of China's most advanced J-20 stealth fighter near the border with India should not be over-interpreted in context of the Sino-India border friction as the tension is de-escalating, Chinese state media has said. The long-range jets' deployment, which is yet to be confirmed by the People's Liberation Army Airforce (PLAAF), could be for the aircraft's long-distance flight practice and part of the warplane's protocols to adapt to different environment, Global Times, the nationalistic tabloid, said in an article.

The article was referring to a news article published in Forbes, which cited satellite imagery to claim that two J-20 fighter aircraft have been deployed by the PLAAF near the India-China border.

The J-20 is China's fourth-generation medium- and long-range fighter aircraft, and it was commissioned into air force

combat service in 2018.

The aircraft were spotted, some 320 km from the border, at the Hotan airport in northwest China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

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"The J-20 is a long-range heavy fighter jet. So, when deployed in Hotan, it can potentially cover many areas in Central and South Asia," it said.

The nationalistic tabloid, known for its anti-India rhetoric, however, sought to play down the development.

The deployment if true is "...likely part of normal training on long distance flight and environment adaptation," Chinese military aviation expert Fu Qianshao said.

China is a large country with

many airfields in various terrains and under different climate conditions, and the J-20 needs to fly in more regions to adapt, Fu said.

The border tensions have already been de-escalating, and foreign media's reports could have ulterior motives, the state media article said.

Earlier this month, experts had told the tabloid that the Rafale fighter jets were no match for its J-20 stealth fighter jets, days after the first batch of five French-made warplanes landed in Ambala.

Chinese experts told state media that the Rafale is only a third-plus generation fighter jet and does not stand much of a chance against a stealth, fourth-generation one like the J-20.

Saying that the Rafale is superior to the Su-30 MKI in certain aspects, the acquisition does not yield a significant qualitative change for India, it said.

"In some combat performance



areas, the Rafale is superior to the Su-30 MKI fighter jets, which are in service in the Indian Air Force in large batches, but it is only about one-fourth of a generation more advanced and does not yield a significant qualitative change," it said.

The J-20 made its maiden flight in 2011 and was first shown to the public at the 11th Airshow China in Zhuhai, Guangdong province, in south China, in November 2016, according to the official news agency, Xinhua.

The fighters made their parade debut when the PLA marked its 90th anniversary in July 2017 at Zhurihe military training base in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

In the backdrop of the ongoing border tension, India last week called on China to work jointly for "complete disengagement and de-escalation" on the Line of Actual Control (LAC), saying the future of the bilateral relationship is dependent on the situation along the disputed frontier.

Chinese troops are said to have pulled back from Galwan Valley, the scene of the June 15 clash that resulted in the death of 20 Indian soldiers and unspecified Chinese casualties, and some friction points, but the troop withdrawal hasn't moved forward in the Finger Areas of Pangong Lake, Gogra and Depsang.

Bus carrying 34 passengers allegedly 'hijacked' in Agra by staff of finance company

All passengers are safe and have been provided with an alternate bus for their destination, Panna in Madhya Pradesh.

A private bus carrying 34 passengers from Gurugram in Haryana was allegedly 'hijacked' from Agra and taken towards Jhansi by the staff of a finance company. The bus was later traced near Jhansi. All passengers are safe and have been provided with an alternate bus for their destination, Panna in Madhya Pradesh. "The private bus began its journey on Tuesday evening for Panna in Madhya Pradesh. There were 34 passengers in the bus of whom 13 had to get down at Chhatarpur in Madhya Pradesh while the remaining were to travel to Panna in Madhya Pradesh," stated SP (West) Agra, rural, Ravi Kumar.

"The bus had just crossed Mathura when it was

stopped by car-borne miscreants on the Southern Bye Pass of Agra. They took the bus in control after forcing the driver, along with the conductor and the helper, to get down," informed SP Ravi Kumar. "The driver, the conductor and the helper were told to get into the waiting car which moved around Agra. They were later dropped at Kuberpur. The staff of finance company returned the personal mobile and cash that the conductor and driver were carrying. However, they took the ticket money collected by them from the passengers to return them. All three were also provided food and were not harassed by the staff of the finance company," he said. Nonetheless, the incident

created panic.

Driver of the Panna-bound private bus, Ramesh Kumar, said, "About nine people were following the bus in two SUVs. When the bus reached near Etawah toll plaza at about 2.30 am, those in the SUVs intercepted the bus and told us that they were from a finance company. They gave Rs 300 each to me and the conductor of the bus and asked us to get down from the bus. They later drove the bus away."

Kumar, a resident of Dabra town in Gwalior district, added, "I later came to know that those who took the bus with them asked the passengers to get down from the bus at Mauranipur in Jhansi district (Uttar Pradesh)." Superintendent of Police,



Gwalior Amit Sanghi said, "We have inquired with the private finance company whose name was mentioned by the alleged hijackers but the company said none of its employees was involved in the entire episode and that they were not aware of the incident."

Dharmendra Chaturvedi, one of the passengers, who belonged from Maheba village in Chhatarpur district, 23,

said, "I work in Gurugram. I boarded the bus in Gurugram. When we reached Agra we were asked by the conductor to board another bus. When we were boarding the other bus there was some conflict outside. We didn't see anyone who indulged in all this. When we reached Gwalior our bus was changed again. In Jhansi we were asked to board another bus then we

could reach Nowgong (Chhatarpur)." Superintendent of police, Chhatarpur, Sachin Sharma said, "Chhatarpur police got information from Agra police that a bus had been hijacked near a toll plaza between Agra and Mathura and that staff from Shriram Finance Company made passengers of the bus get down to board another bus."

The Media's Sudden Crush on Kamala Harris

Last fall she crashed and burned, and the pundits had a million reasons why. Now she's just the energy the Biden ticket needs. What changed?

As the lights at the Kamala Harris presidential campaign flickered and powered down last December, weeks before the voting started, the press corps delighted in cataloging her deficiencies as a candidate and a campaigner. Although she started in the "top tier" of candidates, and in theory could have galvanized votes from an unprecedented range of different voter bases—women, Californians, Black voters and Asian Americans all at once—the press recorded her failure to enthuse any of those power bases. She had languished in the national polls, scoring only in the single digits on her home court, California, said CNN. "Biden has attracted more support than Harris from black voters," the Washington Post reported.

During the campaign, Harris waffled so hard on health care it's a wonder she wasn't added to the IHOP menu. First, she advocated "Medicare for All" and to eliminate private medical insurance. Then she

backpedaled, "leaving many voters unclear on where she stood," the Los Angeles Times wrote. And when she uncorked her complete health-care agenda, she failed to explain it coherently, the paper continued. Her misfiring campaign organization drew poor notices from every press hand—and from former allies, too. "You can't run the country if you can't run your campaign," Gil Duran, her former aide, told the New York Times. She "proved an uneven campaigner," volunteered the Washington Post. Harris also "wrestled with how to sell her background as a former prosecutor," the Wall Street Journal reported. She avoided the topic of her prosecutorial experience in the campaign's early stretches, but then capitalized on it during the impeachment of President Donald Trump. Was she a criminal-justice reformer or a law-and-order cop? The signals crossed.

But now that Joe Biden has selected Harris as his running

mate, there's a surprise!—fresh, much more positive assessment of the California senator. In many senses, the press is serving the same Harris meal—reporters still view her as a health-care waffler and a poor campaign general. They still criticize her for being unable to decide whether she's a reformer or a cop. But there's nothing like a political promotion, especially one that could lead to a presidency, to make the press corps adjust the seasoning and serving presentation on a candidate. Yesterday, Harris was just another overbaked politician. Today, she's fresh as can be, and the press corps can't stop salivating.

Remember Harris' inability to connect with Black voters? Never mind. Now the New York Times reports "that she could reinforce Mr. Biden's appeal to Black voters and women without stirring particularly vehement opposition on the right or left." Harris has "excited Democrats with a personal story" of being the female offspring of two



immigrants, the New York Times notes, one from India and one from Jamaica. It's true, she's unquestionably a unique figure in American politics, a pioneer in several ways. It just omits to mention that this all somehow failed to register with Democrats the first time around. "In many ways, Harris, 55, is a safe pick—broadly popular in the Democratic Party and well acquainted with the rigors of a national campaign," the Los Angeles Times now says. But based on what? Her so-called broad popularity in the Democratic Party did not extend to donors, who gave her candidacy a bye, one of the main reasons she gave for closing her presidential

campaign. As for the rigors of campaigning, she usually performed well in the early minutes of an event but lacked staying power. As the Washington Post's Paul Waldman wrote when Harris left the race, she never conveyed a convincing reason for running for the presidency outside of simply wanting the job.

According to the New York Times' revisionist view, Harris possesses "a gift for capturing moments of raw political electricity on the debate stage and elsewhere," but neglects to mention in that passage that her so-called gift contributed to her political electrocution when she went at Biden so hard on busing and race.

Unless India invests in green infra, the future of cities is dark and grey



The National Capital Region, including Delhi and neighbouring districts of Uttar Pradesh, was flooded on Wednesday after a spell of unrelenting and intense rainfall. The millennium city of

Gururgram (Haryana) and the National Capital of Delhi were the worst-affected. Entire stretches of roads and underpasses were flooded; homes were inundated; and commuters were caught in traffic snarls that took hours to

untangle. The appalling state of affairs showed, yet again, the result of poorly thought-out urban planning and design, weak urban storm water infrastructures, and lack of monsoon preparedness (desilting and unclogging of

drains).

As episodes of short duration—but intense rainfall increase due to the climate crisis, urban flooding incidents will rise. A 2018 study by the Indian Institute of Technology (Gandhinagar) show that cities face an additional challenge: The urban heat island effect (when a city experiences much warmer temperatures than rural areas due to built up areas), which is modifying the rainfall pattern in these areas.

To tackle these challenges, city governments have to rethink the development paradigm. Instead of investing only in inflexible grey infrastructure (drains, pumps, and outfalls), they must invest heavily in flexible green infrastructure (lakes, floodplains or parks, forests), which absorb stormwater, reduce runoff volume and speed, thus, reducing flood risk.

Preliminary findings of an ongoing research by WRI-India

indicate that 35% (428 sq.km) of new development within 20 km of the city centre (2000-15) in the nation's 10 top cities - Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Kolkata, Mumbai, Pune, Surat - has been on low-lying and high recharge potential zones. Unsurprisingly, these cities have seen multiple flood events in the last five years.

India's cities are its political, economic, and cultural nerve centres. They cannot afford to break down every monsoon; each flood episode leads to losses of lives and livelihood and erodes huge investments. To improve resilience, planners must prioritise water-sensitive urban design and planning, prepare drainage master plans, identify high-risk areas, and invest in green infrastructure. Otherwise, the future of India's cities, as NCR showed on Wednesday, is dark and bleak.

India must inflict costs on China *Finally, a Female VP Isn't Being Set Up to Fail*

By occupying key vantage points in eastern Ladakh in an operation backed by tens of thousands of troops in the rear, China has entered a dangerous new phase in its territorial expansionism. It has brazenly seized areas that were under India's military control or patrolling jurisdiction. In fact, China intruded into areas located beyond any claim line it has ever published, including its 1956, 1959 and 1960 claim lines in Ladakh. Demonstrating ever-expanding claims, its forces intruded into the Hot Springs-Gogra-Kongka La region and the Dopsang Y-Junction and also up to the Galwan River's mouth and Pangong Lake's Finger 4. India, facing up to what its defence ministry calls "unilateral aggression," has made it clear to China that it will settle for nothing less than a full return to status quo ante. India's message to Beijing is that refusing to roll back its encroachments will cast a growing shadow over the bilateral relationship. Publicly, too, India has cautioned that China's border hostilities will damage bilateral ties. There has been no national debate, however, on India's options to restore status quo ante. China seems determined to hold on to its territorial gains, which explains its statement that disengagement is mostly over. Indeed, it has used military and diplomatic talks to demand Indian acquiescence in the new status quo. The protracted talks have also helped it to consolidate its hold on the land grabs, including by building fortifications and installing fiber optic cables. China has achieved its territorial gains in the same way it made territorial grabs elsewhere in Asia since the 1980s - below the threshold of armed conflict, without firing a shot. Today, it is trying to dictate a Hobson's choice to India, like it did when it captured Doklam: Go along with the changed status quo or risk an open war. Believing time is on its side, China is seeking to wear India out in order to present a fait accompli. Against this background, India's options are narrowing. The longer India has waited, the harder it has become to militarily push back the intruding Chinese forces and restore status quo ante. Imagine if India had dealt with China's incursions as soon as it discovered them in early May, instead of restraining its forces and entering into unproductive talks. Indian efforts to obscure the intrusions and troop clashes only led to newer Chinese encroachments. As an August 4 defence ministry note pointed out, China made fresh intrusions into Kugrang, Gogra and Pangong on May 17-18. India has the world's most-experienced army in hybrid mountain warfare. Contrary to the conventional

wisdom that China holds a significant military advantage, several recent international assessments underscore that India's air and ground forces have a qualitative edge over the People's Liberation Army. India's weakness is a reactive and risk-averse strategic culture. India's failure to employ its counterattack capability undermined its negotiating position. Instead of a "seize, hold and talk" strategy to clinch an equitable deal, India brought little to the negotiating table, thus allowing China to reinforce its bargaining power. This is apparent from China's absurd new demands that India further retreat from Pangong and vacate the Kugrang heights. India now faces crunch time. If it is not going to end up validating China's forcible realignment of the Line of Actual Control, India must inflict substantive costs on the aggressor. Imposing significant economic and diplomatic costs, coupled with the application of coercive military pressure, holds the key. India must speak from a position of strength. Its professional, battle-hardened armed forces, coupled with its trade and diplomatic leverage, give it that strength. The only way China will roll back its aggression is if India begins exacting mounting costs that make its territorial gains unbeneficial to hold. The costs India has sought to impose thus far have proved woefully inadequate to make Beijing end its aggression. A calibrated imposition of progressively escalating costs has become imperative. Economically, India's main steps thus far - banning Chinese mobile apps and restricting Chinese companies' access to Indian government contracts - need to be supplemented with informal trade sanctions. Chinese exports to India are still running at more than \$5 billion a month, with July witnessing a surge. Now is the time for India to leverage its buying power to correct its massive trade deficit with China. At a time when the international environment is turning hostile to China's ambitions, India must launch a diplomatic offensive to spotlight the Chinese aggression. India's reticence to name-and-shame China seems unfathomable. Even amid its aggression, China has had no hesitation in raking up the Jammu and Kashmir issue at the United Nations Security Council.

As a warning shot across Beijing's bow, India should rescind its 2006 decision allowing China to reopen its consulate in Kolkata, given China's designs on the Siliguri Corridor. That decision was made despite Beijing's refusal to let India reopen its Lhasa consulate. The Kolkata and Lhasa consulates were shut following Mao Zedong's 1962 war against India.

Kamala Harris is the first female vice presidential nominee not to stand teetering on the so-called 'glass cliff,' facing an impossible mission. In 1984, Walter Mondale trailed incumbent president Ronald Reagan 16 points in the polls when he decided to "shake things up," as he later put it, by picking three-term New York Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro as his running mate. Ferraro-the first female VP nominee of a major party-gave Mondale an initial boost, but the pair crashed to defeat after a bruising campaign with just 13 electoral votes in November. In 2008, Senator John McCain had been consistently trailing newbie Senator Barack Obama when he chose little-known Alaska Governor Sarah Palin as his No. 2. It was a gambit, a "Hail Mary" pass, recalls Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics-one that thudded to the ground on Election Day. No VP nominee, male or female, has ever made or broken a presidential election, but that doesn't stop party brass from assuming the worst. The 1984 Mondale-Ferraro debacle put a "bad taste in the mouth" of the white, male decision-makers, said Alyssa Mastromonaco, who was Obama's deputy chief of staff from 2011 to 2014, on a recent episode of Pod Save America. "What so many people just remember is that they lost. He picked a woman, and they lost. Even though he was probably always going to lose." Psychologists like to call this phenomenon the "glass cliff"-the idea that women are more likely to be elevated to executive leadership roles in periods of crisis, when they're more

likely to fail. But this time is different. Unlike Mondale and McCain, Joe Biden is leading President Donald Trump in the polls and has a decent chance of winning in November. His choice of Harris is not a desperate ploy to save a flailing campaign. And this time, no one is hoping for her to pull off an impossible salvage job. In fact, as historic as Harris is-she's the first woman of color on a major party presidential ticket-Biden's reasoning in picking her was fairly conventional: The choice is a nod to (and an attempt to energize) very important segments of the Democratic base, a signal about the future of the party, a recognition of what he lacks and a statement of his own values. Those are fairly standard VP checkboxes; for once, a female running mate has been approved by the same criteria that have boosted white males for centuries.

"In those other two races it felt like a novelty," Walsh says. "And this time around it felt like, 'Of course this is what he needs to do.'" The pick is both a bold confirmation of the power women, Black women especially, hold within the Democratic Party and a signal that the country might finally be overcoming its tacit aversion to placing women at the top of presidential tickets-an allergy driven by a myth that women can't win the top electoral offices. (Not because you wouldn't vote for a woman, of course-because you don't think other people would.) "The context of the times is different" today than in 1984 and 2008, says Susan Carroll, a professor of political science and women's and gender studies at Rutgers University.



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What's stopping Putin from expanding further?

Michael Bociurkiw

With mass protests erupting in Belarus over a disputed presidential election on Sunday, after which incumbent Alexander Lukashenko claimed a landslide victory, the Kremlin must be watching nervously. Thousands have been arrested in the former Soviet republic and heavily armed Belarusian security forces are on the streets. The leading opposition candidate, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, has fled to neighboring Lithuania. Internationally, the reaction has been a mix, from Western governments warning against violent suppression of protesters (the United States, the European Union, NATO and many European neighbors have sounded that alarm) to a congratulatory note from Chinese President Xi Jinping.

In contrast, Russian President Vladimir Putin called for Lukashenko to resume stalled integration plans to join Belarus and Russia into one country. As with any development on Russia's periphery, the rest of the world should take note -- and should think a bit about Putin's intentions.

Putin's comment on Belarus is clearly intended to stop that country's drift to the West, and

we should take it as a subtle warning to Lukashenko to not stray from Moscow's orbit. Not exactly a shot across the bow, but it would be foolhardy to underestimate Moscow's willingness to respond with force -- just ask neighboring Ukraine. That is because what Russia fears most is Maidan-style protests which rocked Ukraine for several months in 2013-2014 and led to the removal of the pro-Moscow President, Viktor Yanukovich. Those protests were sparked by Ukraine's agreement to develop closer trade ties with the European Union and Yanukovich's withdrawal from that agreement after a meeting with Putin.

Belarus has been cooperating with the EU, but its ties with Russia are deep and not likely to diminish, and it would behoove everyone to remember this recent history of Putin seeing pro-Western protests in a neighboring country and responding with force. When protests in Kiev set Ukraine back on the road toward integration with Europe, it was quickly followed by a Russian invasion. With protests arising now in Belarus, conflict in Ukraine still simmering, and the world distracted by Covid-19, it's worth

examining what these dynamics mean for Putin and whether another brazen act is on the horizon.

Dim peace prospects in Ukraine. And more than six years later, the prospects for peace in eastern Ukraine are bleaker than ever. This despite the 2014 signing of peace accords, the active engagement of the French and German leaders, and no less than 20 ceasefires, including one reaffirmed by Presidents Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky that went into effect on July 27 but collapsed just a few hours later, according to Ukraine's military and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The conflict, one of the longest-running in the world, has claimed more than 14,000 lives, displaced an estimated 1.5 million people, and damaged billions of dollars worth of property and infrastructure.

On one side of the conflict, in an unenviable position, is a TV comedian-turned-politician still cutting his teeth. On the other, a former KGB agent who, in Russia's 2014 seizure of Crimea, orchestrated the smoothest invasion on Europe's doorstep in modern times.

And in the middle, a US president



who has a noticeable affinity for Putin and appears fearful of confronting him regardless of what he does.

The time for another land grab is ripe

This is not the first time pundits have warned Putin may swoop in and escalate the conflict with an "August surprise." And this time, they may be right. The time for a land grab is ripe.

Ukrainian officials have been quoted as saying that Russia is building up personnel and firepower in Crimea and along eastern Ukraine. While it is difficult to corroborate such reports -- especially since OSCE monitors have been blocked many times at rebel-controlled checkpoints and are being given very limited

access at an observation point on the Ukraine-Russia border -- the geopolitical landscape appears perfect for Putin to either expand his sphere of influence or intervene to keep a weak client state such as Belarus in the fold. Alarm bells should be going off in Western capitals. Here's why. Putin likely feels emboldened by the success of his latest consolidation of power at home, through a recent constitutional change which extends his hold on power until 2036. And with Russia struggling to fight the Covid-19 pandemic and with its economy in the doldrums, there's no more perfect time to fire up the public than by reclaiming sovereign lands which Russia regards as its own.

Moving urban India after the Covid-19 pandemic



Ryan Christopher Sequeira

In the aftermath of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, India is likely to experience a behavioural change in urban mobility. Due to lasting concerns about transmission and a newfound aptitude for working from home, we must expect an overall reduced demand and an increased preference for personal modes of transport. Unhindered, there is a high likelihood that there would be a permanent modal shift

towards automobiles that would spatially and environmentally overload our cities and substantively impact our quality of life. Consequentially, this would threaten the financial viability of transit operators, especially those already stretched thin before the hit in ridership, and will further tilt the scales away from an optimal urban transportation landscape.

On the other hand, this crisis also presents an opportunity to

ocus on accessibility; prioritise non-motorised modes of transport; integrate pricing and cross-subsidise

guide the recovery of urban transport towards long-term development goals. Transport networks in Indian cities, whether public or private, road or rail-based, are severely overburdened. Investment in infrastructure to address more effective circulation and interchange of people and goods will have an economic multiplier effect - both job-creation in the present and boosting growth and productivity in the future. But where should we focus our energy and resources to have long-lasting and positive change while providing the most bang for our buck? First, direct efforts towards accessibility instead of only mobility. While mobility focuses on movement of people and goods and the distances they cover, accessibility

emphasises the ability of people to obtain the same goods, services, and activities without necessarily having to move, or at least move as much. Accessibility necessitates rethinking our cities to optimally integrate transportation with land uses to increase proximity, connectivity, and convenience. One method for this, Transit Oriented Development (TOD), has been discussed and studied in the Indian context for over a decade, with even a National TOD Policy framed in 2017, but little progress has been seen on ground. TOD is a concept that has come of age, and its implementation to enable access to live-work-play triangles without needing to commute long distances will be a game-changer for the urbanscape.

Second, facilitate the increased demand for personal modes through non-motorised modes, not just cars and two-wheelers. According to a United Nations Environment Programme report in 2014, even in a large city like Delhi, 48% of trips were less than two kilometres (km) and another 14% were between two and four kms. The high frequency of short distance commutes shows that alternative modes are easily manageable and feasible to adopt. Kolkata has already taken the lead to cater to the recent increase in demand for cycling by permitting bicyclists to cut through neighbourhood lanes, thereby reducing their travel distance. While certainly a step in the right direction, this is not enough, and a strong enabling environment is necessary to create a lasting change.

Why Facebook is wrong, yet again

Its commercial model incentivises hate speech, threatens democracy, and disrupts peace

Dipayan Ghosh

The latest controversy concerning Facebook has forced greater public scrutiny over the company's internal decision-making over political issues in India - and may well be the first technology debate originating domestically that has escalated to become truly international in scope.

This debate centres on a lengthy, chilling investigation published last week by The Wall Street Journal. The report revealed that Facebook staff had considered a complete take-down of T Raja Singh's profile on Facebook in 2018 on the basis that the Hyderabad-based Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state legislator spread hateful messages over the platform, targeting the Muslim community. At the time, however, Ankhi Das, who leads

Facebook's policy efforts in New Delhi, intervened in her colleagues' process, to block the proposed ban of Raja Singh's account. Raja Singh has since argued that his account was hacked, and has further implied that Facebook, in fact, facilitated the spread of hateful messaging coordinated by Muslim politicians. The situation is deeply concerning and should ring alarm bells. Here, you had an Indian employee of one of the most powerful American Internet firms that operates in India, quietly falling in line with Facebook's corporate interests, while putting at risk the lives, let alone the social concerns and political hopes, of Indian citizens. Let us be clear that no one - no one - should experience the vitriolic hate and online threats of violence to which Das has alleged she was subjected in the aftermath of the

publication of the story. Separately, however, one would hope that no citizen of India - whether a supporter of the BJP or Congress - would be treated as an unknowing pawn by the American tech titan, which also owns WhatsApp and Instagram. For Das - as Facebook's leading Indian policy voice, as someone who is empowered to speak for the Indian people to her chief executive Mark Zuckerberg - the social concerns of all Indian citizens should have come well before the commercial interests of Facebook. In this case, sadly, they did not.

The core issue here is that there exists a delicate tension for the company. On the one hand, it faces tremendous pressure to "do the right thing"; all things considered, Facebook's greatest asset still may be its brand and, despite all the



belly-blows the company has endured in recent years, the big blue app still stands tall in the eyes of most Indian consumers.

That brand is a corporate asset to be protected. And yet, on the other hand, Facebook feels a constant pressure to cater to all political interests - and all too often, Facebook has caved in under that pressure. And indeed, in this case, Facebook decided not to do the right thing - which would have been taking down Raja Singh's blatant anti-

Muslim posts - because doing so would raise the ire of the political dispensation of the day. The danger of such unilateral decision-making power - which, in 2018, apparently belonged entirely to one individual, for the Indian market - is tangible. In practice, Facebook is indubitably a monopoly that stretches across the Indian digital media ecosystem. With its extraordinary economic power should come an earnest responsibility to keep its platforms clean of hate.

The importance of Kamala Harris

The Democrats are banking on energising Blacks and women, without alienating White voters

Amit Ahuja

Kamala Devi Harris, a Black-identifying woman of Indian heritage, has been picked as the vice-presidential candidate for the Democratic Party. African-Americans form only 12% and Indian-Americans under one per cent of the electorate. Overwhelming majorities of both groups already support the Democrats. Historically, three women have appeared on the presidential ticket before Harris. All of them have lost. So, then, why did Joe Biden pick Harris as his running mate in what many are calling the most crucial election in American history?

In diverse democracies such as America and India, identity-based fault-lines often organise politics. We know that for a political party, having a voter base is not enough; whether it shows up to vote is what counts. Harris' selection will preserve the Democratic Party's support among Blacks and women, two groups that have been energised

by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the women's movements, and boost their turnout in the November election.

Born to a Jamaican father and an Indian mother, Harris and her sister were raised as Black. She attended a prestigious historically Black college, Howard University, in Washington, DC. Blacks may be 12% of the electorate, but they contribute 25% of the Democratic Party's vote share. This should give the group leverage with the party, but it does not. Republicans do not compete for their vote and the Blacks are stuck with the Democrats. In 2016, nine out of 10 Black voters voted the Democratic Party ticket. So, Blacks, as a one-party constituency in a two-party system, get sidelined.

Brutalised by police violence and devastated by the pandemic, the African-American voters are hurt. They are tired of being taken for granted. The BLM movement

was propelled by this injustice. These disappointed voters can punish the Democratic Party for its neglect by not showing up to vote. The 2016 presidential election signalled the Black disaffection; turnout of the group fell by 7% from the 2012 election. Black turnout is critical for winning in swing states such as Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Florida. Trump won all four states in 2016. Biden and the Democratic Party have received this message. They are hoping that the presence of Harris, a strong and charismatic Black candidate, on the ticket will improve turnout among Black voters. Seven out of 10 American voters are White, and Harris' nomination revives an old fear in American politics that by reaching out to Black voters, the Democratic Party may drive the White voters away. One distinguishing feature of Harris' biography has been her embrace of her multiple identities, including her immigrant identity.



She has cut her teeth in the Democratic Party in California, America's most populous state, which is only 5.8% Black. To succeed, she had to fall back on her multiple identities to amplify her appeal beyond Blacks. In California, she was able to build support among the White and Hispanic communities, skills which should help her broaden her appeal at the national level. While race drives voter choices, gender does not have a similar hold on voter behaviour. In 2016, for example, White women voted

for Donald Trump (47%) over Hillary Clinton (45%) by a small margin; a startling outcome given Clinton was the first female candidate, who also happened to be white, and Trump's blatant misogyny. Harris is smart, competent, and walks into the nomination with the necessary experience. These attributes do not protect her from the conscious and unconscious biases against female candidates in the electorate and the media. The prejudice is only harsher against women of colour.

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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.



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

In Trumpian times, Israel and a Gulf State find common ground

Aaron David Miller

In a broken, angry, dysfunctional Middle East, most matters associated with Arab-Israeli peace rarely turn out well. In fact, for a Trump administration that has demonstrated an uncanny clumsiness and obtuseness, this has been a region where American ideas go to die. The formal statement today announcing normalization of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) may prove to be something of an exception. For three parties -- Israel, the UAE and the US -- it's a rare coincidence of interests and a clear win. For another, the Palestinians, it's a stunning loss and a clear reflection of how much the region has changed at their expense. Indeed, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas quickly called it "aggression on the Palestinian people" and "a betrayal of Jerusalem."

Israel's plans to annex parts of the West Bank may have been temporarily suspended, but anyone who believes we are any closer to a negotiation -- let alone an agreement to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- ought to lie down and wait quietly until the feeling passes.

In a way, today's headline of normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE is part and parcel of a trend line that has been building for some time now: a surprise warming of relations between Israel and Arab states in the Gulf, during the Trump presidency.

Three significant factors have driven it.

The rise of Iran, and of Sunni jihadists spewing terror across the region, has created a narrow but important coincidence of interests between Israel and the Gulf states. Increasing exhaustion and frustration with the longstanding Palestinian cause has led Arab states to feel a bit more freedom to pursue their own interests, in spite of it.

But behind it all lay a White House enamored of Arab money for arms sales and investment in the US and eager to marshal the Arabs in the service of its anti-Iranian and pro-Israeli agenda. Indeed, in an effort to court the Gulf Arabs, Trump and his Middle East envoy son-in-law Jared Kushner have established close personal relations with senior officials in Saudi Arabia and the

UAE, and its ambassador here in Washington. And Arab nations, sensing opportunities with an autocrat-friendly US president, have been only too happy to follow.

It was no coincidence that last month, two marked Emirati aircraft landed at Ben-Gurion airport carrying Covid-19 supplies for the Palestinian Authority, which rejected them, asserting this was a cover for normalizing relations between the UAE and Israel, as The Times of Israel reported.

For Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, this announcement couldn't have come at a better time. With Covid-19 resurgent, Israel in recession with record levels of unemployment, and facing trial, Netanyahu needed a boost.

He also needed a way out of the annexation trap he had clumsily managed to set for himself. He had repeatedly promised his base, and the world, that Israel would annex parts of the West Bank, but he found himself unprepared for it, six weeks past the July 1 date after which he could have initiated the plans, in the middle of a surging pandemic, pressed by his right wing to make good on his commitment but without a green light from the Trump administration.

The announcement today extricates the Prime Minister

from this conundrum, and he can tell his right wing he's only suspending annexation -- as called for in the trilateral announcement. Moreover, he can claim credit for a genuinely unprecedented event -- the first normalization of relations between Israel and a Gulf state. Indeed, should Saudi Arabia follow suit (a truly major development) or even Oman or Bahrain, it would validate Netanyahu's campaign to expand Israel's relations in the region even while settlement activity continues in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

For the UAE, which had been well on its way to establishing contacts with Israel, the move offers several benefits. It might open the door for the sale of military equipment the US would only sell to an Arab country at peace with Israel. It scores points in Washington, and not just with the Trump administration. Given Trump's sagging poll numbers, the UAE must also hedge its bets and prepare for a possible President Joe Biden. And key Arab states, including Egypt and Jordan, well know that the road to favor in Washington can run through Jerusalem. What better way to separate itself from Saudi Arabia -- whose Crown Prince has been lambasted by Biden for his policies in Yemen and the



killing of Jamal Khashoggi -- than to be bold and establish relations with Israel.

The UAE may encounter some blowback in the region for its decision. But the UAE is trying to preempt that by presenting itself as the party that blocked Israel's annexation of the West Bank. As the country's ambassador to the US wrote in a statement today, "It immediately stops annexation and the potential of violent escalation. It maintains the viability of a two-state solution as endorsed by the Arab League and international community." For the Trump administration, too, the deal wasn't a minute too late in coming. To its credit, the administration has assiduously cultivated the Gulf states on the issue of Israel, though its failure to restrain Saudi Arabia in Yemen and refusal to impose any cost on the Crown Prince for the killing of Khashoggi has damaged US

interests. The administration is clearly overselling the announcement. National Security Adviser Robert C. O'Brien has called for Trump to be nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for this and his other Middle East policies.

Still, the announcement is good news for the President and credits him with another first with respect to Israel, from a stream of bad ones. It defuses the issue of annexation for the time being and credits the President with a rare example of successful diplomacy. The big loser in all of this is the Palestinians. One might take heart in the fact that at least for the time being, annexation is not imminent. But the decision of a Gulf state to normalize relations with Israel is a stunning blow to the Palestinian issue and a clear reflection of how much the region and Arab priorities have changed.



Bharati Chaturvedi
For India - and other developing countries - the question is about what America will do about its historic emissions

Joe Biden has reworked his climate crisis plan, under pressure from younger activists and workers in the United States,

to make it ambitious and more result-oriented. He acknowledges that the economy and environment are interconnected.

According to the Washington Post, Biden's new plan calls "for the elimination of carbon pollution from the electric sector

by 2035, for the US to rejoin the international Paris climate accord and spend \$2 trillion over four years to boost renewables and create incentives for more energy-efficient cars, homes and commercial buildings". But, for India - and other developing countries - the question is about

what America will do about its historic emissions. The climate crisis is largely because of the emissions from the wealthy nations over the years. Small Island Nations are extraordinarily vulnerable - some might even disappear. There's also India - severely impacted, as freak climate events here have shown. Ideally, nations historically guilty of inflicting this on us and others should finance our efforts to adapt to and mitigate climate change - this is germane to the Equal but Differentiated Responsibilities. But Biden's plans focus on the US. This is not fine for a country that calls itself a global leader. One hopes that Biden will detail this, although it is likely to be unpopular with Americans in the current economic scenario. A Presidential candidate is already a global face. Their plan must reflect how they intend to empower India and other countries to combat the crisis.

Meet Kamala Harris; The VP of Biden!

Kamala Harris has created history by being the 3rd woman, 1st Black & 1st Indian American to be running for Vice President of America. Being an American, I am proud of my country that after electing its first Black President in 2008 we are definitely moving beyond race, religion & gender.

Than as an Indian American, I have mixed feelings for Kamala's candidacy. Kamala was born to highly educated and affluent parents. Her father Dr Donald Harris, first black Economics professor at Stanford University, came from Jamaica, and mother a Hindu Brahmin Shyamala Gopalan, a cancer researcher from India. Kamala was 7 when her parents divorced in 1972 after a bitterly fought custody battle. Her mother got full custody and raised both her daughters. She died in 2009. Kamala always claims that she & her sister Maya were raised by her Indian mother, as Black. That's the most admirable thing about her to say for identifying herself with both cultures! It is true or not; I leave it to the Indian American & Black voters to decide. In fact Kamala hardly talks about her father but do use his family name Harris or her multi-cultural and multi-religious roots or her husband whom she married in Aug. 2014 is of the Jewish faith or mentions his two college-age children by a previous marriage. Douglas Emhoff is an Entertainment Attorney and partner at DLA Piper Law Firm in California and makes over a \$1 mil per year.

Those who draw similarities between Kamala and Obama; must understand that the similarities ends with multi-cultural and multi-religious backgrounds only. Unlike Obama; Kamala can not boast of any Ivy League credentials or community service or social activism. She earned her undergraduate degree from the historically black Howard University and graduated in 1990 from the University of California's second-tier Hastings College of Law in San Francisco. Early in her career, Kamala, 29, dated California Assembly Speaker Willie Brown, who was 60 at the time-and married. As speaker, Brown was instrumental in her appointments as Deputy DA of Alameda County, high-profile lucrative positions on the

state's Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board and the California Medical Assistance Commission. These political appointments gave her almost \$400,000 between 1994 and 1999 and access to politically influential and moneyed elite of San Francisco. In 2003, they gave her full financial backing and political support for her first campaign for a public office.. Although Kamala & Brown split in 1995 but Brown continued to support her politically, using his mayoral office and political connections to help her become San Francisco's first black and first female district attorney. Brown himself was the first black mayor of San Francisco.

This is the most disturbing well known fact about Kamala that she used her sexuality to ride to the top in politics. An unfair means to grab power. No one should care about her sexual preferences but it is unethical & unfair just like the use of money or muscle power to grab power. Lot of male politicians had affairs and mistresses but they never used it to ride to the top. Fair competition is the foundations of democracy. If women rise to the top by sleeping with people in power the democratic system will no longer be supported by people of talent and principles. Such people are flash only with no substance and lack ideological compass. Use of moneypower, muscle power or religion or sexuality in politics is worst for a country & it's citizens. Live example is the plight of Indians currently ruled by politicians with flash only, no substance and total lack of ideological compass. They gained power by using muscle power, money power and religion. During her tenure as San Francisco DA, she came under scrutiny when a technician stole cocaine from the DA's crime lab and mishandled evidence. Kamala, trying to keep things under wraps, failed to inform defense attorneys. As a result, about a thousand drug-related cases had to be thrown out. In 2004 she refused to seek death penalty for a cop killer rather said she will charge David Hill, 21 with crimes that could send him to life with a no possibility of parole. Hill gunned down Officer Isaac Espinoza, 29, with an AK 47 assault rifle and wounded his partner, Officer Barry Parker, 38.



Espinoza, who left behind a wife and young daughter, had no chance even to draw his weapon; his partner Parker survived from the wounds. AG Bill Lockyer a Liberal Democrat didn't overturn Kamala's decision, concluding that she hadn't abused her prosecutorial discretion-though he noted that he would have sought a death sentence if he were the D.A. Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer publicly disagreed with Kamala's decision. Even Gavin Newsom, San Francisco's mayor at the time (now CA Governor), said that the case "rattled" his opposition to capital punishment. In 2004 she came close to Obama when he was running for Senate. They became close friends. Kamala was the first Elected official of CA to endorse him for President in 2008. Her niece Meena Harris worked for Barak Obama's 2008 campaign and later co-founded Gen44, the DNC's millennial fundraising program. Her father Tony West, Kamala's sister Maya's husband was Associate AG in Obama administration. Currently Tony is CLO of Uber. In 2013, President Barack Obama was recorded referring to Kamala as the "best-looking attorney general in the country." He later apologized after critics labeled the comment as sexist! In 2009, again she repeated the blunders of 2004. She announced that she would seek life imprisonment, rather than death penalty, against an illegal alien from El Salvador and MS-13 gang member Edwin Ramos, who murdered a father and two of his sons in a drive-by shooting in 2008. The third son, critically wounded, had survived. Ramos apparently mistaking them as gang rivals. Despite Kamala's well documented laxity toward criminals, illegal aliens and labor unions; liberal voters of CA

narrowly elected her to the AG's office in 2010 to be the first female and first Black. In 2011, AG Kamala argued in County Superior Court filing that Trilochan Oberoi can't be properly fitted for a gas mask if he keeps the facial hair required by his Sikh religion. She asked the Court that Oberoi's lawsuit for racial discrimination be dismissed who was denied Prison Guard's job for being an observant Sikh. Oberoi was in the Indian Navy before moving to the United States and wants to serve as a peace officer and was living close to 2 state prisons. AG Kamala declined to support two ballot initiatives that would've banned the death penalty - raising accusations of political opportunism and inconsistency on the controversial issue. Same Kamala as DA of San Francisco in 2004 refused to seek death penalty for a cop killer and in 2009 again refused to seek death penalty for an illegal immigrant & MS 13 gang member for killing a father and his 2 sons and fatally wounding the third son. AG Kamala continued her predecessor Jerry Brown's refusal to defend on appeal Proposition 8, a voter-approved state constitutional amendment supporting traditional marriage, because of her personal disagreement with it. The measure's proponents had to litigate the appeal on their own. In *Hollingsworth v. Perry* (2013), the U.S. Supreme Court then ruled that the proponents lacked the "standing" to defend the law on appeal, which left in place a federal district court ruling that the amendment was unconstitutional. The LA Times astutely noted that Prop. 8 "died only for lack of a defender, not because the court reached the serious constitutional questions at the heart of it." In 2014, every

professional law-enforcement organization in CA and 55 of 58 county DA's opposed Proposition 47, a ballot measure that, by reducing several felony offenses to misdemeanors, would result in thousands of prisoners going free. Kamala refused to take a position one way or the other. Prop. 47 passed. Kamala agreed to a settlement in 2014 with Rodney Quine, a litigious transgender prisoner serving a life sentence for murder without possibility of parole, allowing him to have a costly sex-change operation at taxpayer expense. That made 1,200 transgender prisoners to be eligible for such operations with tax payers money in the future, if recommended by medical experts. In 2015 Kamala decided not to enforce a provision of Proposition 83, a measure that voters passed in 2006 to bar the state's approximately 6,000 paroled sex offenders from living within 2,000 feet of schools and parks. The CA Supreme Court had ruled that the residency restrictions violated the constitutional rights of sex offenders living in San Diego County because of a dearth there of "compliant housing." The court declined to rule on the legality of the restrictions in the state's 57 other counties. Kamala, concluded that the residency restrictions were invalid everywhere-and then refused to make public her legal reasoning. She unilaterally waived legal restrictions supported by more than 70 percent of California voters, without a word of explanation.

As AG she refused to enforce federal immigration laws, vigorously defended SF's sanctuary-city ordinance and opposing California's participation in the federal Secure Communities Program, which requires local authorities to detain criminal suspects for deportation if they're illegal aliens. Even in the wake of the highly publicized killing in 2015 of Kate Steinle by Jose Francisco Lopez-Sanchez, an illegal alien from Mexico with a string of prior felonies and five previous deportations, Kamala wouldn't criticize San Francisco Sheriff Ross Mirkarimi for his earlier refusal to deliver Lopez-Sanchez to the ICE.

For migrant workers, the meaning of Independence

Millions walked back home during the lockdown and have no income. But there is light at the end of the tunnel

Shashi Shekhar

India celebrated its 73rd anniversary of Independence on August 15. As Indians, we have a lot to be grateful for. But, there are also some worrying and dark aspects to our social milieu. While most of us are justifiably proud of our past, many of our compatriots are in a precarious position today, their distress exacerbated by the pandemic, their future uncertain.

Let me narrate the story of Deepak Brahma, from Kokrajhar district in Assam. Due to the lack of employment opportunities in his native village, he went to Gujarat where he toiled to support his family. Covid-19 took his job away. Like many other migrant workers, he decided to return home to his village. As a daily wage earner, he had no savings since he had used everything he earned to sustain himself and his family. His family raised money by selling household items to enable him to return. After getting home, Brahma and others like him found that they were shunned in their villages.

With no work and no money, and treated as possible carriers of the infection, they were treated as outcasts. When hunger overwhelmed Brahma and his family, he sold his newborn daughter for ~45,000 to feed his other two children for a while. But his misfortunes did not end there. A local NGO got wind of this and the matter finally came to the attention of the police. Brahma, the middleman and the buyer were packed off to jail. Impoverished and desperate, Brahma now faces a long and tough legal battle. Brahma's story is similar to so many others across India, hardly an encouraging thought as the Republic enters its 74th year.

It is staggering how quickly we forget the pain and suffering of others. Just a few months ago, our media was full of news about millions of migrant workers trudging home on the highways under the scorching sun after they lost their jobs in the cities. Hungry, thirsty, their soles cracked and bleeding, they marched on, clutching their meagre possessions and their

children in the hope of finding some succour at home. Those going home included the elderly, the sick and pregnant women, a sight which was heart-rending and, for many of us, an appalling indictment of a system which had failed them. Most of us have only heard about the Partition of 1947. The outward migration when Covid-19 struck seemed like a replay of those terrible days.

Mahatma Gandhi used to refer to these people as *daridra-narayan* (penniless gods). These are the people for whom Gandhi propounded the concept of *Ram Rajya*. This concept drove the spirit behind our freedom struggle. But what has happened to it today?

Did governments at the Centre and states remain silent spectators during the calamity visited upon us by Covid-19? Not at all. During this period, coffers were opened and, as a result, there was no news of mass starvation despite enormous unemployment. Based on data, our sister publication *Mint* has done a comparative study. It



found that under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Yojana, ~2,000 per month, as an advance quarterly instalment, was deposited into the accounts of millions of people. Free foodgrains were also distributed during this period. However, the same study also found that the urban poor were better off than rural communities. Those in rural areas were more deprived despite free foodgrains and the deposits of ~500 in the Jan Dhan accounts of women. In another survey, it was found that during the lockdown, people's income decreased by 84%. When reporters from *Hindustan* reached a segment of these citizens, they came

across a myriad of problems faced by those in the lower-middle and middle-income groups. Decreased income meant that their savings were depleted since these had to be used for daily expenses. The biggest problem for this class was that their sense of pride and dignity stopped them from standing in queues for free foodgrains. They hesitated from applying for work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS), leaving them little choice but to use up their own limited funds.

Trump is assembling a coalition of the willing against China



David A. Andelman

President Donald Trump is having one big success in what is clearly a campaign to distract from Covid-19's impact on his floundering reelection campaign. Somehow, he's managed to cobble together a coalition-of-the-willing -- nations prepared to follow him over the cliff and participate in a burgeoning anti-China alliance. Australia, India, Japan, Britain, France and Canada have all squared off against a China that is at the same time flexing its

own muscles after apparently beating back the coronavirus that it unleashed on the world.

China has become increasingly expansionist -- in trade warfare, propaganda and military exercises. Accusations have ricocheted around the globe.

After US claims of Chinese cyber-espionage targeting Covid-19 treatment and vaccine research, China has issued resolute denials: Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters in Beijing that "sources from the US government have

been accusing China of hacking to steal technology and data of US vaccine research, but there has been no evidence whatsoever. Such allegations are pure slander."

With many pointing the finger at Beijing for cyberattacks against Australia given their timing, Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian has also denied the accusations, saying China is a "staunch upholder of cyberspace security" and is "firmly opposed to all forms of cyber attacks."

Demanding the world adopt a "distrust and verify" posture toward China, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has taken a leadership role in encouraging what is effectively becoming a new cold war, really the deepest through all the years I've been monitoring relations since China's massacre of dissidents in Tiananmen Square more than 30 years ago.

Chinese President Xi Jinping appears to have long felt that it is time for China really to join

the ranks of superpowers. "The days when China can be put in a submissive position are long gone," observed a commentary in the *Global Times*, the English-language offshoot of the Communist Party newspaper *People's Daily*. "What's behind China's perceived 'Wolf Warrior' style diplomacy is the changing strengths of China and the West. When the West falls short of its ability to uphold its interests, it can only resort to a hysterical hooligan style diplomacy in an attempt to maintain its waning dignity."

Now, having largely tamed the spread of coronavirus within its borders and reopened its country internally, China's leadership has begun to flex its muscles anew, from military maneuvers in the South China Sea to bullying governments in Asia, Europe, the Pacific and North America. As Mira Rapp-Hooper of the Council on Foreign Relations wrote for CNN recently, the Trump administration seems to prefer "going it alone"

against China, doing things like enacting sanctions, reportedly planning to roll back some student visas, and revoking Hong Kong's special trade status.

Late Thursday night, an order threatening to ban TikTok and WeChat in the US added to the list, and Friday morning, Trump added tough sanctions on Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, as well as 10 other Hong Kong and Beijing officials, accusing them of curbing freedoms and undermining Hong Kong's long and jealously-guarded autonomy. Lam and other officials have publicly criticized the move, as *The New York Times* reported.

China in turn responded by slapping sanctions on 11 Americans including six US lawmakers: Sens. Marco Rubio of Florida, Ted Cruz of Texas, Tom Cotton of Arkansas, Josh Hawley of Missouri and Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, and Rep.

The centrality of the West Bengal election

On the surface, it'll be a fight between Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). At its heart, however, this is a struggle for supremacy between two conflicting visions of India: Hindutva versus secularism

Karan Thapar

I am not surprised by the increasing coverage of Bihar politics these days. After all, if the elections are on time, the state will be voting in about two months. What does, however, perplex me is the silence on West Bengal. Elections there may be nine months away, but they'll certainly be both a cliffhanger and seminal. In fact, to use a woke phrase, they're bound to be a game-changer. On the surface, it'll be a fight between Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). At its heart, however, this is a struggle for supremacy between two conflicting visions of India: Hindutva versus secularism. Bengal is the ground on which perhaps the most serious battle between these conflicting political forces is likely to happen.

The BJP goes into this fight with considerable advantages.

It has unparalleled access to financial resources. The TMC? simply cannot compete. So, if it's a virtual campaign, Mamata is likely to be at a significant disadvantage. Second, the Centre has the power to dismiss Mamata's government if it wants and, in addition, a governor who would have no hesitation recommending such a course of action. Mamata has frequently riled both and will, no doubt, continue to do so. That could be provocation enough. Third, the BJP can command its nationwide leadership to campaign and canvass. In a tight contest that is not to be sniffed at. Mamata only has what she's got in Bengal. I'm not sure how much help regional political leaders could be. They don't count in Bengal and they might not want to offend the BJP either.

Mamata and the TMC? also have to contend with Congress and the Communists. No doubt, they are shrunken forces but whatever support they retain in Bengal is

likely to be at Mamata's cost. They may be political flies compared to the BJP's roaring tiger, but any time she spends swatting them away will detract from her focus on her main opponent.

Now, consider what a BJP victory in Bengal would amount to. It won't be just another state for Narendra Modi. Bengal's demography and politics suggest it will be much more than that. First, it's a state with 27% Muslims. Only Assam has more. If Modi can win both, the Hindutva juggernaut will seem unstoppable. Then there's the politics of Bengal. This is a state which for nearly 35 years was under unbroken and unchallenged Communist rule. Since 2011, it's been controlled by the toughest opponent Modi has had to face. No one has challenged him more than Mamata. Their rivalry is not just political, it's personal. Therefore, a BJP victory would herald a seismic



shift.

The fall of Calcutta-Kolkata - if it happens - could be compared to the conquest of Carthage and Constantinople or, if you prefer, the Communist takeover of China in 1949. Nothing will be the same again. If Modi and the BJP can win Bengal, they will seem unshakeable and their spread irresistible whilst the Opposition would be crushed and humiliated.

So, for the first time after 1911, Kolkata will be the cynosure of all eyes. The fight for Writer's Building could seal the political future of the country. This is why we need to be better informed about the "Battle for Bharat" that looms ahead. The next nine months aren't going to

be easy for Mamata. Under emotional pressure she can make mistakes. Even when she was riding high, she wasn't free of faults.

Now, as she readies herself to face the formidable forces Modi can muster, the only powerful weapon in her armoury is possibly Prashant Kishor. He's a political magician. Of that, I have no doubt. But can he pull it off yet again? He did it for Narendra Modi in 2014, Nitish Kumar in 2015, Amarinder Singh in 2017, Jaganmohan Reddy in 2019 and Arvind Kejriwal in 2020. They added feathers to his already crowded cap. Uttar Pradesh in 2017 was the solitary exception. Will Bengal be the second one?

Don't blame fate for Beirut's cruel tragedy



Frida Ghitis

Sometimes, it seems as if fate is trying to prove its unlimited capacity for cruelty. When the skies over Beirut exploded on Tuesday, sending shockwaves felt all the way to Cyprus, 150 miles away in the Mediterranean, and devastating much of a city that was once known as the Paris of the Middle East, it seemed one of those times. But the never-ending tragedy that is Lebanon is not the result of the random doings of destiny.

Lebanon's government has

blamed a large quantity of poorly stored ammonium nitrate for the blast that rocked the city, killing at least 135 people, injuring more than 5,000 and destroying the capital's critical port, through which most of the goods Lebanon needs -- including food -- enter the country. Some 300,000 may have been left homeless.

Initial investigations of the catastrophe appear to show it was the result of a confluence of ludicrously reckless practices and non-existent concern for safety -- though we can't know for sure this early. The Prime Minister has

promised a full investigation.

The Lebanese people have long suffered as a consequence of the actions and behavior of venal, incompetent individuals; of power-hungry politicians, businesspeople, and shadowy figures, and of geopolitical actors who have made the country their plaything at the expense of good governance.

Everything that could go wrong in Lebanon has. The blast came in the midst of an epic economic collapse and a global pandemic, with political factions fighting each other as the people, growing hungry, have alternated between despair and rage. (As a prominent TV personality, Antoine El Hajj, put it, "the middle class has become poor and the poor have become destitute.") So it was not surprising that the explosion immediately ignited a storm of speculation and suspicion. What and who caused the cataclysm, everyone wanted to know. Into this situation stepped the

President of the United States, Donald Trump, who appallingly -- almost casually -- appeared to inject more fuel into the smoldering conspiracies, calling the explosion, a "terrible attack," and later speculating that it was "a bomb of some kind." Trump claimed he had heard it from "our great generals," but defense officials told CNN they didn't know what he was talking about. The only reason Trump's carelessness did not set off an even worse political blowup in a country seething with intrigue may be that the world has come to know Trump as a fantasist and a liar. Still the Lebanese did not require his help to set off on conspiracy-minded guesswork -- the sheer volume of which on social media attests to the country's political maelstrom: The Lebanese are familiar with factions and actors and powers. Was it any of the usual suspects? The calamitous 15-years-long civil war that ended in 1990 acquainted them with -- and left

the outlines of -- political conflict and malignant patronage.

What exactly caused the explosion? Images of a mushroom cloud led some to conclude that, "no question that was an atomic bomb"--though experts promptly noted that explosions of all kinds create mushroom clouds, and this was most certainly NOT a nuclear weapon. Lebanese authorities first blamed fireworks stored at the port. But it seemed unlikely firecrackers and sparklers could create a blast of that magnitude. Then new facts started trickling in, and the banality of what may have caused the catastrophe started to emerge. Stored at the port, there was in fact a massive amount of ammonium nitrate, the highly explosive mix used by the 1995 Oklahoma City bombers, perpetrators of what at the time was the worst terrorist attack in US history. Those bombers used two tons.

Is Afghanistan Waiting For The U.S. Election Before Starting Peace Talks?



To pave the way for historic peace talks, the Afghan government is freeing thousands of Taliban detainees in phases, including men accused of one of the deadliest attacks in nearly two decades of insurgency: a 2017 truck bombing in Kabul that killed more than 150 people. "We would like to end this violence," says Sediq Sediqqi, spokesman for Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. "We would like to

make sure that the Taliban understands and realizes the opportunity of peace." But despite the prisoner release, analysts say the Afghan government has been delaying talks to wait for the U.S. election results. "The Kabul government does seem to be holding out for a Biden presidency," says Kate Clark, co-director of the Kabul-based Afghan Analysts Network.

In doing so, the Afghan government risks peace talks collapsing, and could be blamed by its main backer, the United States. The government may also anger Afghans who see the release of Taliban prisoners as a hefty sacrifice.

"This is a unique opportunity in which we might get to some level of a peaceful and stable Afghanistan," says Orzala Nemat, director of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, a Kabul-based think tank. "We should not miss that opportunity."

The talks aim to end more than four decades of near continuous conflict in Afghanistan, including 19 years of insurgency, by negotiating a power-sharing agreement with the Taliban. But mistrust in the intentions of the Taliban and the Trump

administration intentions runs deep among Afghan officials and the Afghan public, analysts say.

To understand why, travel back to a ballroom of an upscale hotel of marble and gold in Qatar. There, on Feb. 29, Taliban supporters shouted "God is Great!" as their senior negotiator, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, signed a historic agreement with U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad. That deal called for most foreign forces to withdraw from Afghanistan by next April. The Taliban promised not to attack U.S. and NATO troops, or shelter militants like al-Qaida.

The peace process is driven by Washington," says Clark. "And it's driven, I would say, by the desire to get troops out of Afghanistan." She says that

immediately concerned Afghan officials who worried it signaled a broader abandonment of the country.

Already, U.S. troops have scaled back from more than 14,000 to more than 8,000 - with plans to draw down to about 5,000 by November. Other NATO forces are scaling back in tandem.

The deal also called for the release of up to 5,000 Taliban prisoners in exchange for 1,000 Afghan security forces held by the insurgents - as a confidence-building measure to precede negotiations between delegations.

The Afghan government was not party to the deal, but promised to uphold those uneven terms after pressure by the U.S., according to Andrew Watkins, senior Afghanistan analyst at the International Crisis Group.

As Bangladesh Cosies Up To China, New Delhi Looks For Path Correction

Use of issue of illegal influx of Bangladeshi immigrants as an election plank by the ruling dispensation harms ties with a friendly country. It shows little concern for India's strategic interests.



Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been a true friend to India. Ever since she came to power, she has been sensitive to New Delhi's security and strategic concerns. India could not have hoped for a better neighbour. Violence and terrorism in Assam have come down, thanks largely to Hasina's generosity. One of the first acts of her government, when it came to power in 2009, was to hand over leaders of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) operating out of

Bangladesh back to India. Insurgent groups of the northeast had found it easy to slip across the border to escape the Indian security forces. All insurgent camps were shut down and unlike the previous governments in Dhaka, Hasina made it plain that anti-India forces were not welcome. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) also got short shrift in Bangladesh. But today, China is spreading its wings in Bangladesh, literally India's backyard. Pakistan's

Prime Minister Imran Khan was on the phone with Hasina in an attempt to mend fences with her. The opportunity for China and Pakistan was provided by the ruling party's domestic agenda. Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla has rushed to Dhaka on fears of growing Chinese interest in Bangladesh. Earlier Beijing announced tariff exception for 97 percent of exports from Bangladesh. During the pandemic, China sent out a medical team to assist the

government. Bangladesh has also allowed a Chinese company to conduct human trials for a vaccine that it is testing. All this was keenly followed by New Delhi. But alarm bells rang out with China's announcement of USD one billion dollar for a project on the Teesta river. Ironically, India and Bangladesh have had major problems about sharing of Teesta waters.

During UPA rule, former prime minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka in 2011 when a deal was to be signed, West Bengal chief minister put her foot down, and no agreement has so far materialised.

The foreign secretary flew to Dhaka on Tuesday and met Prime Minister Hasina Wednesday afternoon. He is carrying a message from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Shringla was India's high commissioner to Bangladesh before he moved to Washington on a short stint and returned to head the ministry. Shringla knows Bangladesh well and has a good equation with all the top brass of the ruling Awami League. He would also hold talks with foreign minister A.K. Abdul Momen and other senior ministers. Momen had some time ago complained about the demeaning way a section of the

Indian press portrayed Bangladesh.

Fault Lies With India

Much of the fault in the downturn in ties lies with India. Use of issue of illegal influx of Bangladeshi immigrants as an election plank by the ruling dispensation harms ties with a friendly country. It shows little concern for India's strategic interests. But the ruling BJP, including its powerful home minister Amit Shah, has flagged this as a major election issue. Shah has earlier dubbed Bangladeshi migrants as "termites". Dhaka had said not a word at that time. Hasina's government had also not protested the scrapping of article 370 and the crackdown on Kashmir. But Assam's National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) are major concerns.

First the CAA. Through this amendment, India decided to fast track citizenship for minorities facing religious persecution in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists could get refuge in India. All but Muslims would be admitted from these three countries. While introducing the bill in the Lok Sabha, home minister Amit Shah spoke of religious persecution in these three countries.



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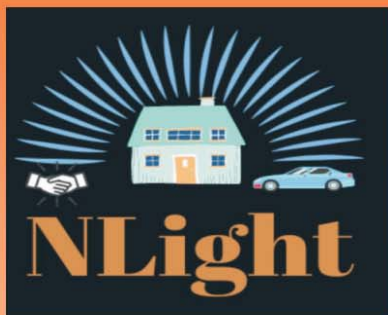
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Aspiring Migrants: Uncertainty clouds fate of over 85,000



Jahangir Alam got an employment visa in late February and was preparing to fly to Saudi Arabia the following month to work as a cleaner.

But the 24-year-old man from Tangail couldn't take a flight as the government in March announced suspension of all scheduled flights to and from Bangladesh amid the global coronavirus outbreak.

This brought to a near halt the country's efforts to send fresh migrant workers abroad.

According to Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira), the pandemic has either delayed or stalled the process of sending at least 85,405 aspiring migrants to

different countries till mid-July. Of them, 85 percent was expected to have jobs in Saudi Arabia.

Of the workers, 22,987 got visas and completed all procedures but could not fly to their destinations. Jahangir had borrowed Tk 3 lakh from a moneylender to pay for his employment visa. He also had to fork out another Tk 70,000 from his own savings.

"Now, I am paying interest on the debt but there is no indication of when I'll be able to catch a flight," he told this correspondent over phone recently.

Jahangir, the eldest of his parents' three children, is now unsure when he will be able to help his labourer father run the family.

Like him, thousands of low-income people have invested their borrowed or hard-earned money for "lucrative" overseas jobs. But the pandemic has thrown their plans into uncertainty.

The government last month announced resumption of international flights on a limited scale. But fresh migrant workers could not fly abroad as scheduled flights to Saudi Arabia, the largest overseas labour market for Bangladesh, and most other countries remain suspended.

Currently, scheduled flights are being operated to only 11 destinations in Malaysia, the UAE, Qatar, the UK, China, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Turkey, Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) Chairman Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman told this newspaper yesterday.

Migrant rights activist Prof CR Abrar said many people in the rural areas paid either recruiting agencies or middlemen for overseas jobs. They fall in the category of migrant workers in distress. The government should ask the recruiting agencies to return the money of such workers, he noted, adding that

migrant rights groups have already raised the issue.

There is another category of intending migrants who have either applied for clearance from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) or already got clearance, Prof Abrar pointed out.

The authorities should give priority to them while sending workers abroad when the overseas labour markets reopen, he noted.

Baira data shows that 30,422 workers were waiting for visas till mid-July. At least 19,198 workers got visas this year while visa processing for 6,904 workers remained stalled from March for various reasons. Besides, flights of 3,078 workers were cancelled during the period.

The data was collected from only 328 of more than 1,200 member agencies of Baira, its Secretary General Shameem Ahmed Chowdhury Noman said at a virtual conference on July 15. Baira member agencies had received demands for more than one lakh jobs before the pandemic, he mentioned.

According to BMET data, no

overseas recruitment was made in April and May.

The situation was similar in June, said BMET Director General Shamsul Alam.

This was in contrast to the situation in January-March when about 1.81 lakh workers were hired for overseas jobs.

The Baira secretary general voiced concern that the country's coronavirus situation might discourage foreign employers from hiring workers from Bangladesh even if the situation in the destination countries becomes normal anytime soon.

Prof Abrar said Baira should shoulder the responsibility of the workers who made full payments, and give them priority when the overseas labour markets reopen.

Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme, said that if the government fails to contain the novel coronavirus effectively, Bangladesh might miss out on the opportunities in the international labour market. "The government must give priority to containment of the virus while making efforts to send workers abroad," he added.

'Advocate for peace': Bombing kills Afghan official in Kabul

Abdul Baqi Amin, who previously participated in talks with Taliban in Doha, was killed by a bomb placed in his car.

A high-ranking Education Ministry employee was killed in a bomb blast in the Afghan capital Kabul on Wednesday, a second attack in less than a week on peace and rights activists in the country.

Abdul Baqi Amin, director of the Scientific Council of the Ministry of Education, was killed by an explosive device that was placed in his car in Kabul.

The attack on Amin comes less than a week after Fawzia Koofi, a member of the government negotiating team, was wounded in an assassination attempt in the north of Kabul.

There have been targeted attacks on rights activists and religious scholars in recent months. Experts see this as an attempt to intimidate and weaken Afghanistan's civil society before

the talks.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, which came a day after more than a dozen rockets were fired in the capital killing at least three people.

Amin was part of the Afghan delegation who took part in several high-level meetings with the Taliban in the Qatari capital Doha where they discussed points on reduction in violence and women rights.

Taliban condemns attack The Taliban, which has repeatedly refused to negotiate with the West-backed government of President Ashraf Ghani, agreed to join the meeting on condition the attendees will do so in a personal capacity.

Amin had also met the chief Taliban negotiator, Mullah

Baradar, in Doha in January 2020, advocating for peace in the country.

"All sides are tired of the war and look for peace and stability in the country; at the same time there are concerns about some issues among all Afghans, and many of these concerns are related to the post-US-Taliban agreement. Therefore, assuring the people about these issues is a must in this stage," Amin was quoted as saying on the website for QASED Strategic Research Center, a Kabul-based independent research organisation, of which he was the general director and member of the board.

Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen condemned the attack on Amin saying he was targeted by "the enemies of the Islamic



system, prosperity and peace". Many took to social media condemning his death and calling the attackers "peace spoilers".

Bombings and attacks continue with frequency in Afghanistan as the government and Taliban armed group are expected to join peace talks, which have been delayed due to differences over the release of Taliban prisoners.

The prisoner release is part of the US-Taliban agreement signed in February, which saw Washington agree to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan in return for a pledge from the armed group to hold peace talks with the Afghan government.

There is still no date for the start of the talks, which were initially scheduled to be held in March.

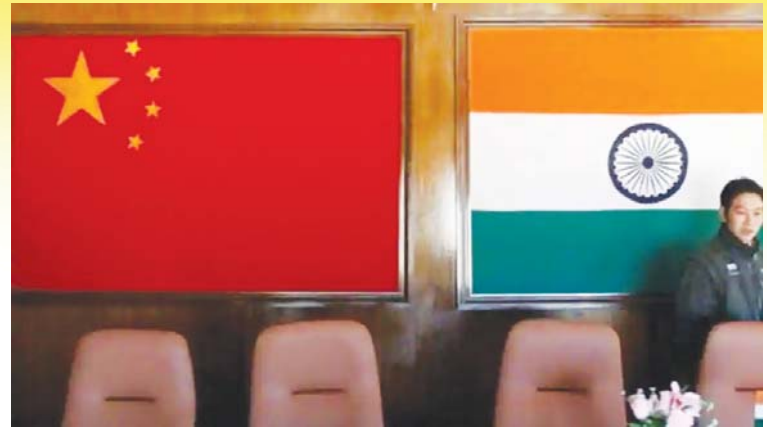
India, China to hold another round of diplomatic talks on border standoff on Thursday

Thursday's talks will be the fifth engagement at the diplomatic level since the border standoff emerged into the open in early May and the Indian side is expected to reiterate its call for China to work sincerely towards complete disengagement and de-escalation along the LAC.

India and China will hold another round of talks on Thursday under the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on border affairs in an effort to break the impasse along the Line of Control (LAC), people familiar with developments said. The meeting between diplomats of the two sides, to be held via video conference, comes at a time when military talks on reducing tensions along the disputed border have hit a roadblock, and the Indian Army has adopted a tougher line in its efforts to restore status quo ante in eastern Ladakh. This will be the fifth engagement at the diplomatic level since the border standoff

emerged into the open in early May and the Indian side is expected to reiterate its call for China to work sincerely towards complete disengagement and de-escalation along the LAC, the people cited above said on condition of anonymity. Amid a growing realisation in New Delhi that there is unlikely to be a breakthrough through the talks between the corps commanders, the Indian envoy in Beijing, Vikram Misri, has been tasked to reach out to top Chinese leaders to discuss ways to end the standoff, the people said. Misri met Maj Gen Ci Guowei of the Central Military Commission's (CMC) office of international military

cooperation, and Liu Jianchao, deputy director of the Communist Party of China's (CPC) central committee's foreign affairs commission, in Beijing last week. The people cited above said more such meetings were on the cards. There was no official word from either India or China on the WMCC meeting, though the people said it would meet on Thursday afternoon. "We have already said China needs to work with us for complete disengagement and de-escalation on the LAC as the future of the bilateral relationship is dependent on the situation along the border. That continues to be our position," said one of the



people cited above.

The Indian side has also made it clear that the sanctity of the LAC is non-negotiable, the people added. Five rounds of talks between the corps commanders have failed to break the deadlock due to serious differences in the Finger Area near Pangong Lake and the PLA's reluctance to vacate positions held by it in what New Delhi claims as Indian territory. Former

ambassador Rajiv Bhatia, distinguished fellow for foreign policy studies at Gateway House, said India had shown "ample commitment and efforts" to end the standoff and much would now depend on China's response. "It seems to me the WMCC meeting should show some of the results of the efforts by our envoy in Beijing, who has met officials of CPC and CMC."

Pak army chief Gen Bajwa's apology doesn't help, gets a royal snub in Saudi kingdom

After India cemented its ties with Gulf countries over the last six years, Pakistan distanced itself from its projected Arab legacy and moved towards Erdogan's Ottoman revival, an Indian diplomat said.

Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa who started his Saudi Arabia visit on Monday to calm diplomatic strains has returned home after been declined a meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Gen Bajwa had to settle for a meeting with the Deputy Defence Minister Sheikh Khalid Bin Salman, also the younger brother of the Crown Prince, as well as Maj Gen Fayyad Al Ruwaili, the kingdom's chief of general staff, people familiar with the matter in Riyadh and New

Delhi. Bajwa is learnt to have conveyed the Imran Khan government's apology over foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi's statement that criticised Saudi Arabia over the reluctance of the Organisation of Islamic Countries to convene a meeting of OIC foreign ministers to discuss Kashmir. But the regret conveyed to Deputy Defence Minister Sheikh Khalid Bin Salman during their meeting on Tuesday, didn't get Islamabad any further in Riyadh. General

Bajwa's interactions in the kingdom were limited to Saudi's defence establishment, just as Pakistan military had claimed after news of General Bajwa's trip was leaked back home. This version was, however, contradicted by Pakistan minister Sheikh Rasheed on Saturday who told a news channel that the army chief was visiting Saudi Arabia to iron out outstanding minor differences. General Bajwa is accompanied on this visit by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief Lt General



Faiz Hameed. There has been a buzz in Islamabad that PM Khan was not averse to dropping Qureshi, who crossed the red line with Saudi Arabia when he threatened to call a conference of Islamic countries outside the OIC if it did not call a conference

of foreign ministers to discuss the situation in Kashmir. Pakistan has long pressed the Saudi-led OIC to convene a high-level meeting to highlight alleged Indian violations in the part it controls but hasn't got its way so far.

US appreciates Pakistan's role for Afghan peace process



Ambassador of United States Paul Wayne Jones has appreciated Pakistan's positive role for Afghan reconciliation process and ensuring peace and stability in the region, a statement issued

by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said. According to the military's media wing, the US envoy expressed these views during a farewell visit to Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa on

US Ambassador Paul Jones calls on General Qamar on his farewell visit Wednesday.

The army chief thanked the ambassador for his services and contributions in Pakistan. On August 12, the outgoing Afghan envoy Shukrullah Atif Mashal also paid a farewell call on General Qamar at GHQ in Rawalpindi.

"The dignitary thanked COAS for support to Afghanistan and Afghan peace process during his tenure," the ISPR said in a statement. Islamabad has played a key role in brokering the talks between

the Taliban and the US and has since then been closely engaged with all relevant parties to take this process to the logical conclusion.

The first round of intra-Afghan dialogue is expected to take place in Doha while talks may shift to either Germany or Norway in the second phase. The intra-Afghan talks will discuss the future political dispensation of Afghanistan and a power-sharing arrangement between the Taliban and other groups.

On its part, the US plans to limit its number of troops to 5,000 by the end of November. Pakistan, China and other neighbours of Afghanistan want the orderly withdrawal of foreign forces from the Afghan soil.

This past weekend Pakistan welcomed the Afghan Loya Jirga or Grand Assembly's approval to release remaining 400 Taliban prisoners, paving way for the much-anticipated intra-Afghan talks.

Pandit Jasraj: The Tansen of our times

Mainstreaming classical Indian music, with community participation, will be his lasting contribution and legacy

Pandit Martand Jasraj was deeply embedded in India's national psyche and was an inimitable part of its cultural ethos. This void is irreplaceable. In my life, even more so. I do not recall of any auspicious occasion, from my house-warming to the marriage of my son, which were not blessed by his magical voice. He was the last of the great quartet in our classical vocal tradition comprising Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, an exponent of the Kirana Gharana; Kishori Amonkar, an exponent of the Jaipur Gharana; Girija Devi, an exponent of the Seniya and Banaras gharanas; and Pandit Jasraj, an exponent of the Mewati Gharana. Given my passion for Indian music, I was privileged to share a personal bond with all of them. However, there are some characteristics which were exclusive to him. His magnanimity, indulgence and equanimity were unique to him. On no occasion did I find him irritated, complaining of either

an inattentive audience or any transient illness. On one occasion, when I remarked about his viral fever, he jocularly answered that the presence of such distinguished music lovers and our enthusiasm had made his discomfort vanish. Born in Hisar, Panditji traversed a long distance in his life from various traditions, imbibing the essentials of different styles of singing. I have heard some recitals of him being taught by his elder brother, Pandit Maniram, and it is amazing to hear the re-orchestration of the best guru-shishya tradition. As an exponent of the Mewati Gharana, he sought to blend various musical styles, not confined to ghayal alone. In this sense, he had a futuristic vision. He recognised that the classical tradition, without losing its purity of form and content, must evolve. That is why, while learning from the Mewati Gharana, he improvised on his musical styles, particularly kirtan. He also innovated the well-known

Jasrangi, which involved both the female artist and himself performing collectively for wider community acceptance. After all, the Om Namō Bhagwate Vasudevaya Namaha, which he sang on many occasions, comes with a supreme sense of spirituality unique to Jasraj and which invoked instant community participation. In imbibing the classical tradition, he constantly sought to improvise and improve on it. On a special occasion, on May 8, 1998, it was a hot and humid afternoon. He decided to sing a raga Dhulia Malhar, which he explained at length was a precursor of the rains and where the rain particles are often mixed with dust particles to produce intense dust storms preceding the rainfall. As he continued his singing on that hot afternoon, clouds appeared from nowhere. It started drizzling, which cooled the atmosphere greatly. The magical appearance of the clouds and the rains from



nowhere reminded everyone present there of the legendary Tansen. It was said that Tansen could summon the rains while singing Malhar and light up the lamps during Deepak. Undoubtedly, Pandit Jasraj, whom we all experienced in that evening, was the 21st century Tansen in drawing legendary powers to invoke the gods and spirituality so much needed by humans. In a sense, it is somewhat ironical that a man born in Hisar, travelling through the entire orbit of the musical traditions of India, and from Hyderabad, then to Sanand, then as the supreme national star, would have passed away in New Jersey. My only comfort in this time

of grief is that he left us doing what he best loved - educating and teaching students on the great Indian cultural tradition of classical music, of which he was the noblest interpreter. Following his calling of globalising the Indian classical music tradition, he founded schools in Atlanta, Tampa, Vancouver, Toronto, New York, New Jersey, Pittsburgh, Mumbai and Kerala. Durga Jasraj, his loving daughter, who was trained assiduously by her father, looked after him to the very end. He had greatly encouraged her in promoting the Tiranga in close cooperation with the notable poet and lyricist Javed Akhtar.

Dhoni: The first hero of 'real India'

A study in contrast, Dhoni symbolised the hopes, aspirations and abilities of small-town India



This story has been told before, towards the start of Mahendra Singh Dhoni (MSD)'s international career; so it is perhaps fitting that it's told again, now that we are at the end of it. In April 2005, in the middle of a hot and hectic one-day series against Pakistan, the cricket carnival shuffled into Visakhapatnam. It was an Indian team that featured a bunch of fresh players, and among them was a wicketkeeper-batsman who wore the same long hair that I did at the time (don't ask; we were all young and foolish once).

As a travelling cricket writer then, this similarity in manes led to a series of interesting encounters. I was greeted at the airport with chants of "Dhoni, Dhoni" by a large group of fans waiting for the Indian team to arrive; crushed by autograph-seekers at the hotel where both the team and I were staying; and cheered in the hotel balcony by another throng that assembled on the beachfront across the road. I must confess that I waved back, relishing this misdirected attention. The following morning, things changed forever. MSD, 23, exploded into national consciousness with an imperious

148 - 123 deliveries, 15 fours, four sixes; scaling the roof of the new stadium at least twice (the jury is still out whether it was three times).

He would not be confused for anyone ever again, long hair or not; and would go on to become India's most influential public figure of the next decade-and-a-half.

Right through this journey, which effectively began that morning in Visakhapatnam, Dhoni was a complicated figure that India really could not get a handle on. His is a story of many contrasts - a subject of both intrigue and fascination, radiating both charm and abrasiveness, reacting with both passion and disengagement, providing moments of both unconfined joy and unadulterated anguish, and donning the role of both rebel and dictator. Not surprising then, that his cricketing legacy is both illustrious and problematic.

It's not easy to capture what MS Dhoni means to cricket - he was not the greatest of batsmen, but could be the most effective; he wasn't the safest of wicketkeepers, but came up with game-changing dismissals; nor was he, despite his phenomenal success, the most talismanic of captains. There are enough contenders in each of those categories - both in India and abroad - against whom Dhoni would not be able to hold his own.

It's perhaps even harder to capture what he means to India, and why he transcended sport to become a public figure. He went far beyond the confines of the boundary line on the cricket field, or for that matter, any other boundaries that society could have enclosed him in.

He was never meant to succeed in the manner that he did. A boy from Ranchi, ticket-collector by profession, and wicketkeeper-

batsman by hobby - the fact that he played in the state Ranji team was a good enough end to the script. Nothing more was needed. But somehow his story didn't stop there: He made it to the Indian side, led it, won two World Cups, and then fashioned an entire generation of dreamers in the same manner that Sachin Tendulkar had done in the previous decade.

Tendulkar, whose career started around the same time India was being liberalised, became the talisman of a nation starting to exhale. His was the face that launched a million brands, each feeding on his power and drawing from his excellence. He was the perfect fit for that time - a boy from a literary, respected, yet financially modest family - encompassing the dreams and hopes that India had from new opportunities that would come with opening its doors to the world.

California fires: Helicopter pilot killed while battling blaze



flames burning through people's front yards in California's famed wine-producing Napa and Sonoma counties. Smoke also blanketed the city of San Francisco, about 60 miles (95km) south of Vacaville, on Wednesday morning. Fires are also burning in the southern part of the state, where officials described "extreme fire conditions" amid the heatwave. Meanwhile, the state's energy operator has pleaded with residents to use less electricity or otherwise face blackouts that would leave millions of people without power for hours at a time. On Tuesday night more than 37,000 customers across California lost power, officials told CNN. So far this year the US has experienced fewer wildfires than in 2019. According to Reuters news agency, around 1.4m fewer acres have burned this year, but the pace is expected to accelerate in the next month as Santa Ana winds reach the south and El Diablo winds strike in the north.

US authorities say the pilot of a helicopter fighting fires in California has died after his aircraft crashed. The pilot was the only person on board the water-dropping helicopter, which crashed near the city of Coalinga. California Governor Gavin Newsom has declared a state of emergency as authorities battle hundreds of blazes. Thousands of people have had to flee their homes in areas near San Francisco after several quick-moving wildfires swept into the region.

Most at risk is the city of Vacaville, home to about 100,000, which lies between San Francisco and Sacramento. Officials went door-to-door overnight in a frantic effort to clear homes. According to fire officials, 50 structures have burned down in Vacaville, with another 50 damaged by the fire. "We are experiencing fires the likes of which we haven't seen in many, many years," Governor Newsom told reporters. The blazes are thought to have been sparked by a heatwave

combined with nearly 11,000 lightning strikes which have hit the state over the last three days. Earlier this week, one of the highest ever temperatures on Earth was recorded in California's Death Valley. Across the US western states on Wednesday, nearly 45 million people were living in areas under some form of excessive heat warning or heat advisory. Mr Newsom said 367 known fires have been recorded so far, but noted that "the prospect of that going up is very real". "As those lightning strikes spark,

as you have a lot of smoke, you have a difficult time determining total number of fires until certain things clear and we have the opportunity to go to more remote parts of the state," he added. The group of fires in the San Francisco Bay Area was driven by winds throughout Tuesday night and has now grown to 46,000 uncontained acres. The fire, which is larger than city of Washington DC, has injured four people and threatens about 2,000 buildings in Vacaville, authorities say. Video on social media shows

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



PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

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



STAY HOME IF SICK

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



PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

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



REDUCE OVERCROWDING

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

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Call 311 to report harassment or discrimination.
**Messages and data rates may apply. Check your wireless provider plan for details.*



Belarus unrest: Lukashenko steps up efforts to reassert control



She said President Lukashenko had "lost all legitimacy in the eyes of our nation and the world" and urged the EU to back what she called the "awakening of Belarus".

She said: "People who went out to defend their vote in the streets of their cities all across Belarus were brutally beaten, imprisoned and tortured by the regime desperately clinging on to power. This is taking place right now in the middle of Europe."

Ms Tikhonovskaya has formed a "co-ordination council" with plans for "new, fair and democratic presidential elections with international supervision".

How has the EU responded? After a three-hour video conference, EU Leaders agreed unanimously to take three actions over Belarus, BBC Europe Correspondent Gavin Lee reports: Firstly, to impose sanctions including asset freezes for an as yet undisclosed number of officials involved in alleged election-rigging, brutality and imprisonment of protesters. The exact sanctions are still being worked out

"Secondly, leaders agreed to a

joint form of words making clear that the EU stands with the people on the streets, and does not recognise the result. But it does not go as far as stating they do not recognise President Lukashenko's authority, as some EU officials wanted

Thirdly, leaders offered help in trying to mediate dialogue between the government and the opposition, to find a way for the president to stand down and peacefully transfer power.

In addition, €53m (£48m; \$63m) of financial support from the EU to Belarus is being re-assigned away from the state to non-governmental organisations, with some money assigned to help the victims of violence, as well setting up alternatives to government-backed media organisations.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said election had been neither free nor fair. olicing and public security. The proposed government is subject to further consent by the lower house of parliament.

What action did Lukashenko order? The man who has led Belarus since 1994 said he had ordered police to quell protests

in Minsk. "There should no longer be any disorder in Minsk of any kind," he told his security council.

"People are tired. People demand peace and quiet," he added. He said he had ordered border controls to be tightened to prevent an influx of "fighters and arms". He also warned that workers at state media who had gone on strike in protest at the election and the subsequent crackdown on protests that they would not get their jobs back. Russian replacements have reportedly been brought in. Mr Lukashenko also accused those picketing outside factories of harassing workers. He had earlier accused the opposition of "an attempt to seize power". The BBC's Jonah Fisher in Minsk said there had already been some signs this morning of a change in tactics from the Belarusian authorities in Minsk. Our correspondent said that a checkpoint had appeared on the road leading to the state TV building with police checking the identity of anyone walking to the building.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has stepped up efforts to reassert his control after 10 days of street protests and strikes triggered by disputed elections.

The official result gave him 80% of the vote but the opposition has denounced the poll as fraudulent. Mr Lukashenko says he has given orders to end the unrest in the capital Minsk.

The move signalled an escalation just as EU leaders agreed to impose sanctions at a virtual summit.

The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, made clear that the EU did not recognise the result of the election and called on Mr

Lukashenko to release hundreds of protesters who have been imprisoned.

"What's happening in Belarus? "The people will not forgive this' But on Wednesday, Mr Lukashenko approved a cabinet that would see Roman Golovchenko retain his role as prime minister, with many other key members of the previous government reappointed, the Tut.by news network reported.

Among those on the list to remain in place was Interior Minister Yuri Karayev, whose responsibilities include pThe 37-year-old, who left for Lithuania after being detained for hours following the vote, released a video statement on Wednesday.

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U.S. postal chaos prompts Democrats to reassess mail-ballot plan

Turmoil at the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) is causing some Democrats and local election officials to rethink their vote-by-mail strategies for November's presidential election, shifting emphasis to drop boxes and early voting that bypass the post office. The 2020 contest promises to be the nation's largest test of voting by mail. But U.S. President Donald Trump's relentless, unsubstantiated attacks on mail balloting, along with cost-cutting that has delayed mail service nationwide, have sown worry and confusion among many voters. Democratic officials who just weeks ago were touting their dominance in mail balloting during a recent rash of primaries are now cautioning supporters of presidential challenger Joe Biden to be wary. Operatives in battleground states, including Pennsylvania, are particularly concerned about ballots arriving too late to count for the Nov. 3 election. "We are considering telling voters that if they haven't mailed out their complete ballot by Oct. 15, don't bother.

Instead, vote in person or drop off the ballot" at an elections office, said Joe Foster, the chairman of the Democratic Party in Montgomery County, the most populous of Philadelphia's suburban counties. "We want to make sure every vote counts." Other local Democratic leaders, from states like Florida and North Carolina, told Reuters they also are weighing urging voters to submit mail ballots weeks ahead of the election or else vote in person. On Tuesday, Postmaster General Louis DeJoy announced he was suspending cost-cutting measures he had put in place in recent weeks that had led to widespread service disruptions. Those changes included limits on employee overtime, orders for trucks to depart on schedule even if there was mail still to be loaded, and the removal of some mail sorting machines. "The Postal Service is ready today to handle whatever volume of election mail it receives this fall," DeJoy said in a statement. He also promised to deploy "standby resources" beginning Oct. 1 to

satisfy any unforeseen demand. But some Democrats said the damage is already done. Many don't trust DeJoy - who was a major Trump campaign donor before becoming postal chief - to restore service at the independent government agency amid a presidential race that polls say Biden is leading. "Return the mailboxes you removed," Rep. David Cicilline of Rhode Island said on Twitter. "Return the sorting machines you took out. Restore the regular hours of post offices you cut short. Return postal vehicles you took. The list goes on." A USPS spokesman declined to comment. DeJoy is expected to provide more detail on his plans in testimony before the Senate on Friday and the House of Representatives on Monday. White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows said Tuesday that Trump never told the Postal Service to change its operations. Democrats asked for \$25 billion to shore up the balance sheet of the USPS in a massive virus aid package that passed the House of Representatives in May.



Republicans have balked at that figure, and Trump last week said he opposed that funding because it might be used to encourage mail voting. But administration officials in recent days have said they are open to additional funding as public outrage over the USPS drama has grown. Local Democratic officials, operatives and campaign workers said they are not waiting for a Washington solution. In the competitive state of Michigan, Democratic voter outreach volunteer Ken McJimpson, 64, is phoning voters to encourage them to hand-deliver their absentee ballots directly to specified drop boxes or elections offices in light of concerns about

mail delivery. She said Tuesday's news about restored service gave her no comfort. "I don't trust it," said McJimpson, who volunteers with a nonprofit called Michigan United. "There has been too much noise around this, and someone is clearly pulling the strings. We are going to proceed as planned: drop the ballots off." Upheaval at the USPS has reshuffled some Democrats' plans for other types of election mail as well. Brad Crone, a Democratic strategist in North Carolina, plans to send up to two million mailers between now and Election Day supporting various state and congressional candidates.

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मोदी का एलान-ए-जंग

बूंद-बूंद को तरसेगा पाक

नयी दिल्ली: मोदी सरकार ने बड़ा बयान देते हुए पाकिस्तान को चेतावनी दी है। उन्होंने कहा कि पाकिस्तान को भारत के खिलाफ जंग लड़नी पड़ेगी। उन्होंने कहा कि भारत-पाक सीमा के पास बूंद-बूंद को तरसेगा पाक।

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ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਉਡਾਰੀ ਮਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਖਰਚੇ 27000 ਕਰੋੜ

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Breaking down the executive actions Trump signed on coronavirus relief



(News Agencies)-With stimulus talks stalled, President Donald Trump announced he would go around Congress to deliver aid to Americans affected by the pandemic.

But a close read of the actual text of executive actions he signed Saturday suggests that even if they are deemed constitutional, they will not quickly deliver the aid Trump promised. They may not deliver much at all.

Here's a breakdown of the actions, the many strings attached and questions about what they actually accomplish. Unemployment benefits Trump described the memorandum signed Saturday

as an action providing "an additional or extra \$400 a week and expanded benefits."

But in reality, the additional unemployment aid is more complicated than the White House acknowledged and experts say it may not help a lot of the unemployed.

Under the previous unemployment benefit passed by Congress, millions of Americans received an additional blanket \$600 a week from the federal government on top of their state unemployment benefits.

States have to chip in. Now, under Trump's measure, the federal government is requiring states to pick up the tab for 25% (\$100) of

the as much as \$400 additional benefit each person may be able to receive weekly in additional aid. On top of that, a state must agree to enter into this financial agreement with the federal government for any unemployed person living there to get any of the additional benefits.

On Sunday night, Trump said he was open to allowing people to get the enhanced benefit without states picking up some of the cost. He said it was possible that the federal government could pick up the entire cost if governors make a request.

"We have a system where we can do 100% or we can do 75%, they pay 25, and it will depend on the state," he said to reporters before returning to the White House from his resort in New Jersey. "And they will make a application. We will look at it, and we'll make a decision."

States are in dire financial straits. Many states have already asked the federal government for major financial help. Several experts told CNN there are major questions about how many states may be able to afford the

extra cost.

If a state says that it does not have the funds or does not want to enter into the agreement with the federal government, the unemployed person in that state receives zero dollars in extra federal benefits (they would still receive the normal state unemployment insurance).

In fact, states have asked Congress to provide them with an additional \$500 billion to help shore up their budgets, which have been crushed by the loss of tax revenue amid the pandemic. This has been one of the main points of contention between Democrats, who want to allocate additional aid, and Republicans, who don't want to bail out what they say are badly managed states.

The millions of Americans who've filed for jobless benefits also have drained several states' unemployment benefits trust funds. Already, 10 states have borrowed nearly \$20 billion from the Treasury Department to cover their share of payments, which typically last 26 weeks.

Requires a new system.

Because Congress has not authorized an extension of extra federal unemployment assistance, the state will have to set up an entirely new system to deliver the additional aid.

"The state has to enter an agreement saying not only can they pay the benefit, but that they have some ability to administer the benefit," said Michelle Evermore, an unemployment expert at the National Employment Law Project.

Building a brand new program could take states months to accomplish, Evermore said. She added Trump needed to do it this way because "in order for states to administer a benefit it has to be authorized by Congress, so they can't use their administrative systems to pay a benefit that hasn't been authorized by Congress."

Few will be helped. Evermore, one of the nation's leading experts on unemployment, told CNN she considered the chances of this effort helping many of the newly unemployed due to Covid-19 "low."

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Isolation Hotel Program for Those with COVID-19

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
- You share rooms or a bathroom
- You live with someone who is vulnerable

Hotel rooms are also available for New Yorkers without COVID-19 but who live with someone who has COVID-19.

For more information click here: www1.nyc.gov/covid-19-hotel-program

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Sushant Singh Rajput case: 5 factors behind SC order for CBI probe

Moreover, Rajput's father, whose complaint was the basis for Bihar police to register an FIR, had alleged a criminal breach of trust and misappropriation of money. The consequences of the incident would, therefore, arise in Patna as well.

"The allegation relating to criminal breach of trust and misappropriation of money which were to be eventually accounted for in Patna (where the Complainant resides), could prima facie indicate the lawful jurisdiction of the Patna police," the court held.

The finding that the FIR by Bihar police was valid turned out to be crucial because the CBI had taken over the probe based on the request made by Bihar police.

3. Need for an independent agency due to conflict between two state governments

The apex court noted that there is a conflict between the two state

governments in the matter and though the steps taken by Mumbai police cannot be faulted, stakeholders have raised allegations of unfair investigation against Mumbai police.

"Because both states are making acrimonious allegations of political interference against each other, the legitimacy of the investigation has come under a cloud. This Court (Supreme Court) must strive to ensure that search for the truth is undertaken by an independent agency, not controlled by either of the two state governments," the judgment said.

4. Need to avoid uncertainty due to possible parallel investigations
The court said that CBI has already registered a case and commenced investigation at the instance of the Bihar government. If Mumbai police also decides to commence probe, then it could add to uncertainty and confusion.

"Uncertainty and confusion must be avoided in the event of Mumbai Police also deciding to simultaneously investigate the offence, based on their findings," the judgment said.

5. Justice for Rajput's father and Rhea

The court noted that Rajput was a talented actor in the Mumbai film world who died well before his full potential could be realised. An impartial probe and its outcome will ensure that Rajput's father and Rhea get justice. Moreover, Rhea herself had called for CBI investigation, the court added.

"His family, friends and admirers are keenly waiting the outcome of the investigation so that all the speculations floating around can be put to rest. Therefore a fair, competent and impartial investigation is the need of the hour," the court said.

Law invoked by Supreme Court Article 142 of the Constitution

confers wide power on the Supreme Court to pass an order for doing complete justice in the matter before it. It is invoked to grant reliefs which are beyond the scope of the petition or not sought by the petitioners.

The court invoked Article 142 in this case stating that to ensure public confidence in the investigation and to do complete justice in the matter, it would be appropriate to exercise the powers conferred by the said article.

Supreme Court's powers to order CBI probe

As per section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, CBI can investigate a crime only based on the recommendation of the concerned state which is probing the matter. However, that does not bar constitutional courts (i.e high courts and Supreme Court) from recommending CBI probe as has been held in a long

line of Supreme Court judgments in the past, the court said.

No power to transfer investigation from one state to another in a transfer petition

Chakraborty had filed the transfer petition under section 406 of CrPC seeking transfer of probe from Bihar to Maharashtra. Section 406 confers powers on the Supreme Court to transfer cases from one high court to another or from a lower court in one state to a lower court in another state.

The Supreme Court held that the provision does not grant power to the top court to transfer a matter which is only at the investigation stage from one state to another. "Having considered the contour of the power under section 406 CrPC, it must be concluded that only cases and appeals (not investigation) can be transferred," the court ruled.

Thousands seek to adopt a 9-year-old boy after seeing his heartbreaking plea for a new family

"To have a family, and family, family. Those are the only wishes I have," said Jordan, who wants to be a police officer when he grows up.

The adoption requests have come from all over the United States, but a spokeswoman for the agency said they would like a family in Oklahoma to adopt Jordan, so he can maintain a relationship with his younger brother, who was adopted separately.

Casey White told CNN that some

of the potential parents were already going through the extensive vetting required to adopt a child when they heard Jordan's story.

"Our main goal is to find the best family for every child, and so it's wonderful to have a wide variety of families to choose from, so that you can find the best fit for each individual child because every child has their own unique needs," she said.

Jordan is currently living in a group home and has moved

around a lot in the six years he's been in the agency's care. White said he's suffered a lot of loss and trauma in his life.

"So he really needs a super understanding family, a family who's fairly experienced with parenting and with parenting a kiddo who has experienced trauma," she said.

Christopher Marlowe, the child welfare specialist in charge of finding Jordan's permanent home, is working with other DHS staff to narrow down the

list to find the right match.

"I'm really excited about this and very hopeful this is going to be the breakthrough we needed to find this kid a home," he told KFOR.

White said she's optimistic that Jordan will find a home and hopes that some of the people who were moved by his story consider adopting other children.

"It really is important that people understand that Jordan is not alone and there are just so many

other kids, just like him, who have been through trauma who really need a family who is willing to step forward for them," she said.

White said there are about 7,700 children in foster care in Oklahoma and 500 are ready to be adopted.

"If we can recruit more foster families and more adoptive families from the story, as well as getting Jordan in his home, that would be just a win-win," she said.

Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny in coma after suspected poisoning: spokeswoman

Russian opposition leader and outspoken Kremlin critic Alexey Navalny is in a coma after falling ill from suspected poisoning, his spokeswoman said Thursday.

Navalny, 44, started feeling unwell while on a return flight to Moscow from the Siberian city of Tomsk, his spokeswoman, Kira Yarmysh, said on Twitter. The plane later made an urgent landing in Omsk, she added.

Loud groaning can be heard in video footage apparently filmed on the flight taken by Navalny, which was shared on the Baza Telegram channel. More video apparently filmed through the airplane window shows an immobile man being taken by wheeled stretcher to a waiting ambulance.

He only drank black tea in an airport cafe before takeoff, Yarmysh told Russian radio station Echo of Moscow. "We assume that Alexey was poisoned with something mixed into the tea. It was the only thing that he drank in the morning. Doctors say the toxin was absorbed faster through the hot liquid," Yarmysh tweeted.

Later on Thursday, Yarmysh said that Navalny still had not been diagnosed. "We don't know what exactly caused everything that happened," she said, adding that Navalny's family and doctor had decided to move him to another facility, citing concerns for his safety as well as a lack of necessary equipment for testing. "In Omsk, the hospital where he

is right now, simply does not have enough equipment that is required for the necessary tests and procedures," she said.

"On top of that, this should be done as a safety measure," she added.

Moving to an undisclosed location

Navalny was initially admitted to the acute poisoning unit of Omsk emergency hospital No. 1, where hospital head physician Alexander Murakhovsky said he was in "serious condition," according to Russian state news agency TASS. Asked by a reporter whether Navalny had been poisoned, the hospital's deputy head physician, Anatoly Kalinichenko said: "Naturally, poisoning is considered as one



of the possible reasons for the deterioration of his state. But apart from this, this could be a number of conditions that started acutely and led to the same clinical reactions. We are working on all of them: excluding, confirming. In an earlier tweet,

Yarmysh said the intensive care unit was full of police officers. "They try to get an explanation from the doctor. The doctor saw me in the distance in the corridor, said that 'some things are confidential' and took the police to another room," she said.

India Day celebrated with Car Parade in Long Island



(Jasbir Jay Singh) Hicksville, NY: Necessity, as they say is the mother of invention. Not cowed down by Covid-19, Long Island's IDP USA went on to find an alternative to holding the annual India Day Parade in Hicksville. The successful Car Parade that took place on August 15 afternoon was so smooth and successful that now the talk is to make it an annual affair adding a few floats as in the previous parades. The estimates of the number of cars displaying the tricolor that participated ranged from 150 to 200. The cavalcade was led by a fire engine and the IDP USA float with Grand Marshall Dr Raj Bhayani, President Mukesh Modi and the glamorous Grand Marshall Bhavna Chamoli waving to cheering India lovers along the route. Starting from Patel Brothers on South Broadway at around 4.45 p.m. the cars wound their way back from Apna Bazar, ending before 6 pm at Badshah Farmers Market before 6 pm, where a

cultural program was held and supporters of the parade honored. At the Patel Brothers stage, the program began with lamp lighting and national anthems of the two nations. The dignitaries who addressed the sizeable gathering included Deputy Consul General of India Shatrughna Sinha (Guest of Honor), Town of Oyster Bay Supervisor Joe Saladino, State Senator Kevin Thomas, and Nassau County's Farrah Mozawalla. Parade Founders Bobby Kumar Kalotee and Kamlesh Mehta as well as Dr Raj Bhayani spoke. President Mukesh Modi thanked his team, as well as the Town of Oyster Bay & Nassau County's help & assistance in organizing the Car Parade. Sponsors and VIP Guests were honored by Supervisor Saladino, DCG Sinha and the Grand Marshall. The local community participated with great enthusiasm maintaining social



distance as per Covid-19 restrictions. Many viewers of the Car Parade sent laudatory messages to the IDP USA team. Hundreds accessed the proceedings on Radio Zindagi and social

media platforms like YouTube. IDP USA has held the India Day Parade in Hicksville since 2012 bringing together over 100 community organizations under one umbrella. Given the success of this Hicksville event and a drive-by

celebration of India Day in Washington DC and another car parade in New Jersey, the community's passion and patriotism for our motherland remains as strong as ever - Covid be not proud.

Former Trump aide Bannon pleads not guilty to swindling donors in private border wall effort

activists Brian Kolfage, Andrew Badolato and Timothy Shea. Bannon - Trump's de facto campaign manager during the latter months of the 2016 presidential race and chief White House strategist before being forced out in August 2017 - was arrested Thursday morning on a yacht in the Long Island sound off Connecticut, according to a law enforcement source who asked not to be named.

Bannon pleaded not guilty to the charges through his attorney, Bill Burck, during a short, virtual hearing in U.S. District Court in Manhattan Thursday afternoon.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Stewart Aaron approved an agreement between prosecutors and Bannon's lawyers for his release on a \$5 million bond, with at least \$1.75 million secured by cash or real property. Two "financially responsible" individuals will have to co-sign the bond and will be liable if Bannon skips bail, Aaron said.

Bannon will be barred from international travel while the case is pending, as well as "private air travel...or private yachts or boats without the express permission of the court," Assistant U.S. Attorney Nicolas Roos said. At the prosecution's request, Aaron also ordered Bannon to have no contact with his co-defendants, others involved in "We Build the Wall," and no involvement in moving money in or out of the organization's accounts.

Bannon, who appeared at the hearing by video conference, spoke only briefly. When the judge asked the former Trump adviser and alt-right commentator if he understood his rights, Bannon replied forcefully: "Yes, your honor." He is expected to be released later Thursday and has two weeks to assemble the bond package. The investigation into the border wall group with strong connections to Trump allies had been a closely-held secret, although the indictment in the case indicates some involved with the group may have gotten wind of the inquiry from a "financial institution" last October.

The stunning indictment was returned Monday and unsealed Thursday - four days before the opening of the Republican National Convention - a move

likely to provoke the president, who has accused opponents of trying to create distractions around the quadrennial nominating event.

Trump and the White House swiftly distanced the president from both Bannon and the wall-building effort. Trump and Bannon have had an at-times contentious relationship since the former Breitbart executive left the White House, particularly over negative comments Bannon made about Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner. But recently, Bannon



has been aggressively defending the president in a podcasts he hosts.

"I feel very badly," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office on Thursday. "I don't like that project - I thought it was being done for showboating reasons." Yet Trump also claimed he didn't "know anything about the project at all."

White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany also noted Trump had spoken out against the project in July, although at least one person involved in the effort, former Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach, previously claimed the effort had the president's blessing. Despite Trump's claim that he was opposed to the privately-financed project, it has won kudos from numerous figures close to the president.

The president's son, Donald Trump Jr., offered praise for the effort during a surprise appearance at a symposium last July near a half-mile stretch of wall the group erected in Sunland Park, N.M., the El Paso Times reported.

During the visit, Trump Jr. hailed the private project as "what capitalism is all about."

"This is private enterprise at its

finest," he said. "Doing it better, faster, cheaper than anything else. What you guys are doing is amazing."

And during a trip to the border last November, acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf said he "welcomed" the project, according to the same newspaper. During Wolf's trip, a Border Patrol official also offered support, calling the project "very effective" and a game-changer for those patrolling in the area. The wall project, launched in late 2018 as a GoFundMe fundraiser, has been controversial from the

start, both because of its anti-immigration premise and because critics have long charged it had the hallmarks of a scam.

Before launching the wall project, Kolfage, an Air Force veteran and triple amputee, had operated conspiracy-minded right-wing websites that were banned from Facebook. In March, he launched an effort to sell N95 respirator masks, which were in short supply amid the Covid-19 outbreak.

Badolato has a long history with Bannon. During the last presidential campaign, it emerged that Bannon had registered to vote at Badolato's home address in Florida. In 2016, POLITICO first reported that Bannon and Badolato had partnered in dubious penny stock ventures, and that Badolato had been implicated in a stock manipulation scheme, though he was not charged.

Badolato was set to be released Thursday on his own recognizance after a court appearance in Tampa, court records show.

Dustin Stockton, a conservative strategist who worked on the wall project, told

POLITICO that armed agents raided an RV he is traveling in with his fiancée Jennifer Lawrence, the project's communications director, at 5:30 a.m. on Thursday morning in Mesquite, Nev. Stockton said the agents served them a warrant and a grand jury subpoena from the Southern District of New York, seizing their phones.

Stockton was not charged in the indictment, but denounced the raids and charges as "political intimidation."

"SDNY is OUT OF CONTROL," Stockton wrote on Twitter. "Attacking political infrastructure just before an election is unAmerican. @realDonaldTrump this is election tampering."

While Kolfage and the other two men charged Thursday don't appear to have close ties to

Trump, several prominent Trump supporters are involved with the organization. In addition to Kobach, Erik Prince, founder of private military contractor Blackwater, and former Milwaukee Sheriff David Clarke are all listed on "We Build the Wall" website as part of the "team" leading the organization. Separately, the charges add new context to a recent power play that ended in June with the ouster of the U.S. attorney in Manhattan, Geoffrey Berman.

When Attorney General William Barr moved to replace Berman, many observers speculated that as the election neared, the attorney general was seeking to assert control over a politically sensitive investigation into Trump's private attorney Rudy Giuliani and perhaps other probes into Trump's business affairs.

However, it was not known that the same office was deep into an inquiry into alleged federal crimes by another senior figure in Trumpworld, Bannon, or one that also involved one of the president's highest policy priorities, the border wall.

Berman resisted leaving, despite an announcement Barr issued saying the Trump-appointed prosecutor had agreed to depart. Berman was eventually dismissed, but Barr also agreed to allow Berman's career deputy, Audrey Strauss, to take over as acting U.S. Attorney.

Strauss announced the charges against Bannon and the other men Thursday morning via press release. The indictment was returned by a grand jury on Monday and unsealed Thursday, court records show.

"As alleged, the defendants defrauded hundreds of thousands of donors, capitalizing on their interest in funding a border wall to raise millions of dollars, under the false pretense that all of that money would be spent on construction," Strauss said. "While repeatedly assuring donors that Brian Kolfage, the founder and public face of We Build the Wall, would not be paid a cent, the defendants secretly schemed to pass hundreds of thousands of dollars to Kolfage, which he used to fund his lavish lifestyle."

An attorney for Bannon, William Burck, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Berman declined to comment on the development.

Bannon was reportedly taken into custody by Postal Investigative Service agents aboard a 150-foot yacht owned by an exiled Chinese businessman, Guo Wengui, who has worked with Bannon on various business and political projects. A lawyer and spokesman for Guo, Daniel Podhaskie, declined to say whether Bannon or Guo were aboard the yacht Thursday, but photos posted on social media showed Bannon aboard the boat on Wednesday.

"Mr. Guo is aware of the situation involving Mr. Bannon who has been a strong ally in fighting for freedom and democracy in China," Podhaskie said in a statement. "Mr. Guo's past efforts with Mr. Bannon in fighting for democracy in China had nothing to do with the We Build the Wall organization or Mr. Bannon's activities with that organization."

Bannon's departure from the White House was acrimonious and followed clashes with numerous other officials and advisers to Trump. The brash adviser claimed he had submitted his resignation well in advance of his dismissal, but others said he was fired.

Steve Bannon, key to Trump's rise, charged with defrauding border-wall supporters

Steve Bannon, an architect of Donald Trump's 2016 election victory, was arrested on a yacht on Thursday and pleaded not guilty after he was charged with defrauding donors in a scheme to help build the president's signature wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. As a top adviser to Trump's presidential campaign who later served as White House chief strategist, Bannon helped articulate the "America First" right-wing populism and fierce opposition to immigration that have been hallmarks of Trump's 3-1/2 years in office. Trump fired Bannon from his White House post in August 2017.

Bannon, 66, was among four people arrested and charged by federal prosecutors in Manhattan with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and conspiracy to commit money laundering. They each face up to 40 years in prison if convicted, but would likely get much shorter sentences.

Prosecutors accused the defendants of defrauding hundreds of thousands of donors through a \$25 million crowdfunding campaign called "We Build the Wall." Bannon used hundreds of thousands of dollars of that money to cover personal expenses, according to the charges.

A handcuffed Bannon wore a protective white mask amid the coronavirus pandemic and two open-collared shirts when he appeared in federal court in Manhattan, where his lawyer entered a plea of not guilty on his behalf. He was freed on \$5 million bond and barred by a federal magistrate judge from traveling internationally.

On leaving the courthouse, Bannon took off his mask and briefly addressed reporters before leaving in a black SUV.

"This entire fiasco is to stop people who want to build the wall," Bannon said.

Bannon was arrested in Connecticut by agents from the prosecutor's office and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service aboard a 150-foot-long (45-metre-long) yacht, according to a law enforcement source. That yacht, called the Lady May, is owned by Chinese fugitive billionaire Guo Wengui, with whom Bannon has had a working relationship. The famously disheveled entrepreneur headed the right-wing Breitbart News website - a voice for the alt-right movement

that spans hardcore nationalists, white supremacists, neo-Nazis and anti-Semites - before joining Trump's campaign. Bannon, an anti-globalist, has since promoted a variety of right-wing causes and candidates in the United States and abroad.

Trump told reporters at the White House that he felt "very badly" about the charges, but sought to distance himself from Bannon and the alleged scheme.

"I do think it's a sad event," Trump said. "I haven't dealt with him at all now for years, literally years."

Trump said he knew little about the project. But one of those involved, former Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach, said in 2019 that Trump had offered his support, according to the New York Times.

Bannon is the eighth close Trump associate here to be arrested or convicted of a crime, a list that also includes former campaign chairman Paul Manafort, longtime friend and adviser Roger Stone, former national security adviser Michael Flynn and former personal lawyer Michael Cohen. Trump has struggled to build his border wall - a key 2016

campaign promise - in the face of court challenges, logistical hurdles and congressional opposition. His administration has completed 30 new miles (48 km) of border fencing and replaced an additional 240 miles (386 km) of barriers along the 2,000-mile (3,200-km) border, government figures show.

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More than 330,000 supporters have donated to private fundraisers and profiteers who have promised to build the wall on their own, a 2019 Reuters investigation showed.

The group tied to Bannon built two wall sections on private land in New Mexico and Texas, drawing criticism from local residents who said proper permits were not obtained. The Texas wall section has experienced erosion problems, a report last month showed. "I know nothing about the project," Trump said on Thursday, "other than ... when I read about it, I didn't like it. I said, 'This is for government, this isn't for private people,' and it sounded to me like showboating."

Trump also said he did not believe he had ever met the three

others charged.

BIDEN CAMPAIGN BLASTS TRUMP

The indictment came as the Republican president trails Democratic challenger Joe Biden in opinion polls ahead of the Nov. 3 presidential election.

Biden's campaign said corruption surrounds Trump.

"He has consistently used his office to enrich himself, his family and his cronies, so is it really any surprise that yet another one of the grifters he surrounded himself with and placed in the highest levels of government was just indicted?" deputy campaign manager Kate Bedingfield asked on a call with reporters.

The charges are being handled by the same office that prosecuted Cohen. The office's top prosecutor, Geoffrey Berman, was abruptly ousted by Trump ally in June. Also charged on Thursday were Brian Kolfage, 38, Andrew Badolato, 56, and Timothy Shea, 49.

Shea and Badolato were released on bond. Kolfage's status was unclear.

A triple-amputee U.S. Air Force

veteran, Kolfage formerly ran a company that made millions of dollars running right-wing media websites. He first pledged to send donations to the U.S. government when he launched the wall effort in December 2018, but then said he would use the money to hire private contractors and build the wall on their own. Donors were told that all of their contributions would go toward a wall, prosecutors said. But Kolfage, whom they described as the public face and founder of the operation, took \$350,000 for his personal use to fund a lavish lifestyle, the indictment said. That money and the payments to Bannon were routed through a shell company and a nonprofit group, using fake invoices, prosecutors said.

More recently, Kolfage started a business to sell protective face masks amid the coronavirus pandemic. His lawyer declined comment.

Board members of We Build the Wall include Kobach, Erik Prince, a former government contractor and brother of U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, and former Boston Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling.

Steve Bannon's troubles are just beginning

Thursday's federal indictment of Steve Bannon, former campaign adviser to President Donald Trump, is very bad news for Bannon -- and potentially for many others. The US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York (SDNY) has charged Bannon and three other defendants with a massive fraud scheme. The defendants operated a crowdfunding campaign called "We the People Build the Wall." Its initial premise was that all donations would be handed over to the federal government to pay for construction of Trump's long promised southern border wall between the United States and Mexico.

Instead, the indictment alleges, Bannon and his co-conspirators pocketed millions of dollars in donations and used that money to pay for their own lavish lifestyles and expenses including "travel, hotels, consumer goods, and personal credit card debts." Bannon has been arrested and his attorney declined to comment.

The indictment itself offers clues indicating that the SDNY's evidence is strong. The case appears to be built largely on documents; the SDNY, it seems, has the receipts. The indictment mentions that the evidence includes "fake invoices and sham 'vendor' arrangements," plus



documents showing how the defendants created and used empty shell corporations to try to hide the flow of money from "We the People Build the Wall" into their own pockets.

From Bannon's perspective, it's one thing to defend a case that turns on subtle issues of subjective intent, or that rest on testimony from other co-

conspirators. But it's much harder to defend a case based on black-and-white financial documents. A good defense lawyer can cross-examine a witness and try to take apart his story -- but it's much harder to argue with phony invoices and forged receipts.

The outlook for Bannon is bleak. He can go to trial, of course, but the vast majority of federal trials result in conviction. He can plead guilty and hope for a slightly lower sentence than if he is convicted by a jury. Largely because of the amount of the alleged] fraud -- here, prosecutors say, over \$25 million -- Bannon, if convicted, is looking at a sentence of at least approximately seven to nine years under the federal sentencing guidelines (which are important but not binding on a judge), or slightly less if he accepts responsibility and pleads guilty.

Or Bannon can try to cooperate with the SDNY -- which could offer him his best chance at a significant sentencing reduction. In my experience, the SDNY handles cooperation differently than many other prosecutors' offices. Some prosecutors permit a defendant to cooperate only against certain defendants (typically, his indicted co-conspirators) or only on certain subject matters (usually the charge stated in the original indictment). But in the SDNY, cooperation is all-or-nothing. An SDNY cooperator must admit to every crime he has committed. And the cooperator must give up everything he knows about what others have done -- even if the conduct, or the other people, go beyond the original charges in the indictment.

If Bannon goes the cooperation route and fully comes clean, he stands to minimize his own potential prison time. But, to save himself, Bannon will very likely need to give the SDNY the ammunition it needs to take others down too.

The post office arrested Steve Bannon. Yes, the post office can arrest people.

The US Postal Service is out to deliver justice against former White House chief strategist Steve Bannon.

It may not have come as a shock that Bannon, often described as a grifter, was allegedly caught up in a scheme to defraud donors to a crowdfunding campaign that promised to construct a wall on the US-Mexico border.

But it was a surprise to some that the USPS, the same agency that President Donald Trump has tried to cripple ahead of an expected surge of mail-in ballots in November, carried out his

arrest on a \$28 million megayacht called Lady May off the coast of Connecticut Thursday morning:

These aren't your everyday mail carriers: They are part and parcel of an elite police unit known as the US Postal Inspection Service (USPIS), which has been fighting crime since the mail fraud statute was enacted in 1872. There are about 1,200 such postal inspectors who carry weapons, make arrests, execute federal search warrants, and serve subpoenas. They have even inspired a CBS series, "The

Inspectors."

All agents must complete a 16-week training program that covers firearms, physical fitness, and defensive tactics. In 2019, they made 5,759 arrests and 4,995 convictions related to postal crimes, according to USPS.

They often team up with other federal, state, and local authorities to investigate mail theft, fraud, identity theft, narcotics cases, opioid investigations, lottery scams, and more. Investigations sometimes span years.

In Bannon's case, they

collaborated with Audrey Strauss, the acting US attorney for the Southern District of New York. It's not immediately clear why the USPIS got involved since neither of the charges levied against Bannon - conspiracy to commit money laundering and wire fraud - appear to be directly related to the mail, and the USPIS declined to comment on their investigation of Bannon.

The inspector in charge of the New York division of postal inspectors, Philip Bartlett, said in a statement that Bannon's indictment should send a

message to other fraudsters: "No one is above the law."

"The defendants allegedly engaged in fraud when they misrepresented the true use of donated funds," Bartlett said. "As alleged, not only did they lie to donors, they schemed to hide their misappropriation of funds by creating sham invoices and accounts to launder donations and cover up their crimes, showing no regard for the law or the truth."

Clearly, the USPS doesn't just sell stamps - it also acts to stamp out crime.

Former Trump advisor Steve Bannon pleads not guilty in alleged border wall fundraising scheme

Former White House chief strategist Steve Bannon was arrested Thursday after being charged with defrauding hundreds of thousands of donors through his "We Build the Wall" fundraising campaign.

Bannon pleaded not guilty during a court hearing later Thursday, and he was expected to be released, according to NBC News. Bannon is getting a \$5 million bond that is secured by \$1.75 million in cash or property that Bannon has to post by Sept. 3. He is not allowed to use private jets or yachts, and he must surrender his passport. His travel will be limited to Connecticut and the New York and Washington, D.C., areas.

Bannon and three associates were indicted in a federal investigation in the Southern District of New York. Prosecutors allege the four defrauded donors by raising "more than \$25 million to build a wall along the southern border of the United States," but some of that money was used for personal gain.

The United States Postal Inspection Service assisted in the investigation.

Others in the indictment are Timothy Shea, a 49-year-old from Colorado accused of owning a shell company, Brian Kolfage, a disabled Iraq war veteran, and Andrew Badolato, who according to his own website was a contributor to Breitbart News, the conservative publication Bannon used to run.

The campaign was intended to raise money to help President Donald Trump fulfill a campaign promise to build a border wall. Instead, prosecutors allege that Bannon and his team profited off

the arrangement.

The indictment said the defendants "collectively received hundreds of thousands of dollars in donor funds from 'We Build the Wall,' which they each used in a manner inconsistent with the organization's public representations.

"The defendants defrauded hundreds of thousands of donors, capitalizing on their interest in funding a border wall to raise millions of dollars, under the false pretense that all of that money would be spent on construction," Acting U.S. Attorney Audrey Strauss said in a statement. "While repeatedly assuring donors that Brian Kolfage, the founder and public face of We Build the Wall, would not be paid a cent, the defendants secretly schemed to pass hundreds of thousands of dollars to Kolfage, which he used to fund his lavish lifestyle. We thank the USPIS for their partnership in investigating this case, and we remain dedicated to rooting out and prosecuting fraud wherever we find it."

The White House declined to comment. A spokeswoman for Bannon did not return a request for comment.

Kolfage, a 37-year-old triple amputee, launched the crowdfunding campaign in late 2018 on GoFundMe to build the wall. His effort came amid a stalemate over government funding on Capitol Hill, where Trump demanded that any spending package include billions of dollars to go toward the border barrier. The deadlock culminated in the longest partial government shutdown in U.S. history.

Kolfage's effort quickly went viral and raised millions of dollars from hundreds of thousands of donors - but GoFundMe threatened to suspend the campaign unless he "identified a legitimate non-profit organization into which those funds could be transferred," according to the indictment.

Prior to his campaign to crowdfund the border wall, Kolfage had been involved in a string of far-right news blogs and groups, one of which had been scrubbed from Facebook for allegedly using fake accounts to drive up website traffic. Some of the sites peddled false conspiracy theories and racist content. As his wall-funding campaign gained national attention, Kolfage had frequently appeared on Fox News and Fox Business, where he defended Trump and slammed his critics for suffering from "Trump Derangement Syndrome."

Badolato notes on his own website that he has been an "infrequent freelance contributor in the past to Breitbart News," a conservative news outlet Bannon used to run. Badolato also says on his site that he was involved with a number of other conservative publications linked to Bannon including Clinton Cash and The Undeclared: The Rise of Sarah Palin.

Shea, according to an NBC TV station in Colorado, is married to the group's treasurer, Amanda. She told the station that she and her husband opened a P.O. Box in order for donors to send checks. Amanda Shea insisted to NBC, in late 2018, that the checks were being made to Kolfage of "We Build the Wall."

Kris Kobach, a former Republican nominee for a Kansas Senate seat and a team member of "We Build the Wall," previously told the New York Times that Trump gave his "blessing" for the project. Kobach was not mentioned in the indictment.

A year after that story was published, Trump said he disagreed with the move by a "private group" to create a section of the wall "which raised money by ads," he said in a tweet.

The White House press secretary said in a statement that Trump had no involvement in the project while distancing the administration from Bannon and the group. "President Trump has not been involved with Steve Bannon since the campaign and the early part of the Administration, and he does not know the people involved with this project," Kayleigh McEnany said in a statement. Audrey Strauss, the Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and Philip R. Bartlett, Inspector-in-Charge of the New York Field Office of the United States Postal Inspection Service ("USPIS"), announced the unsealing of an indictment charging BRIAN KOLFAGE, STEPHEN BANNON, ANDREW BADOLATO, and TIMOTHY SHEA for their roles in defrauding hundreds of thousands of donors in connection with an online crowdfunding campaign known as "We Build the Wall" that raised more than \$25 million. The defendants were arrested this morning. KOLFAGE will be presented today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Hope T.

Cannon in the Northern District of Florida. BANNON will be presented today in the Southern District of New York. BADOLATO will be presented today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Thomas Wilson in the Middle District of Florida. SHEA will be presented today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Kristen L. Mix in the District of Colorado. The case is assigned to U.S. District Judge Analisa Torres in the Southern District of New York.

Acting U.S. Attorney Audrey Strauss said: "As alleged, the defendants defrauded hundreds of thousands of donors, capitalizing on their interest in funding a border wall to raise millions of dollars, under the false pretense that all of that money would be spent on construction. While repeatedly assuring donors that Brian Kolfage, the founder and public face of We Build the Wall, would not be paid a cent, the defendants secretly schemed to pass hundreds of thousands of dollars to Kolfage, which he used to fund his lavish lifestyle. We thank the USPIS for their partnership in investigating this case, and we remain dedicated to rooting out and prosecuting fraud wherever we find it." Inspector-in-Charge Philip R. Bartlett said: "The defendants allegedly engaged in fraud when they misrepresented the true use of donated funds. As alleged, not only did they lie to donors, they schemed to hide their misappropriation of funds by creating sham invoices and accounts to launder donations and cover up their crimes, showing no regard for the law or the truth."

Who is Guo Wengui, the Chinese billionaire who owns the boat Steve Bannon was arrested on?

Earlier this month, a sunburned Steve Bannon, holding a lit cigar and wearing a blue polo shirt with the collar turned up, stood in front of a camera on a yacht owned by his friend Guo Wengui, a Chinese billionaire. A YouTube video shows Wengui putting his arm around Bannon as the former Trump campaign chairman denounces the Chinese government and extols the alleged benefits of hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19. The vessel's lavish interior gleams in the background. On Thursday, Bannon was arrested by federal agents on that same yacht off Westbrook, Connecticut, and booked into jail on fraud charges. Though the charges appear to have nothing to do with the Chinese businessman, the arrest puts a new spotlight on Bannon's relationship with Guo, a controversial figure with his own history of legal entanglements. Multiple people familiar with the matter tell NBC News there is a separate federal inquiry involving a company linked to both men, GTV Media Group. As The Wall Street Journal first reported Wednesday, the FBI, the New York state attorney general and the Securities and Exchange Commission are examining

whether securities laws were violated during a \$300 million private offering by the company this spring, the sources say. In a memo to potential investors, according to The Journal, the company identified Bannon as one of several prominent directors. Last month, investigators with the Mercer Island Police Department in Washington state took an incident report from an unidentified victim who had become an investor in GTV Media Group Inc., with the promise it was launching a video-sharing platform, similar to YouTube, "that was supposed to go huge," according to an official familiar with the matter. The investor wired \$500,000 to receive shares in the company by the end of May, but never received shares and wasn't able to get in contact with the reported suspect, the report stated. As of July 10, local authorities noted that no crime had been charged, and the FBI was investigating the matter. The Mercer Island PD incident report identified the suspect as Guo Wengui, describing him as a "billionaire" based out of New York, and noted there were other victims. When Mercer Island police contacted the FBI, local

investigators learned that Wengui appeared "to be a target of a large investigation personally and pertaining to his business," according to an official familiar with the matter. When they followed up, investigators in Washington learned FBI agents had been investigating the case for about a month. "The victims that have been calling the FBI, FTC, and local police agencies have been reporting fraud for a failure to return on promised investments," the official said. Guo's lawyer declined to comment, and Guo himself could not be reached. Guo, who sometimes goes by Miles Kwok, is a mysterious and polarizing figure - a self-styled crusader against Chinese Communist corruption who has drawn the ire of the Chinese government but has also been sued by other Chinese dissidents. A former female employee alleges in an ongoing lawsuit that he repeatedly raped her, a charge he disputes. And a former Trump aide, Sam Nunberg, is among many who have sued Guo alleging defamation; he denies the allegations. "Utilizing his world-wide publicity, high profile, social media accounts, and seemingly

endless financial means, Defendant Guo regularly uses his public platform and power to defame and harass his enemies," Nunberg's suit says. "In this case, Guo set his sights on destroying Plaintiff Samuel Nunberg's reputation and livelihood by filing baseless litigation against him and slandering Nunberg with malicious, false lies which discredit Nunberg both personally and professionally." Nunberg's suit is ongoing. Guo, who by all accounts made his money in real estate and securities, portrays himself in interviews and court records as an exiled whistleblower, proving an inside account of breathtaking corruption at the heart of the Chinese system. "Guo is a pioneer of using YouTube and Twitter to fight for the rule of law, human rights, freedom and democracy in China," his lawyers wrote in court papers in a federal lawsuit in Maryland against a self-described Chinese democracy activist. "Guo has exposed widespread corruption in the Chinese Communist Party ('CCP'), multiple senior officials of the Chinese Government, and their family members." That lawsuit itself offers an

illustration of the divisions of opinion about Guo: The defendant, Hongkuan Li, a well known dissident who says he participated in the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, accused Guo on social media of being a "gangster," a "communist spy puppy," "a rapist" and of "suffering from schizophrenia," Guo's lawyers wrote, charges they say are all false. That lawsuit purports to recount Guo's history, which includes a 1989 incident he says turned him against the Chinese government. As police sought to arrest him for supporting the Tiananmen protests, the suit says, "Two drunken policemen raided Guo's office and fired their weapons directly at his young wife, who was holding his three-month-old baby daughter. His younger brother...tried to protect Guo's wife and daughter and was shot twice in the altercation," the suit says. Guo's brother was sent to the hospital, the suit says, but "the policemen who shot him instructed the doctors to refuse him any medical care and locked the door." As a result, he died, and Guo "vowed to become a persistent and brave advocate against the Chinese kleptocracy," the suit says.

The Stunning Predictability of Steve Bannon's "We Build the Wall" Scam

On Sunday, after Steve Bannon appeared on Fox News, an image of his visage during the interview made the rounds on social media. While we in the audience were living through the multifaceted collapse of society, Bannon faced the camera with a mane of gray hair swept back, his face looking like a sunburned hunk of bologna, and a lighthouse rising behind him on some unidentified coast. "He looks INCREDIBLE," my colleague Naomi Fry commented. Nearly four years have passed since Bannon, the former capo of Breitbart News and the intellectual godfather of contemporary American political extremism, helped bring an egomaniacal bigot to the White House. And now there he was on the screen, his multiple shirt collars unbuttoned and his eyes as unreadable as ever. If the look he was going for was "James Bond villain in retirement," he was pulling it off. It has been asked,

repeatedly, whether the grifts of Donald Trump and the people around him would ever catch up with them. On Thursday, they caught up to Bannon. Federal prosecutors in New York announced that Bannon and three other men were being indicted for alleged fraud and money laundering for their role in a scheme that, even in a Bond film, might feel too on the nose. For the past two years, Bannon and his accomplices ran an online fund-raising campaign called We Build the Wall, whose nominal purpose was to raise the money for the monument to nativism that Trump had promised to build on the southern border. Trump had also promised that Mexico would pay for the wall. But, when those funds proved unforthcoming, and his various attempts to strong-arm Congress into giving him the money mostly failed, too, Bannon and his gang stepped forward to ask the very people

who'd been thrilled by the notion of a "big, beautiful wall" to shell out. According to the government, the group raised more than twenty-five million dollars, and promised "not to take a penny in salary or compensation." Then they pocketed a bunch of the money. Bannon allegedly routed more than a million dollars through a nonprofit he controls. One of his co-defendants, Brian Kolfage, allegedly used his share of the money to buy, among other things, a boat called Warfighter. According to the Times' Evan Hill, Kolfage sailed Warfighter in a pro-Trump boat parade held in Destin, Florida, on July 4th. Happy birthday, America. Is there a word in German for something that is at once extraordinary and shocking and yet at the same time totally predictable and stupid? The indictment raises questions about other Trump allies as well. We Build the Wall's board members included Kris

Kobach, the former Kansas secretary of state; Erik Prince, the Blackwater founder and a brother of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos; David A. Clarke, Jr., the former sheriff of Milwaukee County, Wisconsin; and Curt Schilling, the former major-league-baseball pitcher. The indictment came out of the office of the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York. In June, Trump and his Attorney General, Bill Barr, forced Geoffrey Berman out of his job as the U.S. Attorney in that office, for reasons that remain unclear, and despite Berman's protests. It now needs to be asked whether this case against a close Trump associate played a role in Berman's ouster. The notion that political and legal gravity does not apply to Trump has become a key aspect of the Trump mystique, something that even his opponents begrudgingly believe. "Well, I'd like to see ol Donny Trump wriggle his way out of THIS jam!" goes the classic

Twitter joke. "Trump wriggles his way out of the jam easily* Ah! Well. Nevertheless." And maybe Trump will, in the end, avoid serious consequences, despite the instances of likely obstruction of justice found by the special counsel Robert Mueller, despite the various investigations into the Trump Organization swirling in New York State, and despite his long history of engaging in business and personal activities that raise all kinds of legal questions. Associates of his have been indicted before, from Michael Flynn to Michael Cohen to Rick Gates, without the damage touching Trump. Being President is great insulation. But there has been recent evidence that not every jam can be wriggled out of, even by Ol' Donny. Trump has not been able to browbeat and demagogue the coronavirus.

Urbanisation, agriculture, and climate crisis likely to take a heavier larger toll on some butterfly species

Some butterfly species are more prepared to survive displacement from their habitats than others, shows new study

Some butterfly species are more prepared to survive displacement from their habitats than others, a new study by researchers from Bengaluru's National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) has said. The study, which was published in Royal Society's Biology Letters on Wednesday, has also warned that loss and fragmentation of habitats through urbanisation, agriculture, and climate crisis may take a heavier toll on other species.

Some butterfly species disperse for several hours or days to find food or breeding grounds. The researchers found that increased flight burden puts additional pressure on the egg-carrying female butterflies, which are physiologically less prepared to navigate through unknown fragmented habitats in search of

larval host plants. Butterflies flight movements are for migration and dispersal. The seasonal long-distance migrations are between two known destinations over hundreds of kilometres. When local food resources are exhausted, some species randomly disperse over relatively short distances in search of new unfamiliar resources patches. Other species do not disperse at all. The researchers said while some long-distance female butterfly migrants stop reproductive activity during migration to invest energy in flying, others lack reproductive plasticity. They arrived at the conclusion after comparing the flight morphology and reproductive status of Lemon

Emigrant and Mottled Emigrant butterflies. They have both dispersing and non-dispersing populations.

The researchers found that female milkweed butterflies migrate in a state of reproductive diapause - or halt reproductive activity. In doing so, they invest their energy on flying rather than being burdened with eggs during their journey.

"Female emigrants disperse while carrying eggs, and therefore there are long term consequences of fragmenting or vanishing habitats. That's because the longer they have to fly, there is more uncertainty in finding a suitable habitat patch.

As a result, many more female butterflies may perish before they can reach a spot where they may lay eggs," said



Vaishali Bhaumik, lead author and a PhD scholar at NCBS.

"The danger with too much fragmentation is that if these butterflies have to fly with eggs, they may either be unable to carry as many eggs as they can at short distances or they may not be able to fly long enough to reach the patches."

Renee M Borges, a professor at Bengaluru's Indian Institute of Science, said the findings show most convincingly that there is

flexibility in the strategies of butterflies.

"However, more importantly, a strategy can only be maintained if the habitat through which butterflies disperse is conducive to the provision of nectar fuel for the flight. The increasing fragmentation of forests and butterfly habitats can cause a serious problem for the successful dispersal and migration of butterflies," she said.

An unusual meteorite, more valuable than gold, may hold the building blocks of life

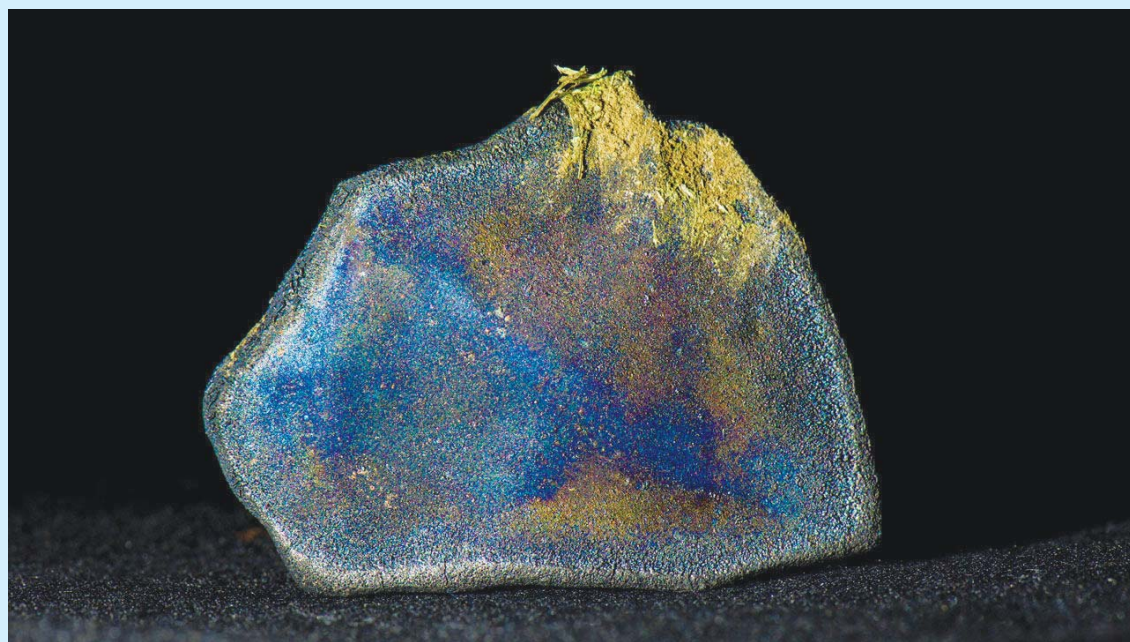
As the fiery emissary streaked across the skies of Costa Rica, an unearthly mix of orange and green, Marcia Campos Muñoz was in her pajamas, watching TV on the couch. It was 23 April 2019, a bit past 9 p.m., when she heard a foreboding rumble. Heart racing, she tiptoed outside to calm her barking dog, Perry, and to check on the cow pastures ringing her small house in Aguas Zarcas, a village carved out of Costa Rica's tropical rainforest. Nothing. She ducked back inside, just before a blast on the back terrace rattled the house to its bones. Campos Muñoz phoned her father, brother, and oldest son, who rushed to the house. On the terrace, they found a grapefruit-size hole in the corrugated zinc roof and a smashed-up plastic table, last used for the quinceañera of Campos Muñoz's daughter. The culprit was scattered on the floor, in pieces as black as coal.

She picked up the biggest fragment, still warm to the touch. Already, her phone was chiming with WhatsApp messages from friends telling of blazing fireballs and rocks raining down on farms and fields. The family added its own viral messages to the mix: photos of Campos Muñoz and her son holding the big stone that crashed through her roof. Within

hours, a local journalist visited the house and streamed videos of the damage on Facebook Live.

It was only the beginning. A space rock the size of a washing machine had broken up in the skies over the village, and the excitement was about to spread globally.

Meteorites are not uncommon: Every year, tens of thousands survive the plunge through Earth's atmosphere. More than 60,000 have been found and classified by scientists. But meteorite falls, witnessed strikes that take their name from where they land, are rare—just 1196 have been documented. And even among that exclusive group, there was something extraordinary about this particular meteorite, something anyone with the right knowledge could know from the first pictures. The dull stone was, as far as rocks go, practically alive. Aguas Zarcas, as the fragments would soon collectively be called, is a carbonaceous chondrite, a pristine remnant of the early Solar System. The vast majority of meteorites are lumps of stone or metal. But true to their name, carbonaceous chondrites are rich in carbon—and not just boring, inorganic carbon, but also organic molecules as complex as amino acids, the building blocks of proteins. They illustrate how chemical reactions in space give



rise to complex precursors for life; some scientists even believe rocks like Aguas Zarcas gave life a nudge when they crashed into a barren Earth 4.5 billion years ago. From the beginning, the inky Aguas Zarcas resembled a legendary carbonaceous chondrite that exploded in 1969 over Murchison, an Australian cattle town. Geology students helped collect about 100 kilograms of Murchison, and a local postmaster mailed pieces of it to labs across the world. To date, scientists have recognized nearly 100 different amino acids in it, many used by organisms on Earth and many others rare or nonexistent in known life. Hundreds more amino acids

have been inferred but not yet identified.

Murchison also contained nucleobases, the building blocks of genetic molecules such as RNA, and in November 2019, researchers found a major component of RNA's backbone: the sugar molecule ribose. This half-century parade of discoveries jump-started the now-flourishing field of astrobiology. "We're not detecting life itself, but the components are all there," says Daniel Glavin, an astrobiologist at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. "I wouldn't have a job without Murchison." The 30 kilograms of primordial leftovers from Aguas Zarcas hold similar

promise. But these new pieces are 50 years fresher than Murchison, allowing scientists to apply modern techniques to preserve and probe what amounts to fragile lumps of unspeakably old clay. They could sniff out delicate organic compounds long evaporated from Murchison. They could hunt not just for amino acids and sugars, but also proteins, which have long been suspected but never confirmed in a meteorite. And if they were clean and careful, they could hedge against a perennial criticism of the Murchison finds by ensuring the molecules discovered inside were native, and not contamination from Earth's own microbes.

Dear Makers Of 'Gunjan Saxena', You Cannot Peddle Lies In The Name Of Creative Freedom

I have myself served as a helicopter pilot and I have never faced the kind of abuse and maltreatment as was portrayed in the movie. In fact, men in uniform are true gentlemen and professionals, writes Wing Commander Namrita Chandi (Retd).



But cinematic licences and creative freedom can be applied to 'Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gum' type of bubble gum cinema. It cannot be stretched into an absolute travesty of set rules and established protocols of hallowed institutions like the Indian Air Force. I am not certain what Gunjan could have told the researchers of the film about her experiences in the Crew Room. But, this I can say with authority and absolute iron clad surety that no one who has worn a uniform, even for the 5 or 6 years like Gunjan did, will ever feed such a scenario to the makers of puerile cinema. I have myself served as a helicopter pilot and I have never faced the kind of

abuse and maltreatment as was portrayed in the movie. In fact, men in uniform are true gentlemen and professionals. They go out of their way to make lady officers comfortable and adjust. Yes, initially there were teething troubles like no changing rooms or exclusive ladies toilets; yet the men made space for us. Sometimes, my brother officers stood guard outside the curtain while I changed. Never in my entire career span of 15 years have I been disrespected or mistreated. The Flight Commanders, the people who wield the burden in all operational Squadrons/ Units (disseminate flying tasks, schedule sorties and crew rosters etc), are men of great professional

competence. Not in the least like that man depicted in the film. Every pilot in the Air Force has to prove himself. Man or woman. As I mentioned, creative license is one thing but when you deal with institutions, you cannot change facts. Elaborate and fantasise, if you must. But don't peddle lies. Srividya Rajan was the first lady pilot who flew to Kargil - not Gunjan. Though, I am certain that Srividya has no complaints about this credit being taken away from her. There is a scene in which the Army Major asks the character of Gunjan Saxena: "tum join karogi". Even an imbecile knows that once you are a commissioned officer, you are committed to the constitution of

India. Please do not make a civilian even imagine that it is even possible to disobey orders. I have myself been the first lady officer to fly on the International Border with Pakistan, way back in 1996. I had the confidence of every officer that sat with me in the crew room. I was the first lady pilot to be posted to Leh and fly the Cheetah helicopter in the Siachen Glacier, an area where superstitious belief was that the Army suffered casualties whenever a lady visited Base Camp! But not

once did my colleagues or flight commander raise objections to my flying or had doubts on my ability. My husband and I were both posted together in Leh from December, 2000 till December, 2002. If I was suspect, he would be the first person to object. Officers are officers. Whether with long hair or short. Never are they paraded for losing in a childish strength game. Never are the briefings interrupted in that rude and ugly manner.

In Israel-UAE Deal, India Stands To Gain But Pakistan's Terror Factory Will Be Dented

If the planet were a kingdom, US President Donald Trump would be its king right now! He has pulled off what several world leaders in the past failed to achieve. He has ensured that the Muslims will be allowed to pray at the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam. Trump has convinced the Israeli PM that there will be no more annexation of West Bank, or Palestinian territories. He has created a path of peace and stability for the region to follow. Israel and UAE Thursday signed a peace treaty which, as per the latest reports will be signed in person in White House,

under the watchful gaze of the man who brokered the deal. Peace has a fair chance to return to the region, though the treaty itself has angered a lot of sections on both sides. Palestinians recalled their Ambassador from UAE, citing reasons that by agreeing to the terms, the UAE has abandoned the Palestinian cause. This is exceptionally immature and myopic, given the fact that the UAE has been supporting Palestinians' cause for decades now. The Hamas-led leadership, which isn't happy with the decision, may actually resort to increasing attacks into Israeli

territory. In Israel, the far right is not happy at all. The PM has to pacify the sections back home and he clearly stated there will be no more annexation without US approval. However, some think that by doing this, he has taken the pressure of annexation off the table and betrayed them. Beit El settlement council feels that they have been sold out. Naftali Bennet, presently serving as MK (Member of Knesset) for New Right said, "Netanyahu wasted a once in a century opportunity when he failed to annex territories in the West Bank, as part of a normalisation deal with the UAE." Israeli

communication Minister Yoaz Hendel said, "Congratulations on the deal, but I am not giving up on the settlement and our Eastern border." The hardliners on either side are not happy with the peace deal as they take it as a compromise on status quo. However, the far-sighted leaders of the world, like Prince Mohammed Bin Zayed, have realised that not only can Israel be not wished away, the continuous conflict is not good for anyone. Why not give peace a chance? The response across the world has been very welcoming. Netanyahu had worked with Trump for a long

time to work on the US Peace plan in the region, and annexation of the West Bank and other territories was part of the plan. However, in an excellent diplomatic move, Trump turned this annexation plan around as a bargaining chip and worked not with Palestinians and Hamas, but the power behind, the UAE, to create a peace deal. The Israelis can now actually work on a two-nation theory and achieve more security in the region and Palestinians can work on consolidating their state and identity.

How do you fix healthcare's medical waste problem?

When surgeon Claire Teves* (not her real name) landed in Singapore from the Philippines for a six-month fellowship, she knew it would take some time to adjust. Teves had come from a hospital serving the needs of a poorer developing society, to work in a cutting-edge medical facility in a much wealthier one. She was braced to overcome a knowledge gap at this world-class facility, and face different day-to-day medical challenges. But when she arrived, she faced a very different culture shock: how the new hospital used plastics.

In the operating theatre, devices such as plastic retractors - which are used to hold surgical cuts open - were used once per patient and then thrown away at the end of the procedure to be disposed of as medical waste. In her hospital in the Philippines, the same device would be painstakingly sterilised and

reused until it was worn out and beyond repair.

Seeing these life-saving items being thrown away when they were so sought-after in the Philippines, Teves decided to do something about it. "When I saw the waste, I thought to save whatever single-use equipment I could get my hands on, so I could recycle them and bring them back," she says. It was a decision that would have ruffled some feathers at the Singapore hospital if it wasn't carried out with discretion and the help of friendly staff. In the end she managed to fill a large suitcase with "single use" plastic surgical devices that would otherwise have gone to waste. Even Teves agrees - her motivation in saving devices was to provide equipment for patients in the Philippines. "Addressing sustainability is not really on our priority list; everything we do is about helping our patients," she says. Others point out that in the broader sense, sustainability is

also about helping patients - or rather, preventing people having to go to hospital in the first place.

Take the healthcare industry's carbon emissions - if healthcare were a country, it would be the fifth-largest emitter of greenhouse gases on the planet, according to the non-profit organisation Health Care Without Harm. That's a carbon footprint the same as the emissions of 514 coal-fired power plants, equivalent to 4.4% of global net emissions. More than half of that was a result of energy use: electricity, gas, steam, air conditioning and operational emissions. "Fossil fuel combustion is a major contributor to air pollution-related deaths, which kill more than four million people around the world every year. More than tuberculosis, more than malaria, and more than Aids combined," says Gary Cohen, president and co-founder of Health Care Without Harm.

'Freedom Is Not given - It Is Taken': Bose's Words Are Reminder Of How To Win Back Unity In Diversity

Having been a critical messenger to Subhash Bose across borders, my grandfather had joined the "Bengal Volunteers" party at the age of 15 and told me that he realised his life's mission right then - to serve and die for his country, writes Isheeta Ganguly.

On Subhash Chandra Bose's death anniversary amid the continued post-Independence Day deliberations on democracy and freedom, I have one recurrent thought. I miss the old-world charms of pre-liberalised 1980's Calcutta - my notion of idyllic India. I miss the water handpumps, kerosene stoves, boiled water, home-made coconut naarus and paatishaapta, famous five chocolate bars, gems and tiny-sized, thick, square toasted bread with jam. I miss New Market Christmas trees and cakes, I miss pre-megamall shopping for trinkets in Gariahat. But more than that I miss my grandparents' Park Circus home and paara.32 Dilkhusha Street was the ultimate dilkhush place--a largely Muslim dominated neighborhood, where multiple religions not only co-existed but were co-respected - yes, as a verb. Despite the scarcity constraints of pre-liberalised uni-brand India (Lakme, Godrej and Bata land),

there was a pluralism of post-Naxalite/pre-Babri Masjid 1980s Calcutta that was real, palpable and now aspirational. My grandfather was a freedom fighter from the Subhash Chandra Bose camp. He was charismatic, a brilliant singer, orator and storyteller. He was the erudite English honors with distinction, a brilliant architect of limericks and rhymes and simply the most elegant, handsome, well-read, and delightful human ever. If I could have serenaded Sting's "every little thing he does is magic" - I would. Because he was. Having been a critical messenger to Subhash Bose across borders, he had joined the "Bengal Volunteers" party at the age of 15 and told me that he realised his life's mission right then - to serve and die for his country. When he was 21 in 1941, Bose sent him to Kabul disguised as a "Pathaan" (under the code name "Sher Zaman") to deliver a key message to the INA.

He spent days and nights on end on foot without his next meal or a place to sleep in sight. They were lonely nights laced in fear of being discovered. During the pandemic's migrant crisis, I often thought about those days my grandfather spent on foot without food, water or shelter in sight. His survival came from random acts of kindness from the Pathans in Afghanistan. Those days of his life fostered a lifelong love and loyalty towards folks in our neighborhood which he never forgot. The random acts of kindness bestowed on him by complete strangers saved his life again and again. His other greatest companion outside reading The Statesman and books of every genre was song. Our mornings began with toast, jam and chhana(sweet paneer) over the All India Radio "Akash Bani" offering Rabindra Sangeet, to which he would sing along and also reminisce other "swadeshi" songs, which kept him and his



companions going during eight years of jail time. On one of my earliest trips, when I was roughly four, he taught me DL Roy's Amar Jaunmo Bhumi(the soil of my birth), in his perfect pitch, marvelous tenor voice. I imbibed the verses while attempting to apply a scarlet red liquid bindi to my forehead. When he commented on my being inattentive (with the red bindi liquid now smeared all over my forehead), I sang back all four verses to him verbatim. He was stunned. This song then became our anthem duet on every drive to and from Calcutta Dum Dum airport where the arrivals felt like a wedding and the departures

were like a funeral. The departures inevitably with a pit in my stomach where the lines "Amar ei deshetei jaunmo jano ei deshetei mori" ("let me die in this country where I was born") would evoke an intense melancholy. So the root of this annual Calcutta love fest was of course family and songs. My cousin and I would spend the summers in "lockdown" style in our grandparents' bungalow creating havoc. It was a party every day. We were never bored. We had a free reign of the house reading, play-acting, singing and conducting "school" for staff and anyone willing to attend every afternoon.

As Labourers Return To Cities, Is Govt Ready To Avoid Future Migrant Crisis?



The images of lakhs of migrant workers stranded on highways or walking back to their villages during Coronavirus-induced lockdown still haunt many of us. Several migrants could not make it to their homes. Despite all those distressing images, the main learnings from that crisis are perhaps still going unnoticed. With businesses and life gradually 'unlocking', migrants have also started to return to their workplaces. However, there is no process for registration of migrants or the safety standards

that could ensure the crisis is not repeated. While it is a question of survival for the migrant workers, it is time the governments should rise to the occasion to ensure they do not suffer again.

Danara Kalari, 25 years old, from the village Koilari in Nabarangpur district of Odisha belongs to a backward community. He lives with his parents and two younger sisters. Though his father owns two acres, it does not provide for the entire year. Because he shares the responsibility to get

As the business and workplaces open up after months of lockdown, migrant workers are gradually heading towards cities in search of livelihood. To avoid the repetition of the migrant crisis the nation witnessed in the beginning of the lockdown, has the government thought out any strategy?

his two sisters married, Danara migrated to Telangana where he worked as carpenter for 14 months. He managed to save Rs 5,000 every month. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, everything was closed in Telangana. In April, he returned home along with his friends. Now Danara helps his parents with agricultural work. He says, "I don't know much about agricultural work. If the government provides me any carpentry work in my district, I wouldn't migrate outside. I would go back to work in Ranagreddy once the everything is normal." India has 45 million such economic migrants who leave their villages and go to the cities in search of work. As per Census 2011, the total number of internal migrants in the country (accounting for inter- and intra-state movement) is 139 million. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are the biggest source states, followed

closely by Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal; the major destination states are Delhi, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Kerala. The conditions that these migrant workers live in the destination cities is abysmal and has no minimum health and basic amenities. The social security schemes including PDS are not accessed by these migrants due to the non portability of the schemes beyond their source states. In a recently released survey by ActionAid, where over 11530 workers across 21 states were interviewed, we were able to cover 293 source and 393 destination districts. The findings were startling: 78% reported a loss of livelihood but more importantly, over 48 per cent of respondents were

cheated and did not receive any wages after the lockdown and 17 per cent received partial wages. The conditions of housing are pitiable, and most workers lived with 6-10 people and 60% workers had to vacate their housing post Covid, primarily because of loss of livelihood. More than 50 per cent migrants reported that they were stranded for over a month, yet more than 70 per cent migrants said that they did not receive any transport assistance. After coming home, 60% migrants have taken loans to pay for the family expenses and healthcare as for most of the workers the savings were not enough. For more than 80% of the workers, the food consumption was not sufficient and around 38 per cent of respondents said that their access to water was insufficient or barely sufficient.

Apple first US company to be valued at \$2tn

Each giant Apple has become the first US company to be valued at \$2tn (£1.5tn) on the stock market. It reached the milestone just two years after becoming the world's first trillion-dollar company in 2018.

Its share price hit \$467.77 in mid-morning trading in the US on Wednesday to push it over the \$2tn mark.

The only other company to reach the \$2tn level was state-backed Saudi Aramco after it listed its shares last December.

But the oil giant's value has slipped back to \$1.8tn since then and Apple surpassed it to become the world's most valuable traded company at the end of July.

Strong sales

The iPhone-maker's shares have leapt more than 50% this year, despite the coronavirus crisis forcing it to shut retail stores and political pressure over its links to China.

In fact, its share price has doubled since its low point in March, when panic about the coronavirus pandemic swept the markets.

Tech firms, which have been viewed as winners despite lockdowns, have seen their stock surge in recent weeks, even though the US is in recession.

Apple posted strong third quarter figures towards the end of July, including \$59.7bn of revenue and double-digit growth in its products

and services segments.

The next most valuable US company is Amazon which is worth around \$1.7tn.

"US stocks hit new high after coronavirus crash"

"Apple helped make 'top secret' government iPod

Apple's rapid share price rise is "an impressive feat within a short period of time", said Paolo Pescatore, a technology analyst at PP Foresight.

"The last few months have underlined the importance of users and households alike to own better quality devices, connections and services and with Apple's strong broad portfolio of devices and a growing services



offering, there are plentiful opportunities for future growth."

He said the arrival of gigabit connectivity broadband would offer Apple "endless possibilities".

"All eyes are now on the eagerly anticipated 5G iPhone which will

fuel further consumer demand," he added. Microsoft and Amazon follow Apple as the most valuable publicly traded US companies, each at about \$1.6tn. They are followed by Google-owner Alphabet at just over \$1tn.

J&J strikes \$6.5 billion deal for autoimmune disease specialist Momenta



Johnson & Johnson agreed to buy Momenta Pharmaceuticals Inc for about \$6.5 billion on Wednesday, to

bolster its portfolio of drugs for hard-to-treat autoimmune diseases. The acquisition, latest in a recent spate of healthcare

deals, comes just days after France's Sanofi struck a \$3.7 billion deal to buy Principia Biopharma Inc for its pipeline of autoimmune disease treatments. Treatments targeting autoimmune conditions have fetched billions of dollars in sales, including AbbVie Inc's Humira, which is the world's best selling drug. J&J's Janssen unit will gain access to Momenta's experimental therapy, nipocalimab, which is in late-stage testing for warm antibody hemolytic anemia, a condition that causes destruction of healthy red blood cells, and mid-stage

testing for myasthenia gravis, a neuromuscular disease.

Nipocalimab is expected to eventually win approval to treat several conditions, "many as first-in-class indications with potential for significant peak year sales, some of which could exceed \$1 billion," J&J said in a statement.

"We find the deal modestly surprising as we see every one of Momenta's assets as somewhat tricky to develop," said BTIG analyst Thomas Shrader. Shares of Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Momenta were up 69.2% at \$52.15, just a hair's breadth

away from the offer price of \$52.50.

With the recent flurry of activity, the pharmaceutical and biotech sectors have seen 829 deals so far this year, compared with 839 by this time in 2019, according to data from Refinitiv.

The value of the deals, however, is much lower this year - \$62 billion versus \$290 billion a year ago. J&J in recent years has sold some businesses such as the one that made medical devices for diabetes care, as it sharpens focus on better-performing products such as cancer treatments.

Indian spot gold rate and silver price on Aug 21, 2020

Get latest update on daily spot gold prices, currency exchange rates and other precious metal rates in India

Spot gold prices in India (Rs. 52000.0) have increased since yesterday (Rs. 51990.0). Although, it was lower than the average gold price observed this week (Rs. 52447.14) by 0.85%.

The Indian spot gold price as of today is Rs. 52000.0 which grew by 0.02%; the rate was lower than the global gold spot growth rate of 1.01%. The global spot price is \$1950.0. Gold and other precious metals on Aug 21, 2020

Global spot prices continued to grow as per the current close with a value of \$1950.0 per

Troy ounce. The total growth being of 1.01%. This price level is 0.57% lower than average gold price observed in the past 30 days (\$1961.0). Among other precious metals, silver prices edged higher today. Silver gained 1.56% to \$27.1 per Troy ounce.

Further, platinum price has shown an uptick. The precious metal platinum rose 0.8% to \$944.5 per Troy ounce. Meanwhile in India, gold was priced at Rs. 52522.0 per 10 gram on MCX, with a change of Rs. 267.86. Also, the price

of 24k gold in the Indian spot market was quoted at Rs. 52000.0.

MCX Gold on Aug 21, 2020 On MCX, gold futures prices in India showed an upsurge of 0.51% to Rs. 52522.0 per 10 gram. In the previous session, gold was down 1.12% or about Rs. 267.86 per 10 gram. On MCX, silver futures grew nearly 1.33% or Rs. 913.04 per kg to the price level of Rs. 68650.0 per kg.

The gold spot price today (Rs. 52000.0) increased by Rs. 267.86 from yesterday (Rs. 51990.0), along with global



spot prices growth of \$19.47 to \$1950.0 value today. Similar trend was observed in MCX

future price with an increase of Rs. 267.86 and value of Rs. 52522.0 as of today.

Death Valley: What life is like in the 'hottest place on Earth'



"I think we all lose our patience with how hot it is," says Brandi Stewart, who works at Death Valley National Park in California. "When you walk outside it's like being hit in the face with a bunch of hairdryers." On Sunday, what could be the highest temperature ever reliably recorded on Earth, a toasty 130F (54.4C), was reported in the park - a vast, desert area filled with canyons and sand dunes that straddles the border with neighbouring Nevada. However, in Brandi's picture, the sign showing the temperature appears to have overheated.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) says it is still verifying the record. But Brandi doesn't need experts to tell her just how hot it is. She's one of just a few hundred people for whom the location often referred to as "the hottest place in the world" is home.

Ms Stewart has lived in Death Valley on and off for five years, working in the park's communication department. "It feels so hot that one thing it took me a while to get used to is

that you can't actually feel the sweat on your skin because it evaporates so quickly," she told the BBC. "You might feel it on your



clothes, but you don't actually feel sweat on your skin because it dries so quickly".

Ms Stewart says a lot of time in the summer is spent inside, but some people choose to head to the mountains where temperatures are slightly cooler. "Once people do get used to it [the heat], I think we begin to normalise it and then anything below 80F (26.6C) seems chilly." In terms of sleep, people in the town have air conditioning, which keeps their homes cool as long as the power doesn't go out. This

can be an issue when everyone is trying to keep their homes at a comfortable temperature as the mercury soars. The majority of

people who work and live in the national park are located in Furnace Creek, where the recent record temperature was recorded. The town is situated in a long and narrow basin around 280 feet below sea level. It is surrounded by high and steep mountain ranges. Jason Hesper, originally from Minnesota, lives in Furnace Creek and works on the golf course there. It's the lowest golf course in the world at 214 feet (85 metres) below sea level. "I've been to Iraq twice. If I can take Iraq, I can take Death Valley," the former military service member said.

He starts work on the golf course just before 05:00 and works until 13:00. "They told us once it starts getting hotter, like right now, we'll start working at 04:00. At 04:00, it's still 100-105F (37.7-40.5C)," he said.

The water used to keep the course up to scratch comes from a natural spring underground. Mr Hesper is part of a team that helps to keep the course in a good condition. "We're mowing every day, trimming, raking bunkers.

"We're picking up trees that have fallen because it's so dry. They're so dry with the heat they're getting heavy and breaking off. A lot of our day is spent picking those up." Mr

Hesper arrived in October 2019 and loves his job. He plans to stay there for a number of years. The winter makes up for the scorching summer temperatures, he says. During the time off, he likes to play golf on the course he works so hard to maintain. But that means a fairly early start of 07:00 to beat the heat - or at least the worst of it - and get through 18 holes.

"I just love to golf," he said. "When I got here, the temperature was amazing - shorts, polo, a cold beer or a cold soda. Now, if you have a beverage it's warm by the time you get to the green. You've got to drink it fast, which makes for interesting golf!" Sunday's temperature has been described as possibly the hottest ever

expected." Christopher Burt, a weather historian, has suggested the 1913 temperature recorded in Death Valley was suspicious due to other readings in the area at that time. The reading in Furnace Creek was two or three degrees higher than other weather stations around, he says. This is one reason why Sunday's record, if verified, is being described by some US experts as the highest ever "reliably recorded". The WMO says it is seeking to verify it but even if it does, it will classify the temperature as the third-highest temperature ever recorded because it stands by the 1913 record in Furnace Creek and the 1931 record in Tunisia despite



recorded "reliably" on Earth. There are two higher temperatures in the record books - one in Furnace Creek in 1913 - 134F (56.6C) - and another in Tunisia in 1931 - 131F (55C). But these are contested by climate experts.

"Modern day scientists and meteorologists suggest that those two readings weren't accurate," says BBC Weather's Simon King. "When you have a massive temperature like this [in Furnace Creek], the World Meteorological Organization investigates further and looks at a lot of different information to verify the record as you would

scepticism. It has also been argued that other places might have seen hotter temperatures than the Death Valley, but weather-watchers simply don't know about them due to the lack of any weather station nearby.

So for now, Furnace Creek is the hottest place in the world. "People ask me what it's like," says Mr Hesper. "The best way I describe it is you know when you're cooking something in your oven and you want to check on it, you open the door and you get that blast of hot air from the oven.... that's what it feels like."



Project Power movie review:

Jamie Foxx, Joseph Gordon-Levitt's superhero film ends Netflix's action movie hot-streak

Project Power movie review: Boasting a big budget and even bigger stars, Netflix's new film, featuring Jamie Foxx and Joseph Gordon-Levitt, ends the streamer's action movie hot-streak.

Project Power

Directors - Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman

Cast - Jamie Foxx, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Dominique Fishback, Rodrigo Santoro

The coolest insider gossip I remember reading about directors Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman came immediately after their debut film, the documentary *Catfish*, premiered at Sundance and inspired a heated bidding war. This was a decade ago. The director duo were reportedly summoned to the offices of Paramount Pictures, and were offered the gig to make an upcoming franchise film, on the condition that they admit that *Catfish* was, in fact, a fake documentary. Joost and Schulman, who have now adopted the considerably chiller credit 'Henry and Rel', maintain to this day that the events shown in *Catfish*, an incredible story of online fraud, really happened. They were reported to have stood their

ground in that Paramount dealers to push pills on the streets. But these aren't any ordinary pills. Popping just one of them can give a person superpowers, but only for five minutes. A narcotics cop played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt is trying to clean up the streets with the help of a young girl working as his informer. Little do his bosses know that Frank - that's JGL's character - is taking the same power pills that he is trying to rid the city of.

In a parallel plotline, a mysterious man played by Jamie Foxx goes on a murderous rampage through the city's underbelly, in an effort to locate his missing daughter. The two men, independently, stumble upon a larger conspiracy - one in which a moustache-twirling villain played by Rodrigo Santoro (you might remember him as Xerxes from *300*, or Jesus from the ill-fated *Ben-Hur* remake) is looking to mass produce the power pill and get the entire world hooked onto it. The third act finds them

joining forces, and culminates, as most superhero films seem to do these days, in a sloppy CGI slugfest. There is interesting subtext in writer Mattson Tomlin's script - his first, which, like *Catfish*, inspired a bidding war between studios - that the film fails to effectively explore. References are made to a 'great flood' - no doubt, Hurricane Katrina - and the government's handling of its aftermath. JGL's character is frequently seen wearing a Steve Gleason football jersey - an homage, perhaps, to the athlete who became a symbol of recovery in post-hurricane New Orleans. Tomlin's screenplay, does, however, indicate his affection for

superheroes and superhero cinema. That is a good sign, considering he is credited, along with Matt Reeves, as a co-writer on the upcoming *Batman* film. The comic book references in the *Project Power*, which are mostly just nods to everyone from Johnny Storm to *The Incredible Hulk*, are more effectively done than any of the socio-political themes that the film briefly addresses. *Project Power* is yet another attempt by Netflix to spawn IP of its own. But it is decidedly inferior to recent action hits such as *Extraction* and *The Old Guard* -- more cluttered, less compelling. A sequel, however, seems like a foregone conclusion.



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Khuda Haafiz movie review:

Vidyut Jammwal will find you and he will kill you in this entertaining but flawed thriller



Khuda Haafiz

Director: Faruk Kabir

Cast: Vidyut Jammwal, Shivaleeka Oberoi, Ahana Kumra, Shiv Panditt

The woman-rescue trope has been a staple in cinema. Princesses and brides have forever gone missing and valiant men have scaled mountains and seas in search of them, battling villains and befriending golden-hearted strangers on their way. Over time, the sleeping

princesses became teenage daughters and the brave princes became fathers with a 'very particular set of skills'. But at the core of it, the *Taken* genre is not vastly different from the fairytales we all grew up with. Faruk Kabir's *Khuda Haafiz* is a modernised version of the same. A damsel is in distress and our hero tears through heavens to bring her back. Sure, it makes for one entertaining watch, but it rarely surprises you. *Khuda Haafiz* is

said to be inspired by true events about a man's search for his wife. Vidyut Jammwal plays a software engineer, Sameer, who marries Shivaleeka Oberoi's call centre employee, Nargis. Their blissful world comes crashing down during the 2007-2008 Recession and they both lose their jobs, forcing them to find employment overseas. The wife finds a job in a fictitious Middle Eastern country called Noman. He bids her goodbye, hoping to join her in a few days. However, a day later, he gets the dreaded *Taken* call. The panicked wife tells him that she has been abducted and is being ill-treated by men she does not know. The husband charges straight into Noman International Airport, looking for his missing wife. After suffering an unhelpful Noman Police and a lazy Indian Embassy, a friendly taxi driver, played by Annu Kapoor, is

godsend. Together, the husband and the driver discover a flesh trade racket in the heart of Noman and his wife trapped in it. With or without the help of police, our software engineer fights 20 men at once, kills a few, drives over a couple of them, all to bring his wife back home. However, considering Vidyut's filmography so far, the action is indeed toned down quite a bit. Even with him tackling a couple of dozen men all at once, the action does not seem totally unbelievable. He is not pulling off any helicopter kicks or leaping off cranes but stabbing a man with a fork or throwing chillies in the eyes of another. There is an impromptu, non-choreographed quality to the fight scenes that brings some semblance of reality. Now, only if they didn't play romantic tunes over shots of blood sprouting out of a goon's jugular vein. The music is definitely not

the most imaginative. Establishing shots of 'Noman' are always preceded by stereotypical 'Middle Eastern music' straight out of Alif Laila. Ouds resound every time a bearded general appears, a mob boss smokes hookah or we see a drone shot of any building with a dome. It's old, it's lazy and it's been done to death. The Noman public -- had it actually existed -- would not have been too happy with the representation of their accents either. Now of course there is no Noman accent to really compare it with but whatever Shiv Panditt and Ahana Kumra were trying to pull off, that wasn't it. Their accents grow thick and thin with every alternate scene, and each time is more embarrassing than before. While Annu Kapoor did seem more a natural fit in the land of Noman, it was uncanny that so many characters conveniently knew Hindi.

Death on the Nile trailer: Ali Fazal is in star-studded company of Gal Gadot, Armie Hammer in Kenneth Branagh's new Hercule Poirot mystery

The makers of *Death on the Nile* have released the first trailer. The film is directed by Kenneth Branagh and is based on Agatha Christie's novel by the same name.

The murder mystery's cast includes *Wonder Woman* Gal Gadot, *Call Me By Your Name* star Armie Hammer, *Black Panther*'s Letitia Wright, *Sex Education*'s popular actor Emma Mackey, *Game of Thrones* alum Rose Leslie, Jennifer Saunders, Russell Brand, Dawn French, Tom Bateman with Oscar nominee Annette Bening. The film also stars Kenneth as the beloved, popular Belgian detective Hercule Poirot and Bollywood actor Ali Fazal.

Death on the Nile is among Agatha Christie's most popular books. It

features a murder of passion on board a cruise ship on the river Nile. A classic locked room drama, it has been adapted on the big screen multiple times before. *Death on the Nile* is among Agatha Christie's most popular books. It features a murder of passion on board a cruise ship on the river Nile. A classic locked room drama, it has been adapted on the big screen multiple times before. Written by Michael Green, the film is slated for a very



hopeful October 23 release. This will be one of the first major international pictures to see a global release amid the coronavirus pandemic. The trailer launched virtually amid fanfare on August 19. This is Kenneth's second outing as Poirot after 2017's *Murder on the Orient*

Express. The first film was also a star-studded affair starring Johnny Depp, Daisy Ridley, Michelle Pfeiffer and others. Ali Fazal shot for the film for three months in the UK last year. Talking about working with Ali, Kenneth had told PTI, "Ali was a joy to work with, an absolute joy. He's a total pro. He's a real details man. He was completely caught up in how the character

looked sounded and was able to be very precise, but also very playful. He could improvise when I asked him to improvise."

He has earlier starred in *Victoria* and *Abdul* with Judi Dench and in *Furious 7* with Vin Diesel and others. On the home turf, the actor has the second season of *Mirzapur* coming that is expected to drop on Amazon Prime later this year.

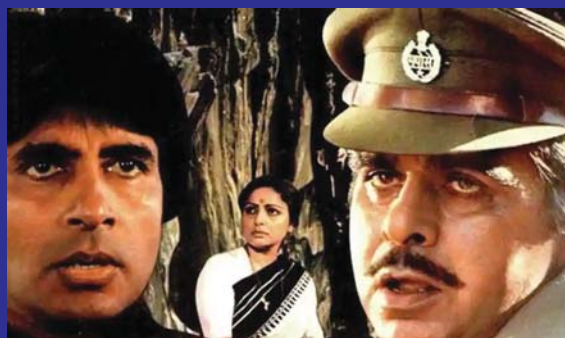


Shree Narayan Singh to remake Dilip Kumar-Amitabh Bachchan's *Shakti*, says 'It's a huge responsibility'

After 38 years, Dilip Kumar and Amitabh Bachchan-starrer *Shakti* is set to get a remake. Reportedly, a remake of Ramesh Sippy's action-crime drama was being planned earlier too, with Amitabh stepping in as the father and his real-life son Abhishek Bachchan taking up the role of the rebellious son, but the plans never materialised. Now, Shree

Narayan Singh is working on a remake of the iconic film. Confirming the same, the filmmaker told *Mumbai Mirror*, "I have been working on the film for the last two years with Anjum Rajabali and Saumya Joshi penning the script. It's a huge

responsibility, which is why we are taking time to finalise the script, even



though ours is more of an adaptation than a remake. The idea is to take the film on floors by next year." Shree Narayan is known for Akshay Kumar-starrer *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha* and Shahid Kapoor-Shraddha Kapoor's *Batti Gul Meter Chalu*.

Shakti was the only film that featured Dilip and Amitabh together; the two played father and son. It traced the fight between them which arose due to a difference in their principles. While Dilip essayed the role of a cop, Amitabh deviates to a life of crime because of his hatred for his father's love for duty, which resulted in negligence towards the family. *Shakti* got four Filmfare Awards, including Best Film, Best Actor (Dilip Kumar), Best Editing and Best Screenplay in 1982. Rakhee essayed the role of Amitabh's mother in the film. The film also featured Amrish Puri, Smita Patil and Kulbhushan Kharbanda in important roles.

Goa CM says International Film Festival of India to be held as per schedule in November

International Film Festival of India (IFFI) will happen in November, said Goa chief minister Pramod Sawant.

Goa chief minister Pramod Sawant has said the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) would be held in the state in November this year as per schedule. IFFI is held annually in the coastal state between November 20 and 28.

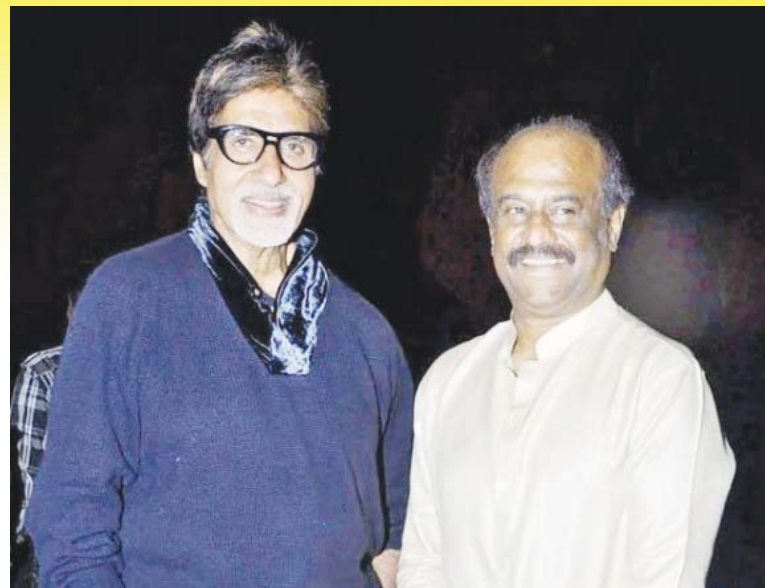
The state will be hosting IFFI 2020 as per schedule in the last week of November, Sawant told reporters on Wednesday.

The opposition Congress, however, said it is not advisable to host IFFI in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and urged the state government to reconsider its decision.

Role of @GovtofGoa is now reduced to Travel and Hospitality agent of @IFFIGoa. I demand

@goacm must reconsider its decision on hosting of #IFFI2020," Leader of Opposition in the state Assembly Digambar Kamat tweeted.

He also demanded a white paper from the government on the expenditure incurred on IFFI, and benefits received by the local film fraternity and tourism sector from the festival. CM @DrPramodPSawant has accepted that financial condition of the State is bad. The Covid Pandemic is not the time for hosting Festivals and Celebrations. With no Financial support from @MIB_India and @DFF_India, Goa ends up spending Rs 20-25 crores every year on the mega event. @INCGoa, Kamat said in another tweet. The festival is organised by the Directorate of Film Festivals in association with the state government's Entertainment Society of Goa.





Sushant Singh Rajput case: 5 factors behind SC order for CBI probe

The Supreme Court presented a detailed legal rationale behind its order to transfer Sushant's death case to the CBI.

(News Agencies)- The Supreme Court on Wednesday ordered a CBI probe into the death of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput. Below is a list of 5 factors that played a role in the court's decision.

1. Maharashtra police yet to investigate

The court noted that the Maharashtra police was only conducting a limited inquiry under Section 174 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) into the cause of unnatural death of Rajput.

Section 174 of CrPC confers powers on police to enquire into death by suicide and submit a report to the district magistrate. The Supreme Court said that an inquiry under section 174 is limited in scope and cannot be equated to a full-fledged investigation. The



Mumbai police have not registered an FIR or started investigation into the incident. 2. Patna police has jurisdiction to register FIR

Rajput's girlfriend Rhea Chakraborty had argued that Bihar police does not have jurisdiction to deal with the matter and register an FIR since the incident occurred in

Mumbai. The Supreme Court, however, turned this down stating that registration of an FIR is mandated when information on a cognizable offence is received by the police.

"Precedents suggest that at the stage of investigation, it cannot be said that the concerned police station does not have territorial jurisdiction to investigate the case," the court said in its judgment. (Contd on page 29)

Thousands seek to adopt a 9-year-old boy after seeing his heartbreaking plea for a new family



(News Agencies)-If 9-year-old Jordan could be anywhere in the world, he'd be at an adoption party celebrating with a forever family of his own. The Oklahoma Department of Human Services says it's gotten more than 10,000 adoption requests from people hoping to make his dream come true since his story was shared last week by CNN affiliate KFOR. "I hope one of y'all pick me," he told KFOR. "I would just like to have a family to call mom and dad, or just mom, or just dad. I don't really care." When asked what he'd do if he was given three wishes, Jordan said he really only needs one.

(Contd on page 29)

Former Trump aide Bannon pleads not guilty to swindling donors in private border wall effort



(News Agencies)- Steve Bannon, a former senior White House adviser to President Donald Trump, has been arrested and charged with three other men for swindling donors who supported a private effort to build sections of wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Bannon and the other men were indicted by a federal grand jury in New York on charges of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and money laundering in connection with their roles in the non-profit group "We Build the Wall." Prosecutors allege that Bannon, 66, diverted \$1 million raised by the group to another organization he controlled and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars of donor funds on his personal expenses. Also charged in the two-count conspiracy indictment:

(Contd on page 31)

India Day celebrated with Car Parade in Long Island



(Contd on page 30)

