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Can Kejriwal's arrest generate sympathy and propel AAP in Delhi?



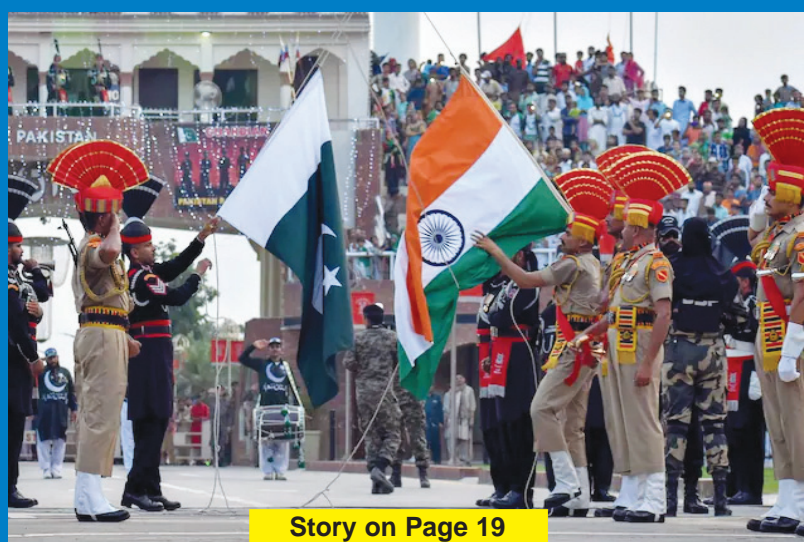
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US Speaks Again On Arvind Kejriwal, Mentions Frozen Congress Accounts

We continue to follow these actions closely, including the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, said US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller.

(Sai Bureau)-After India summoned an American diplomat over their remarks on the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the liquor policy case, the US reiterated on Wednesday its call for "fair, transparent, timely legal processes".

We continue to follow these actions closely, including the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, said US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller while responding to questions on India summoning Gloria Berbena, the US Acting Deputy Chief of Mission in New Delhi.

The meeting at the foreign ministry's South Block office lasted nearly 40 minutes yesterday with India objecting strongly to the US remarks on the arrest of Mr Kejriwal.

Miller also responded to a question on the Congress party's frozen bank accounts, saying, "We are also aware of the Congress party's allegations that tax authorities have frozen some of their bank accounts in a manner that will make it challenging to effectively campaign in the upcoming elections."

Read | India Summons US Diplomat Over Comments On Arvind Kejriwal's Arrest
He said the US encourages "fair,



transparent and timely legal processes" for each of these issues.

"With respect to your first question, I'm not going to talk about any private diplomatic conversations, but of course, what we have said publicly is what I just said from here, that we encourage fair, transparent, timely legal processes. We don't think anyone should object to that," he said. Mr Kejriwal was arrested last week by the Enforcement Directorate

(ED), the third Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader after Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh to be taken into custody in connection with the alleged liquor policy scam. The US State Department on Tuesday said it is monitoring reports of Mr Kejriwal's arrest and called on New Delhi to ensure "a fair and timely legal process" for the jailed Chief Minister. India objected to it and warned of "unhealthy precedents".

"States are expected to be respectful of the sovereignty and internal affairs of others, and this responsibility is even more so in case of fellow democracies. It could otherwise end up setting unhealthy precedents," the foreign ministry said.

"India's legal processes are based on an independent judiciary which is committed to objective and timely outcomes. Casting aspersions on that is unwarranted," the ministry stressed.

The US remarks came days after Germany's Foreign Office stressed that Mr Kejriwal is entitled to a fair and impartial trial. The Indian government had reacted strongly and summoned the German envoy, labelling their remark "blatant interference in internal matters".

The excise policy was introduced to bring an overhaul to the liquor business in Delhi, but was scrapped after Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena ordered a probe into the alleged irregularities in the policy. The ED believes the bribe money from the policy was allegedly used for funding the AAP's election campaigns. It has also called Mr Kejriwal a "conspirator" in the case.

His arrest just ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha election has also prompted furious protests from the opposition camp.

Canada tightens post-graduate work permit norms for international students

The Canadian government said that international students enrolling for specific college programmes would face revised eligibility for post-graduation work permits in Canada. The tightened norms, which were slated to kick in at a later date, but now come into effect earlier.

This change is meant to address a housing shortage linked to rising international student numbers.

Originally slated to commence on September 1, 2024, the Canadian government has advanced the implementation of changes to the eligibility criteria.

The new set of rules will be enforced starting May 15, according to the Canadian government.

The graduates from college programmes delivered through a public-private curriculum licencing arrangement will no longer qualify for post-graduation work permits, under the revised rules.

This means that students enrolling in such programmes on or after May 15, 2024, will be ineligible



for this permit upon completing their studies.

However, graduates will still retain ways to seek work permits for post-graduation. They can pursue options such as applying for a work permit supported by an

employer's approved labour market impact assessment, particularly for occupations which are facing labour shortages in Canada.

To aid students in identifying eligible colleges and institutions,

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) maintains a designated learning institute list.

Now, students who have completed a master's degree programme, even if it lasted less than two years, will be eligible for a three-year post-graduation work permit program (PGWP), provided they meet all other requirements. The PGWP grants international students the freedom to work as many hours as they choose for any company, anywhere in Canada. Its duration lies on factors such as the length and intensity of the student's study programme, as well as the expiry date of their passport, whichever occurs first. These changes are a response to Canada's housing shortage, which a surge in international student numbers has exacerbated. Over the past decade, Canada has experienced an unprecedented influx of international students, with 2023 witnessing a staggering threefold increase since 2013, granting study permits to over one million students.

NEW MEASURES AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

In January, Canada introduced a new measure -- a two-year cap on new international student permits, to tackle the influx of foreign students in recent years. Expected to reduce study permit approvals by 35% to roughly 3,60,000 in 2024, this move comes as the federal government grapples with mounting pressure over concerns that its ambitious immigration targets are worsening the national housing shortage. Notably, Indians comprised the largest national cohort, constituting 37% of study visas issued by Canada in 2023. However, this number experienced a decline following a recent Indo-Canadian diplomatic stand-off.

Government data reveals that last year alone, Canada issued over 6,50,000 study permits to international students, pushing the total number of international students entering the country to over a million.

A battle to save political strongholds for Scindia, Digvijaya and Kamal Nath

(News Agency)- Amid the electoral battle between the ruling BJP and the Congress, some seasoned politicians in Madhya Pradesh will also be fighting to save their own bastions and pocket boroughs. Prominent among these political stalwarts are Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia and two former chief ministers, Congress veterans Digvijaya Singh and Kamal Nath. A member of the erstwhile royal Scindia family of Gwalior, Jyotiraditya Scindia contested and won the first Lok Sabha (bypoll) election after his father and Congress leader Madhavrao Scindia, a Lok Sabha MP from Guna, died in a plane crash in 2001.

Jyotiraditya Scindia (53) was re-elected as MP from his family's pocket borough Guna for the next three consecutive terms – 2004, 2009 and 2014.

In fact, Guna was one of the two



Lok Sabha seats that the Congress managed to win despite a massive wave in favour of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi in 2014.

However, Jyotiraditya Scindia lost the election from Guna against the BJP's KP Yadav in 2019. One year later, Jyotiraditya Scindia along with 22 Congress MLAs had shifted into the BJP, resulting in the end of the Kamal Nath-led Congress government in March 2020.

Jyotiraditya Scindia, who is a

Rajya Sabha MP, is contesting his sixth Lok Sabha election, but the first on the BJP's symbol.

Spanning eight Assembly seats of the three districts of Guna, Shivpuri and part of Ashok Nagar, most of the time, this particular seat was represented by the members of the Scindia family.

Local people said the seasoned politician is taking this election as a matter of prestige and is determined to get his pocket borough back.

Congress veteran and former Chief Minister, Digvijaya Singh is contesting the Lok Sabha election from his home turf Rajgarh.

Interestingly, the Rajgarh parliamentary constituency covers two Assembly segments – Raghogarh and Chachoura of Guna District and one Assembly seat of Agar-Malwa (Susner) along with five Assembly segments of Rajgarh District.

Veteran Rajya Sabha MP, Digvijaya Singh was elected as a Lok Sabha MP twice from Rajgarh, in 1984 and then again in 1991. In 1993, he became the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh and remained on the post until 2003. Digvijaya Singh's younger brother Laxman Singh represented this particular Lok Sabha constituency five times, including one term on the BJP's symbol.

As the Congress could win just one Lok Sabha seat in the previous election, and Digvijaya Singh had

also lost against BJP's Pragya Singh Thakur from Bhopal in 2019, the grand old party, which is striving hard to find its lost ground in Madhya Pradesh, has fielded the former CM from his home district Rajgarh this time.

The Congress had won the last Lok Sabha election from Rajgarh in 2009, while the BJP's Rodmal Nagar won two previous elections in 2014 and 2019.

Another Congress veteran Kamal Nath is making all efforts to retain his bastion Chhindwara, the only parliamentary constituency the BJP lost in the previous general election.

Though, ex-CM Kamal Nath is not the candidate from Chhindwara Lok Sabha seat, he is leading the campaign for his son and sitting MP, Nakul Nath.

Senior leader Kamal Nath had won nine Lok Sabha elections from Chhindwara, and he would be fighting to save his stronghold.

Sadanand Vasant appointed new NIA chief; BPRD, NDRF get new DGs



(News Agency)-The Centre has appointed Sadanand Vasant Date as the Director General of the National Investigation Agency (NIA), while IPS officers Rajeev Kumar Sharma and Piyush Anand have been appointed as DGs of Bureau of Police Research and

Development (BPRD) and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) respectively. The Secretariat of the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet Ministry of Personnel has given the approval for the appointments.

An order issued on Tuesday

stated, "Appointment of Sadanand Vasant Date, IPS (MH/90), as Director General, National Investigation Agency in Level-16 from the date of joining the post, for a tenure up to his superannuation on 31.12.2026 or until further orders, whichever is earlier, vice Dinkar Gupta, IPS (PB/87) upon his superannuation on 31.03.2024." Rajasthan cadre IPS officer (1990 batch) Rajeev Kumar Sharma has been appointed as the DG of BPRD for a tenure up to his superannuation on June 30, 2026 or until further orders. IPS officer Piyush Anand (Uttar Pradesh cadre 1991 batch) presently working as Special DG, CISF, has been appointed as the NDRF chief.

Man kills mother with LPG cylinder for refusing to let him drink



(News Agency)- A man hit and killed his mother by hitting her with a LPG cylinder after she refused to let him consume liquor in the house.

The incident took place in Aashiana area in Lucknow on Sunday but police registered an FIR on Tuesday under 304 (culpable homicide) and 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) IPC. According to reports, the accused Virendra wanted to consume liquor in the house.

His father Ram Prasad, 65, in his police complaint said, "After we refused to let him do so, he started fighting with us. In a fit of rage, he first hit me with the cylinder after which I came out of the house. But then he hit his 62-year-old mother Shyamavati who started bleeding and fell unconscious."

Shyamavati was admitted to Lok Bandhu hospital but died during treatment, he added.

Virendra is yet to be arrested.

DTC bus marshal beaten to death in Delhi

(News Agency)-- A 47-year-old tenant, working as a marshal in Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), was allegedly thrashed to death by the building owner and his nephew for using foul language, said Delhi Police official on Wednesday, adding that they have arrested one of the accused. Police said that the incident occurred on March 25 in north east Delhi's Karawal

Nagar area.

The arrested accused was identified as Rahul (30) while Sunil a.k.a Kala (50) is on the run.

According to the police, a PCR call was received at 12.15 a.m. on March 25 regarding a quarrel in the Karawal Nagar police station area, following which a police team was dispatched to the spot. Upon reaching the

scene, it was found that the injured, identified as Satvir, had been taken to the hospital. "A police team reached JPC hospital where Satvir was found admitted and unconscious. He had injuries to both legs and hands. No visible injuries were found on vital body parts," said Deputy Commissioner of Police (Northeast) Joy Turkey. Although the victim remained

unconscious, a case under sections 308 and 34 of the IPC was registered on Monday.

"On Monday evening, around 5:30 p.m., information was received from the hospital that Satvir had succumbed to his injuries. Accordingly, section 302 of the IPC was added to the case," said the DCP.

During the investigation, it was revealed that Sunil is the owner

of the building where his nephew, Rahul, lives on the second floor and Satvir was a tenant on the fourth floor for the past two years. "Rahul is separated from his wife and lives with his mother. Satvir was unmarried and lived alone. He worked as a marshal in DTC," said the DCP.

On the intervening night of March 24-25, they had an altercation over a trivial issue.

Complaint filed against AAP legal cell's court protests over CM Kejriwal's arrest

New Delhi- A complaint has been lodged with the acting Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court regarding a protest called by the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) legal cell in the vicinities of courts against the arrest of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. Scheduled for Wednesday across various Delhi courts, this demonstration by the legal cell and AAP political workers has sparked controversy and legal pushback. The complainant, Vaibhav Singh, a practicing lawyer, has called for an immediate cessation of what he terms as an "illegal call for a protest" within the premises of any court.

Vaibhav Singh's complaint extends to a request for the Bar Council of India and the Bar Council of Delhi to investigate the matter for professional misconduct thoroughly.

Additionally, Singh seeks directives from the bar associations of all district courts and high courts to commence disciplinary actions against lawyers and political workers participating in the protest.

He suggests imposing penalties on AAP's Legal Cell for orchestrating what he believes to be an unauthorised demonstration within court boundaries.

According to the complaint, the trend of political parties mobilising their legal arms to strike, protest, or call for boycotts within court vicinities has become increasingly



common, sometimes aiming to pressure law enforcement or the judiciary.

Specifically, the complaint highlights a video posted by Sanjiv Nasir, an advocate and Vice-Chairman of the Bar Council of Delhi, on his X account.

In the video, Nasir criticises the arrest of CM Arvind Kejriwal as unlawful and alleges it was motivated by the Central government, a claim that the complainant argues is

unfounded and damages the reputation of law enforcement agencies and the government.

"That Mr. Sanjiv Nasir (Advocate) who is also the vice chairman of Bar Council of Delhi had put a video on his twitter handle on 26.03.2024 at about 03:45PM calling the arrest of Hon'ble Chief Minister Mr. Arvind Kejriwal as illegal and also gone to the extent of saying that the arrest by

Enforcement Directorate is on the behest of Central Government," the complainant said.

The AAP Legal Cell's protest is slated to occur in several key legal locations in Delhi, including the High Court, Patiala House Court, and others, potentially marking a significant confrontation between political activism and legal professional conduct standards.

Bengaluru cafe blast: NIA conducts raids at multiple locations in K'taka



(News Agency)-The National Investigation Agency (NIA) was on Wednesday conducting simultaneous raids in Bengaluru and Shivamogga district in connection with the Rameshwaram Cafe blast case. According to sources, the NIA was raiding five locations in Bengaluru city, and some houses in Thirthahalli town of Shivamogga district.

The raids were conducted on the suspected persons, who were in direct contact with the bomber

and provided him financial assistance, sources said. More details are yet to emerge on the NIA action.

The agency had detained two suspects in connection with the Rameshwaram Cafe blast case in Bengaluru on Tuesday. The preliminary probe revealed that the two suspects were in direct contact with the suspected bomber. Sources said that the raids were being conducted on the basis of information given by these two suspects.

Even as the NIA and police teams have launched an extensive search operation in various states, the bomber has remained elusive. The authorities had obtained the bomber's images and videos from CCTV footage on March 1, soon after the incident.

Sources said that the sleuths were suspecting that the bomber had come from Tamil Nadu and had stayed in a neighbouring state for two months before carrying out the blast.

The hair samples of the accused were gathered from the hat of the accused which he abandoned in Bengaluru near a religious place. The authorities have sent the samples for the DNA testing and were hoping for a breakthrough. The Rameshwaram Cafe bomb blast took place on March 1 in the Brookfield area. Low-intensity Improvised Explosive Device (IED) was used to carry out the blast and nine persons were injured in the incident.

ED raids AAP leader Deepak Singla's residence in Delhi



(News Agency)-The Enforcement Directorate (ED) was conducting raids at multiple locations in Delhi and its peripherals, including the residence of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Deepak Singla, sources said. However, it is yet to be revealed whether the raids are connected to the ongoing investigation into the alleged Delhi excise policy. Singla, a former AAP candidate, had contested elections from

Delhi's Vishwas Nagar Assembly seat under the AAP banner. Apart from his political endeavours, Singla also holds key roles within the party hierarchy, serving as the AAP's in-charge for Goa and as co-in charge of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). On March 23, the ED had conducted similar raids at the home of AAP MLA Gulab Singh Yadav from Matiala in the national capital.

Arvind Kejriwal's directives from ED custody may add to his & AAP's legal hassles

(News Agency)- Two orders issued by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal from the custody of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) over water and sewage issues in the national capital have triggered a controversy about the legitimacy and legality of such a step — which could potentially multiply legal hassles for the Delhi CM as well as the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). The probe agency is examining the veracity and source of the so-called directives issued by CM Kejriwal to his ministerial colleagues Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj.

The ED is very likely to raise the legality of sending such orders before the Rouse Avenue Court when Kejriwal is presented next before the court on the expiry of his existing remand timeline. After his arrest, CM Kejriwal first issued an order to Water Minister Atishi from the custody of the ED on Sunday, while another directive was issued on Tuesday to the health department on smooth functioning of the AAP's flagship Mohalla Clinics.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has claimed that CM Kejriwal, despite being remanded to ED custody, is more concerned about the people of the national



capital than himself.

However, the issuance of directives by Kejriwal in custody has triggered allegations of illegal operations and unlawful takeover of the Delhi CM's office.

The opposition BJP has questioned the authenticity of the directive allegedly sent by CM Kejriwal to Delhi minister Atishi, questioning the timing of its issuance.

BJP national secretary, Manjinder Singh Sirsa, alleged that the AAP leaders

presented an illegal order in the name of the Delhi Chief Minister, claiming that the Chief Minister issued it while in ED custody.

Describing this act as entirely illegal, unconstitutional, and an abuse of the office of the Delhi CM, Sirsa lodged a complaint with Delhi Lt Governor V.K. Saxena and ED, seeking registration of a case against Atishi and other individuals for hatching a criminal conspiracy. Along the same lines, Supreme Court lawyer Vineet Jindal has urged

the L-G to initiate an investigation into the "gross violation of legal procedures" by CM Kejriwal. In his letter, Jindal said that standard legal procedures dictate that any individual, irrespective of his or her post, even a government official in remand, cannot engage in communication with the outside world without explicit court approval.

"In Kejriwal's case, only his spouse and legal counsel have been granted permission to meet him. The court has not granted any permission to Arvind Kejriwal to communicate any formal order or decisions as CM of Delhi from ED custody," he said.

On the contrary, constitutional expert and former Secretary General of Lok Sabha P.D.T. Achary said that since Kejriwal has not resigned and has not

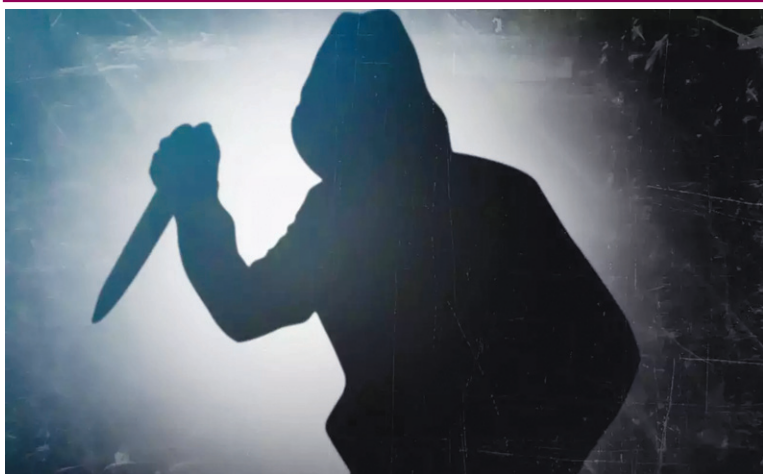
been disqualified under operation of law, he continues to remain in the constitutional position as Chief Minister. Achary said that there exists no bar under the Constitution for a person to hold the CM post or discharge his or duties while he or she is in custody, obviously subjected to rules provided under the prison manual.

However, there exist practical problems since the CM has to preside over Cabinet meetings, take decisions on files, consult the Chief Secretary and other officials, he added.

Achary highlighted that Kejriwal is not an ordinary accused but the Chief Minister of Delhi and the courts could allow him to function as a CM within the jail precincts or in custody.

"There is no constitutional infirmity in passing of directives from custody. He can issue orders in custody. He is performing his duties as a Chief Minister," he said. However, the issue of authenticity of these directives is to be dealt with independently, particularly when there was no permission to the CM by the court to issue orders from the ED's custody.

Delhi: Two construction workers stabbed by men in inebriated condition; 1 dead



(News Agency)-A 26-year-old man died while another sustained a stab wound on Tuesday after they were allegedly attacked by two men in an inebriated condition on a bike for refusing to give money, the police said. According to the police, on Tuesday at around 6 p.m., a call was received regarding the incident in north Delhi following

which a team rushed to the spot.

"Both the injured persons were shifted to a Burari hospital where one person identified as Akhilesh Kumar, a native of Saharsa in Bihar, was declared brought dead. He had three stab wounds mark on his body," said Deputy Commissioner of Police

(north) M.K. Meena.

The injured individual, identified as Chandan Kumar (42), sustained stab injuries in his right hand.

Chandan in his statement told police that he along with Akhilesh were engaged in construction work at Harit Vihar.

He told the police that two youth in an inebriated condition came on a bike and demanded some money, which resulted in a verbal altercation between them.

"Both left from there and came again along with some others and stabbed them with a knife. Multiple teams have been formed to identify and nab the accused. Police teams are also scanning CCTVs in the area to trace the accused," said the DCP.

Seat-sharing formula of INDIA bloc in Bihar to be announced in one or two days: Tejashwi



country and we have an understanding with each other. The seat-sharing formula has been finalised and will be announced in one or two days in Patna." "The leaders of BJP are spreading rumours that INDIA bloc will break in Bihar but it is not the case. The INDIA bloc is united in Bihar. The RJD, Congress and left parties will contest together in this election in Bihar and we will give surprising results," he said. Tejashwi Yadav and his father and RJD chief Lalu

Prasad Yadav are in Delhi, where, according to sources, they have discussed the seat-sharing formula with the top leaders of the Congress party. The RJD has announced tickets to six candidates in Bihar, ahead of the announcement of the seat-sharing formula.

Nehru's China Blunder and Britain's Dangerous Doublespeak: Decoding Vijay Gokhale's New Book

By: Utpal Kumar

It's not just Kautilya's Mandala theory that makes Pakistan and China eternal enemies of Bharat. For the uninitiated, it must be reiterated that the Mandala theory, as explained in Arthashastra, makes it categorically clear that an immediate neighbour cannot be one's natural friend or ally. They would be naturally susceptible to being upset and agitated, prone to gratuitous rivalry and one-upmanship, and bugged by an innate sense of jealousy even while sharing a similar ideological worldview. What further goes against Pakistan and China, in particular, is while the very *raison d'être* of Islamabad's existence is anti-India-ism—you remove it and the very rationale of that country's very presence goes away—the latter is a pale shadow of its old, civilisational self, especially since 1949.

To confuse today's China with the historic, civilisational China would be a blunder of epic proportions—something Jawaharlal Nehru compulsively committed during his 17 years as Prime Minister. The old China shared with Bharat a guru-shishya relationship, and not that of a geostrategic rival—as has been the case today. The difference between the two Chinas is so glaring that while the old one would fight battles with its neighbours to acquire knowledge—in fact, one Chinese ruler chose to invade a neighbouring state simply because the latter refused to part ways with a Sanskrit scholar—the post-1949 China has been obsessively fighting for land and resources. While the old China was hungry for knowledge, today's China has had an insatiable appetite for power. When one adds this genetic reorientation of China with communist doublespeak, the result is outright dangerous, to say the least. In 2012, Shyam Saran, former foreign secretary and one of the best minds on China in current times, narrated a story during a public lecture. Referring to a conversation between former Secretary-General, Ministry of External Affairs, RK Nehru, and Chinese Premier Chou En-lai in 1962, just before the big war, Saran said, "RK Nehru drew attention to reports that China was leaning towards the Pakistani position that Jammu & Kashmir was a disputed territory. He recalled to Chou an earlier conversation, where when asked whether China accepted Indian sovereignty over J&K, he had said rhetorically — has China ever said that it does not accept Indian sovereignty over J&K, or words to that effect. At this latest encounter, Chou turned the same formulation on its head, to ask: Has China ever said that India has sovereignty



over J&K?" This is today's China, hegemonic, imperialistic and hypocritical. Seeing Nehru deal with this China as if he were dealing with a civilisational one, one realises how naïve and imprudent the first prime minister was in his dealing with Mao Zedong and his men, especially Prime Minister Zhou Enlai. One is well aware of Nehru's Tibetan folly (forget about rallying the world against China's invasion of Tibet, about which the US was extensively worried and agitated in the 1950s, Nehru's India actually helped the PLA take over the Roof of the World by providing them with rice when they faced food scarcity up there). So has been the case with the Nehruvian rebuffing of the UN Security Council seat, saying China should get it first. Former foreign secretary MK Rasgotra in his 2016 book, *A Life in Diplomacy*, too exposed how Nehru refused then President JF Kennedy's offer to take the American help to nuclearise India. Kennedy wanted democratic India to become the first nuclear power in Asia, beating communist China, but Nehru the idealist had other plans. Now Vijay Gokhale has come up with a new book, *Crosswinds*, which provides another aspect of Nehruvian folly vis-à-vis China. Among other things, the book brings out quite eloquently the undue haste on the part of the Nehru dispensation to grant official recognition to Mao's China, at Britain's behest, and against the wishes of the United States. The book, in that way,

can be said to be an extension of Gokhale's previous work, *The Long Game: How the Chinese Negotiate with India*, which cites the hurried recognition of the communist state as one of the major diplomatic failures of the Nehruvian State.

While the previous book confines itself to explaining how Nehruvian India's haste in recognising Mao's China was a diplomatic naiveté, *Crosswinds* takes the narrative forward to let the readers know about the conniving role played by Britain in pushing Nehru towards recognising communist China at the earliest. This was against the American thinking which didn't want India to recognise in a hurry. The feeling in the UK in the late 1940s grew that, writes Gokhale, "far from trying to create a joint Anglo-American policy on China, the US was paying scant attention to British interests when crafting its China policy". To add to it, Britain had by then realised that the US would not be able to stem the communist rise in China. Also, it could see the Chinese not joining the Soviet forces, thus the British dispensation, unlike its American counterpart, wasn't particularly alarmed by Mao's rise.

Writes Gokhale, "In May 1949, the British government advised other Commonwealth governments, including the Government of India, that while they watched and waited for the communists to make the first move, any appearance

of 'ganging up' against them should be avoided. In the case of India, however, this was not a major concern for the British. Noel-Baker had reported to the cabinet that Nehru's tendency was to 'write down the menace from that direction (communists)'. Britain played both ways: To the Americans, it said that Nehru was too tied up internally to play any role in China. And to the Indians, it said that China was largely an American problem with which India should not get involved. To quote Gokhale again, "Britain understood well that if the US got India's support for its China policy (which was to delay recognising the new communist regime), Nehru's stature and capacity to influence other Asian states and the Commonwealth members could potentially jeopardise British interests in the Far East."

Just before Nehru's official US visit in 1950, the US Ambassador to India categorically told the Ministry of External Affairs that "there should be no haste in recognition (of the) regime". Among the four reasons, one categorically asked New Delhi to seek "convincing evidence" from Beijing that "such recognition would result in marked improvement in India's ability to protect its interests". Interestingly, even when Nehru was on his official visit to the US, Britain left no stone unturned to convince India of the "correctness of the British position and to persuade India to follow suit".

Britain, thus, played a sinister role in not just encouraging India to officially recognise Mao's China in haste, but also created a deep wedge between New Delhi and Washington DC. One wonders how the Chinese saga would have unfolded had India not pursued the Nehruvian self-goal. Interestingly, as one ponders over this, a news report appears saying the Biden Administration has backed New Delhi on Arunachal Pradesh, calling the Northeastern state an integral part of India. Winds are blowing again in Bharat's favour. Its leadership must take advantage of this situation and let the country sail fast in the sea of development, strength and prosperity. Above all, new India must correct its notion of the enemy (*shatru bhava*). Even if the West may not have enough prerequisites to be Bharat's ally, it is in the latter's interest to create an honourable space for itself in the Western global order. As for the enemies, remember Chanakya's Mandala theory and be wary of Pakistan and China: One is born out of anti-India-ism, while the other just cannot see itself excelling in a world order where Bharat is thriving. And, yes, the country must keep a healthy

India is going to have its least free & fair election in 2024. See these 5 indicators

For BJP, Kejriwal is an idea whose time has come to be destroyed

Here is a safe election forecast: 2024 is going to be the least free and fair national election in Independent India. We do not yet know if it will eventually turn out to be a seriously compromised election or a complete farce. Going by recent developments including the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, however, it seems fairly certain that this election would slide below the minimum threshold of a credible election. In this respect, we are sure taking a stride toward our immediate neighbours like Pakistan or Bangladesh and distant neighbours like Russia.

It pains me to write these lines. I have been a self-appointed ambassador of India's electoral democracy. I have defended, nay celebrated, India's electoral process in the face of the usual Western suspicions and Eurocentric standards. Sometimes, I was the official ambassador too. In 2002, when the Election Commission of India celebrated 50 years of India's first Lok Sabha election, I was officially invited by the Commission to give a keynote address to the election commissioners from all over the world. I may have been a wee bit smug in showcasing the strength of the Election Commission of India, the vibrancy of electoral competition and the administrative miracle that is the Indian election. All that comes back to bite my conscience.

To be fair, this would not be the first instance of an Indian election that was less than 'free and fair'. India's largely clean record of electoral integrity has had its dark spots. Besides many isolated instances of electoral fraud in a few constituencies, I think of the assembly elections in West Bengal in 1972, Assam in 1983, and Punjab in 1992 as examples of elections that fall below the minimum acceptable standards of credible elections.

Most of the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir (except 1977 and 2002) belong to this category, with the 1987 election being the most shameful instance of electoral fraud. But so far, no national election can be added to this blacklist. While the 1977 election was preceded by an authoritarian Emergency, once the elections were declared, everything, including the campaigning, voting and counting in that election, was free and fair. The outcome proved it. In the Lok Sabha election of 2019, the BJP enjoyed a massive structural advantage in terms of money, media, state machine and indeed the Election Commission. But the partisanship was within certain bounds.

A consistent decline

Those limits are being breached this time. As I typed these lines, an Enforcement Directorate raid occurred at walking distance from my house. The

target: a local leader, the former assembly candidate of the Aam Aadmi Party.

I then glanced through the newspaper headlines: judicial remand for Bharat Rashtia Samithi (BRS) leader K Kavitha in an ED case; AAP workers protest against the arrest of CM Kejriwal by the ED; Six Congress MLAs from Himachal complete their defection to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP); the Congress party faces even bigger income tax penalty that can paralyse it; Yamini Aiyar, the CEO of Centre for Policy Research, is eased out following cancellation of the institution's licence under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) and fresh tax demands; an outcry against an uncivil remark by Congress social media in-charge Supriya Shrinete followed by her apology, but only a faint condemnation and no apology for much worse remarks by BJP West Bengal leader Dilip Ghosh. The next morning, WhatsApp updated me on the latest developments: at 9 am, Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) announced its Mumbai candidate; at 10 am, he received an ED notice in a three-year-old case. A day in the life of what The Times of India calls the 'Dance of Democracy'.

Anecdotal evidence and a few headlines are no conclusive evidence. So here is something more systematic. The International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IIDEA), an inter-governmental organisation, measures the quality of 'representation' (including the credibility of elections and freedom of political parties etc.) across 173 countries. Between 2014 and 2022, India's score on this dimension of electoral democracy has fallen from 71 per cent to 60 per cent. In the last five years, India has slid from the 50th to the 66th rank.

Before you think it is another Western conspiracy, please check its website: India is one of the member states of IIDEA and is represented on the governing council by none other than Sunil Arora, the former Chief Election Commissioner of India appointed by the present government. Take another more academic and globally well-regarded Perception of Electoral Integrity Index. In its latest report, India scores just an average 59 per cent, which places it in the yellow zone below other functioning but seriously flawed electoral democracies like Brazil, Ghana and Nepal.

At this rate, the next year's report following the 2024 Lok Sabha elections could place India in a sickly "orange zone". That is why scholars who insisted that India may not be a liberal democracy but continues to be an electoral democracy are beginning to revise their opinions.

In her first response on the arrest of her chief minister and party leader, Atishi, a key minister in the Delhi government, said that Arvind Kejriwal isn't merely an individual. He is, instead, an idea.

It follows that she means his arrest, or temporary removal from the scene, won't mean a crippling blow to his politics, party or government. That's a good and interesting point. Let us take it at face value to begin with. We will know in the next few days what it means for his party and the two governments it runs, in Delhi and Punjab. The more important discussion, however, is about the implications this will have for national politics. Theoretically, if the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is able to withstand this blow and persevere till Kejriwal is eventually released, it could emerge stronger. Kejriwal could then return as a leader with his charisma burnished by time spent in the BJP's prison.

If your basic credibility remains intact, and if your 'base' is immune to corruption charges against you, some time in a rival government's jail never hurt an Indian politician. On the other hand, if your government flounders in your absence, your party lapses into disarray and is crippled further by defections — which the BJP will be working quite assiduously to bring about — it will send your politics into terminal decline. That's the juncture at which the party now stands.

If Kejriwal is today an idea, the 'idea' he and his politics grew around was a no-holds-barred fight against corruption. That is the reason the Modi government has now tarred him and his entire party and government with the same brush: corruption. It isn't the individuals they are after. It is the idea once

synonymous with Kejriwal. That everybody in public life and debate — politicians, corporates, media, judges, everybody — is corrupt and complicit. Or, as the India Against Corruption (IAC) war cries went: sab chor hain (everybody is a thief) and sab mile hue hain (they are all complicit). It followed that the only one truly fighting them all was Kejriwal. That's how he became an idea, which the Modi government now wants to destroy with corruption charges: "Look, look now, who has been talking all these years." Over the past decade, the BJP witnessed that idea of Kejriwal gain ground. It won Punjab and got some votes in Goa, but more importantly, won five seats even in Gujarat. It polled about 13 percent of the vote in the Modi-Shah BJP's pocket borough, showed some growth in municipal elections and set alarm bells ringing. This BJP may run its politics on the grievances of the past, but it doesn't fight today's battles today. Like any true superpower, it fights the day after tomorrow's battles today, and ideally far from its own territory. The 2022 state elections showed AAP growing in the most valued part of the BJP's territory, its heartland of heartlands. That is when the die was cast and AAP was marked out as the rival of the day after tomorrow, to be finished now. If the BJP succeeds and the idea of Kejriwal now declines, it will reaffirm a larger trend in national politics. That all the efforts made by popular, powerful and ambitious leaders to expand their political geographies have failed. Over the past three years, we have seen Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress (TMC) invest time, energy and money in Goa, Tripura and Meghalaya in the hope of acquiring a national footprint, and fail.



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Modi's War on Corruption: Time to Stop Defaming the Enforcement Directorate



the ED with a crucial judgement, the top court in 2022 upheld almost all the stringent provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in proceeds of crime, search and seizure, power of arrest, attachment of properties, and bail, which were under challenge in the court. Section 19, which deals with the power to arrest, does not suffer from the "vice of arbitrariness," the court said, adding that Section 5 of the Act relating to the attachment of property of those involved in money laundering, is also constitutionally valid. Money laundering not only affects the social and economic fabric of the nation but also tends to promote other heinous offences such as terrorism, offences related to the NDPS etc., the court said.

The petitioners had argued that unchecked power to arrest the accused without informing them of grounds of arrest or evidence is unconstitutional. They further said the ED recording incriminating statements from an accused during questioning under the threat of being fined for withholding information amounts to compulsion. The petitioners said that putting the burden of proof on the accused violates fundamental rights like the right to equality and the right to life.

Another major challenge, that filing PMLA charges on cases that occurred before 2002 (when PMLA came into existence) is unconstitutional, was also turned down last year by the apex court. The Modi government justified it by saying that money laundering is a continuing offence, and not a single act but a chain. Proceeds of crime could have been generated before 2002 but could have still been in possession or in use by the accused, post-2002. ED's money laundering raids are up 26 times under the Modi government. Proceeds of crime worth Rs 99,356 crore were attached between 2014 to 2022 while only Rs 5346 crore was attached between 2004 to 2014, under an inept Congress regime. While there were 888 prosecution complaints under the Modi government, there were just 104 between 2004 to 2014, showcasing how increased searches endorse PM Narendra Modi's commitment to preventing money laundering.

The apex court's verdict upholding arrests by the ED under PMLA is a big blow to the Left and the Congress ecosystem, which has been crying hoarse needlessly about how arrests by ED are such cases tantamount to gross violation of stated procedures.

Coming back to PMLA, what exactly were the concerns of the petitioners, which were in any case found to be devoid of any merit by the apex court in its July 2022 judgement? Well, the petitioners had questioned various aspects of the law including the wide powers given to ED for search, seizure and attachment, the reverse burden cast on the accused to prove innocence, the admissibility of statements made to ED as evidence, the stringent conditions for grant of bail and the impact of predicate offence and its outcome, in PMLA cases.

The Modi government had argued that the offence of money laundering under Section 3 is a standalone offence so long as there is a predicate offence irrespective of whether there is acquittal or conviction in such a predicate offence. Pertinently it was also argued by the Central government that money laundering under Section 3 is a continuing offence, irrespective of the time at which the predicate offence is included in the Schedule. Basically, the apex court stated that money laundering is a standalone offence under the PMLA, in a big victory for the Modi government which has zero tolerance for corruption and has been fast-tracking such money laundering cases, much to the discomfiture of the Opposition. The top court justified the constitutional validity of the provisions of the PMLA, thereby nailing the Opposition's bluster.

The Modi government has repeatedly defended the amendments to PMLA, saying money laundering poses a threat not only to financial systems but also to the integrity and sovereignty of nations, since it is conducted not just by corrupt businessmen, but also by terror groups. It would

suffice to say that honesty is still the best policy under Prime Minister Modi's government. Also, amidst allegations that its probes are launched for political reasons, the ED has claimed a conviction rate of 96 per cent in cases registered under the PMLA, in which trials have already been completed. According to the latest data released by the ED, of the 25 cases (as of January 2023) with completed trials, 24 resulted in a conviction, leading to the sentencing of 45 accused. Trials are in progress in other 1142 cases, with the ED having filed chargesheets. A 96 per cent conviction rate in PMLA cases is in fact, an excellent rate of conviction, in contrast to the 56 per cent notched in cases prosecuted under the IPC.

During the last 10 years, the ED has also attached assets worth over a solid Rs 1.15 lakh crore in about 2000 attachment orders. It recovered more than Rs 20,000 crore by selling confiscated assets and returning the money owed to the banks by errant borrowers. Major recoveries have been made from the sale of assets belonging to fugitive economic offenders like Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi. What a travesty of fate that while the Congress shouts and hollers against Nirav Modi in India, in London, it was Abhay Thipsay, a Congress leader, who fought tooth and nail to prove Nirav Modi's innocence. That Thipsay lost the Nirav Modi case is another matter altogether. The moot point is simply this—India's electorally vanquished Opposition has failed to take on PM Modi, given Modi's unstoppable popularity and his focus on welfarism.

The ED and the CBI are only doing their job impartially, without any political bias whatsoever. Hence it is time for Rahul Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee, Kejriwal and their ilk to wake up and smell the coffee! PM Modi was, is and will always be against corruption. The probe agencies are operating independently, as they should be. The actions of agencies do not depend on whether they will benefit the BJP or not. Last but not least, the BJP has a principled stand against corruption irrespective of electoral advantages or disadvantages.

Modi's War on Corruption: Time to Stop Defaming the Enforcement Directorate The court upheld the validity of Sections 3 (definition of money laundering), 5 (attachment of property), 8(4) (taking possession of attached property), 17 (search and seizure), 18 (search of persons), 19 (powers of arrest), 24 (reverse burden of proof), 44 (offences triable by special court), 45 (offences being cognizable and non-bailable). The court also held that the supply of Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) under PMLA proceedings by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is not mandatory, since ECIR is an internal document and cannot be equated to a First Information Report (FIR). Supply of ECIR to the accused is not mandatory and only disclosure of reasons for arrest to the accused, during the arrest is enough. Even the ED manual is not to be published since it is an internal document, the court held. It also rejected the argument about the proportionality of punishment under the PMLA Act, with respect to scheduled offences as wholly "unfounded". The court added that the stringent conditions for bail under the PMLA Act are legal and not arbitrary. Enforcement Directorate, Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO), Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) officials, and not 'police' statements recorded during an inquiry are valid evidence, the Court added, in a stinging rebuttal to Modi baiters and the Opposition which has been making frivolous allegations about the supposed high handedness of the ED. This landmark judgement by the Supreme Court upholding powers of the ED under PMLA came at a time when the Congress party had

been desperately trying to shield the Gandhi dynasty from persistent ED summons to Sonia and Rahul Gandhi who are out on bail in the National Herald money laundering scam. Sonia's lackey, P Chidambaram, is also out on bail in the INX Media scam. What an irony that while the entire top brass of the Congress is out on bail in either money laundering or tax evasion charges, including the much-maligned Deputy CM of Karnataka, DK Shivakumar, Rahul Gandhi and his minions preach about ethics and integrity to all and sundry.

Besides the Congress, Mamata Banerjee's TMC has been floundering, with key TMC heavyweights like Partha Chatterjee convicted in the SSC scam, Anubrata Mondal convicted in the Cattle scam and many others from the TMC behind bars. While Mamata can scream from the rooftops about vendetta politics by the BJP, the harsh truth is that the TMC is a web of notoriety and corruption given that the likes of Partha and Anubrata have been close aides of Mamata and were ministers in the West Bengal regime. These TMC heavyweights have been indicted by the courts and not the BJP. While the trial is still underway in most cases, it is clear that TMC leaders find themselves sentenced by the judiciary due to ample evidence and not due to any alleged shenanigans by the BJP.

What the Opposition fails to realise is that the courts have repeatedly upheld the proof submitted by the ED and the CBI and hence each time the Opposition blames the Modi government, it is actually undermining the very core of our impartial judicial process. Backing

Food wastage

Crisis particularly grave in India

IN a world where 78.3 crore people grapple with chronic hunger, the revelation that 19 per cent of the food goes to waste demands urgent attention. The latest UN report underscores a stark reality: despite ample resources, the inability to manage food distribution effectively is not only morally reprehensible but also environmentally unsustainable. This crisis is particularly pronounced in India, where food wastage poses a significant challenge alongside persistent food insecurity. According to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, one-third of all food in India is wasted or spoiled before consumption. Household food waste alone is estimated to be around 50 kg per person annually. Another UN report had shed light on a disconcerting nutritional trend in India, where a staggering 74.1 per cent of the population cannot afford a healthy diet.

The environmental implications of food waste are equally alarming. Like many other countries, India faces the adverse effects of greenhouse gas emissions associated with food production and waste. Methane emissions from decomposing food waste in landfills contribute to climate change. The UN's findings should propel the world toward overhauling food systems and prioritising equitable distribution. In India, where millions struggle for adequate nutrition, addressing food wastage is a moral obligation. It requires a comprehensive strategy that integrates policy measures, public awareness campaigns and community-driven initiatives. Government interventions, such as implementing regulations to minimise waste and incentivising sustainable practices, are essential. Collaborative efforts between government agencies, NGOs and private enterprises can facilitate efficient redistribution of surplus food waste through practices like to underprivileged meal planning, utilising communities. Individual leftovers and supporting food banks.

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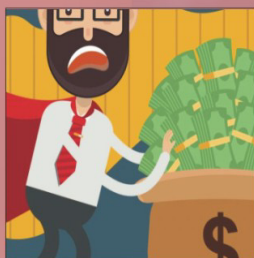
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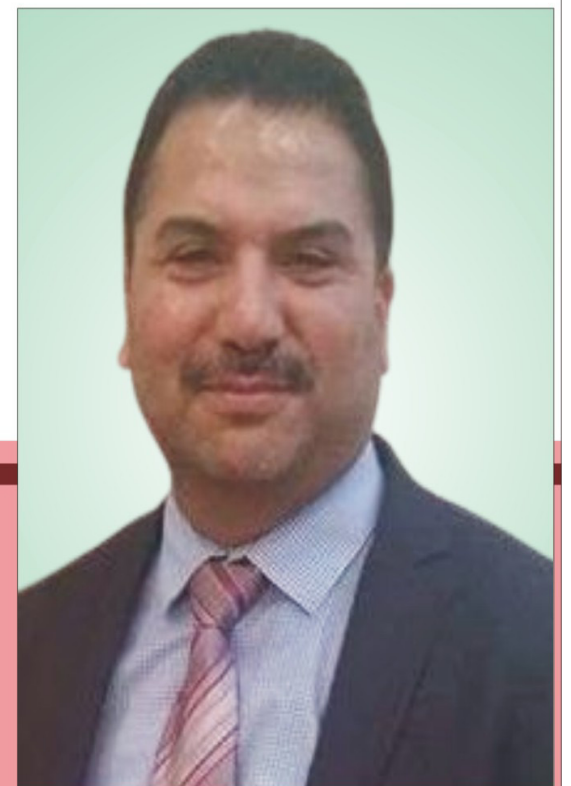
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Kejriwal's arrest

Onus on ED to substantiate allegations

A day after the Supreme Court pulled up the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for making arrests at the pre-trial stage without even completing the investigation, the premier probe agency arrested Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in an excise policy-linked money laundering case on Thursday night. With regard to a Jharkhand case, the court had observed that keeping an accused in custody without trial was akin to detention that hampered the lib-

erty of an individual. However, it seems that this reprimand failed to deter the ED from taking coercive action against Kejriwal. The ED has alleged that the CM was a key conspirator in the Delhi excise policy scam case along with other ministers and AAP leaders. According to the agency, Kejriwal received several crores of rupees as kickbacks from the 'South Group' while formulating and implementing the excise policy for 2021-22 and misused his position as the CM to facili-

tate money laundering by his party. The onus, of course, is on the ED to substantiate its allegations and establish the money trail. It's no less important for the agency to complete the investigation in a time-bound manner. It has already been a year since Kejriwal's former deputy Manish Sisodia was arrested in this case.

With the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections less than a month away, the arrest has given AAP and other Opposition



parties ample fodder to accuse the BJP of misusing Central agencies to settle political scores. Earlier this week, the apex court had denied regular bail to senior AAP leader Satyendar Jain in a money laundering case, saying that there was sufficient material collected by the ED to show that he and his associates were prima facie guilty of the offence. With its credibility at stake, the all-important question is whether the ED — which has often come under fire for alleged overreach in Opposition-ruled states — has incontrovertible evidence to justify Kejriwal's arrest and remand.

RFK Jr.'s VP pick is a missile aimed at Biden

By Paul Begala

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s independent presidential campaign can't win, but it could swing the presidency to former President Donald Trump. Kennedy's selection Tuesday of Nicole Shanahan, a Democratic donor from Northern California, as his running mate is the final point of proof that the RFK campaign is a heat-seeking missile aimed at Biden.

Some people, a little slow on the uptake perhaps, persist in the fantasy that Kennedy, as a vaccine critic and conspiracy promoter, would draw from Trump. In his choice of running mates, RFK Jr. has ended that debate. Not very much is known about Shanahan, the woman Kennedy wants one heartbeat away from the presidency. She is a 38-year-old attorney and entrepreneur who grew up poor, raised by an immigrant single mom in California. She was formerly married to Google co-founder Sergey Brin and has used her wealth for a variety of philanthropic and political causes.

In the political world, she has, according to The New York Times, described herself as a "progressive through and through," and has donated to Democrats like former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and California Rep. Ro Khanna. And Biden. So, yeah, I think we can conclude she has been on Team D.

A candidate born with perhaps the most famous name in Democratic history has chosen a running mate with a gold-plated Democratic donor history. Amazingly, according to the Times, as recently as one month ago, Kennedy had only spoken to Shanahan once. Perhaps that's all the vetting Kennedy needed to choose someone to help him siphon off



Democratic votes.

Common sense tells you RFK Jr. is likely to draw more votes from Biden than Trump. The name alone is a giveaway. Kennedy's name couldn't be more blue if it were Democrat McDonkeyface.

His great-grandfather, John Francis "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald, was a Democratic congressman, then the Democratic mayor of Boston over a century ago. His grandfather, Joseph P. Kennedy, served as chair of the Securities Exchange Commission and then ambassador to Great Britain under Democratic President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

RFK Jr.'s namesake father was a Democratic US attorney general and a Democratic senator from New York. He was murdered the night he won the Democratic presidential primary in California.

Bobby Jr.'s uncle, John F. Kennedy, was a Democratic congressman from Massachusetts, then a Democratic senator from Massachusetts, then the Democratic president of the United States, and also the victim of an assassin. Another uncle, Edward M. Kennedy, was elected nine times to the US Senate. Each time, he ran as a Democrat and served as a Democrat. Teddy, like his brother, sought the presidency as a Democrat.

Bobby's brother, Joseph P. Kennedy II, was a Democratic congressman. So was Joe's son, RFK Jr.'s nephew, Joseph P. Kennedy III. Bobby's sister, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, was the Democratic lieutenant governor of Maryland. In 2021, she joined the Biden administration.

Bobby's cousin Patrick Kennedy was also a Democratic congressman,

representing Rhode Island for 16 years. Bobby's aunt, Jean Kennedy Smith, served as ambassador to Ireland in the Clinton administration, and his cousin, Caroline Kennedy, served as President Barack Obama's ambassador to Japan and is currently ambassador to Australia in a Democratic administration.

I go through that pedigree, an unbroken string of Kennedys running or serving as Democrats stretching back a century and a quarter, to suggest that maybe, perhaps, potentially, possibly, a third party candidate named Bobby Kennedy Jr. might attract more votes from the Democrats than from the Republicans. Put the shoe on the other foot: Would a third party candidate named Trump or Reagan have instant appeal with Republicans? As a former Clinton strategist, the dumbest myth I've had to deal with was that Ross Perot's independent candidacy

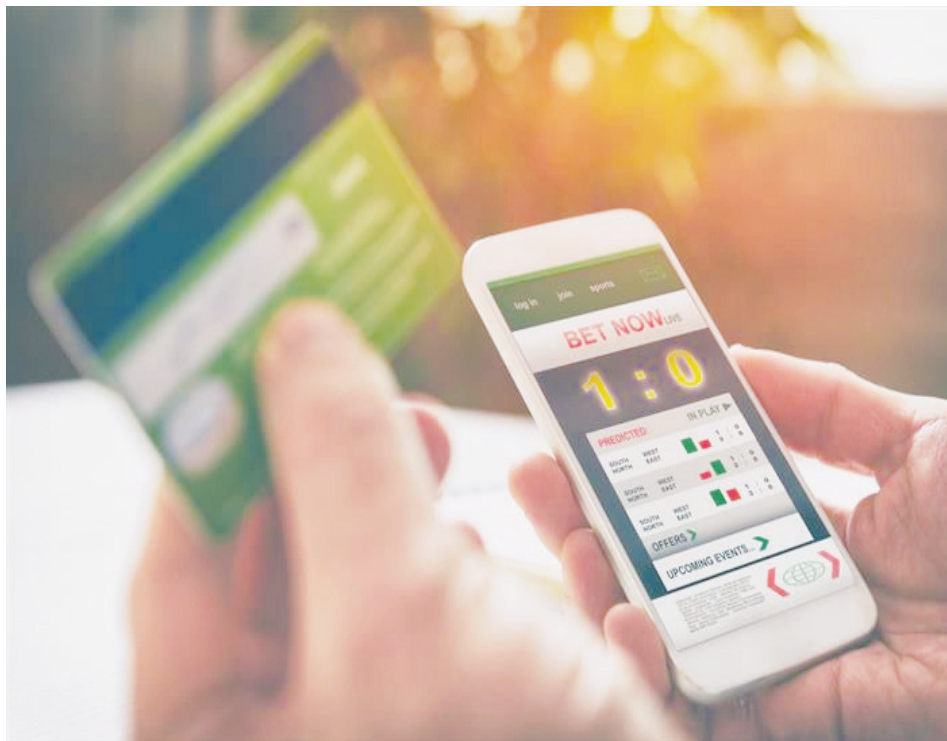
swung the 1992 election to Clinton. To believe that, one must ignore that Perot, like Clinton, was a change candidate; like Clinton, he was pro-choice, and like Clinton, Perot supported campaign finance reform. Look at the data: Perot was leading in the polls in June 1992. When he temporarily dropped out of the race, Clinton's support surged, with Clinton gaining an astonishing 30% in just one month. Later, Perot got back in the race, and Clinton's support went from 55% to 43%. On Election Day, most Perot voters (51%, to be exact) told exit pollsters that Clinton, not then-President George Bush, was their second choice. But you don't need decades of experience and reams of data to see who RFK Jr.'s bid hurts. All you need is a clear head, a command of history and a pair of functioning eyes.

Gambling menace

Suicide shows predatory tactics of betting rings

THE recent suicide by a young Karnataka woman due to her husband's involvement in online cricket betting highlights the grim consequences of entering this dark world. Ranjitha's death serves as a stark reminder of the devastating impact that addiction to betting can have on families. Her husband Darshan Babu, an engineer, fell prey to the allure of easy money promised by betting on Indian Premier League matches. Duped by advertisements claiming that the risk was minimal, Darshan soon found himself trapped in a cycle of debts, which mounted to over Rs 1.5 crore. His descent into financial ruin not only jeopardised his own wellbeing but also that of Ranjitha, who succumbed to the relentless harassment inflicted by creditors.

The harrowing circumstances surrounding her death shed light on the predatory



tactics employed by those running illicit betting rings. Exploiting individuals with false promises and coercive measures, these unscrupulous elements profit at the expense of vulnerable individuals. There is a dire need to check the proliferation of online gambling and save unsuspecting people from falling into this trap. The scale of the racket can be gauged from the Mahadev betting ring exposed by the Enforcement Directorate last year, wherein the agency has frozen or attached promoters' assets worth nearly Rs 1,300 crore.

The government's recent efforts to regulate online gaming and crack down on illegal gambling activities are commendable. Citing the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, an advisory issued to social media influencers, cautioning them against endorsing offshore betting platforms, underscores the importance of ethical practices and aims to prevent the normalisation of gambling-related activities. Public awareness campaigns, counselling and stricter enforcement of laws prohibiting gambling are essential components of a much-needed holistic approach to combating this all-pervasive problem.

India's job crisis

Youth bearing the brunt of unemployment

UNEMPLOYMENT is weighing India down, with the country's youth accounting for almost 83 per cent of the unemployed workforce, according to the India Employment Report 2024 published jointly by the International Labour Organisation and the Institute of Human Development. As per the report, the proportion of jobless youth with at least secondary education rose to 65.7 per cent in 2022. The findings have cast a cloud on India's capacity to reap the demographic dividend; young people constituted 27 per cent of the nation's population in 2021.

The report states that the labour force participation rate, the worker population ratio (the number of employed people per

thousand citizens) and the unemployment rate witnessed a long-term deterioration between 2000 and 2018, but there was an improvement after 2019. The turnaround coincided with periods of economic distress, both before and after the Covid-19 pandemic, with the exception of two peak Covid quarters. However, the authors of the report have said that this improvement needs to be 'interpreted cautiously' as jobs generated in the slowdown period raise questions about the 'drivers of these changes'.

The world's most populous nation, which is also the fastest-growing major economy, cannot afford to ignore youth employment. The government and the industry need to



work in close coordination to rein in joblessness. Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran has put the onus on the industry to hire more people, saying that it is incorrect to think that government intervention can solve every social or economic problem. Nevertheless, policymakers have a key role to play in

shaping schemes that can spur skill development and employment generation. No less important than the quantity of employment is its quality. The robust growth in manufacturing, services and construction sectors should guide stakeholders to optimally use the skills of India's educated youth.



THE Supreme Court ruling striking down bail conditions that restrain individuals from participating in political activities is a significant reaffirmation of

the fundamental rights of citizens. The court's decision underscores the principle that the democratic exercise of political engagement cannot be curtailed through

Bail & electioneering

SC upholds right to political engagement

the imposition of restrictive conditions, especially as a prerequisite for bail. In the case of BJP leader Siba Shankar Das, the Orissa High Court's imposition of a bail rider barring him from political activities was deemed a violation of his right to engage in political discourse, which is sacrosanct and must be safeguarded.

Several politicians have taken part in campaigning while being out on bail over the years. Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Lalu Prasad Yadav campaigned extensively during various elections while he was on bail in connection with

a slew of corruption cases. Sonia Gandhi was granted bail in the National Herald case in 2015 and she continued to address rallies and mobilise support for the Congress; likewise, Mayawati was involved in campaigning for the Bahujan Samaj Party when she was on bail. In 2010, Amit Shah was granted bail in the Sohrabuddin Sheikh encounter case, and he played a key role in the BJP's poll campaigns in Gujarat and other states. Their presence at the hustings highlighted the significance of active participation in the democratic process.

PM's Bhutan visit

Reaffirming commitment to building stronger ties

BARELY 24 hours after putting off his trip to Bhutan due to heavy rain in the neighbouring country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi availed a spell of good weather to visit Thimphu. India's efforts to ensure that the bilateral ties did not enter a state of limbo were reciprocated by Bhutan, which conferred its highest civilian honour on PM Modi. As was expected, Bhutan PM Tshering Tobgay received his counterpart at the airport. In another indication that PM Modi's quick visit was a win-win proposition for both sides, both



Tobgay and the Bhutan King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel

Wangchuck, were present to see him off.

These courtesies reflect the two countries' willingness to be receptive to each other's aspirations in a rapidly altering geopolitical landscape. Bhutan's expectation of more aid from India, the world's fastest-growing major economy, was met when PM Modi doubled the assistance for Bhutan's next Five-Year Plan. India will also shoulder the financial burden of the Gyalsung Initiative, an integrated training programme for Bhutan's youth. New Delhi is readily backing King

Jigme's Gelephu Special Administrative Region Project by financing a railway line that will be connected to the plains of Assam. However, India's steadfast commitment to Thimphu is inseparable from its security interests vis-à-vis China, as the Doklam standoff of 2017 had demonstrated. New Delhi has shown respect for Bhutan's sovereignty by revising the India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty to enable Thimphu to decide its own foreign policy. Understandably, Bhutan cannot keep itself away from greater diplomatic engagement. India had facilitated Bhutan's emergence from isolation by sponsoring its membership of the UN and the World Bank. The bonhomie among the leaders at Paro airport suggests that both sides will continue to synchronise their geopolitical moves.

Last Congress fort - How BJP's targeting Kamal Nath stronghold Chhindwara

By Milind Ghatwai

Whether or not the Bharatiya Janata Party juggernaut has found a vulnerable spot in Chhindwara -- the sole parliamentary constituency in Madhya Pradesh it did not win in 2019 -- will become clear only on June 4. But senior Congress leader Kamal Nath has never appeared as vulnerable and discredited as when he begins another campaign to defend the family turf. The 77-year-old is now a member of the Madhya Pradesh Assembly, having passed the parliamentary baton to his son Nakul Nath in 2019. Unlike his father, who represented Chhindwara nine times in a career spanning more than forty years, Nath junior, who filed his nomination on Tuesday, does not carry any baggage.

Both were reportedly on the cusp of making an ideological switch to the saffron camp last month before the deal fell through. At least, that's what the ruling dispensation at the Centre and the state made everyone believe. Senior BJP leader Kailash Vijayvargiya rubbed it in, claiming that the doors were closed for "people with helicopters and aircraft", a reference to the riches the Nath family enjoys and its preferred mode of campaigning.

The veteran parliamentarian later blamed the media for conjuring up the improbable alliance, but not when he was in a position to publicly scotch the rumours and prevent them from acquiring lives of their own. The protracted episode that involved sorties to Delhi, saddled the Nath family, especially the former chief minister,



with an unwanted reputation. The family name was further sullied with the exit of former legislators, spokespersons, and family retainers from Chhindwara. All this followed the party's poor showing in the 2023 Assembly elections that cost the veteran his position as Pradesh Congress Committee chief. To make matters worse, he was denied a Rajya Sabha berth, a position he had taken for granted given his proximity to the Gandhi family.

A fiefdom

The Congress had done well in the Chhindwara district in the past, winning all seven Assembly segments in 2023. But that was a period when Nath, the official chief ministerial face, was in control of the state organisation and got due respect from the party high command, reflecting his long association dating back to the era of Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi.

Back in 1980, Nath won Chhindwara for the first time. He then won it eight more times till 2014. The only time he did not contest was in 1996 when the party denied him a ticket after the infamous Hawala scam. His wife Alka Nath contested in his place and won by a slender margin. In 1997, he forced her to resign and contested himself, only to lose to former chief minister and BJP veteran Sunderlal Patwa.

It was alleged that Nath forced the by-election because he was eyeing a bungalow in Delhi, an allegation exploited by Patwa during the campaign. Nath felt assured of his victory because Madhya Pradesh had a Congress government. However, despite the setback, he bounced back in the next election and defeated the same rival. He never lost again.

With three members having represented the constituency in the Lower House

for more than four decades, the Nath family, not surprisingly, treats Chhindwara as its fiefdom, often talking about familial connections with three generations of voters. Even before the official list for the 2024 poll was out, the family went public by nominating Nakul Nath.

The times, they are a-changin'

But things have changed for the family after its loyalty to the Congress party was in question last month. Nath attended Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Nyay Yatra when it passed through Madhya Pradesh. But the absence of legislators close to him gave detractors a handle to target the former Union minister. Even after Nakul Nath filed his nomination on Tuesday, some continued to question his (and his father's) political loyalties on social media. Before falling from grace, Nath often played the role of a firefighter in intra-party squabbles in other states. In stark contrast, 49-year-old Nakul lacks his father's charisma and connection with the cadres. A few who left the Congress for the BJP claimed they could no longer deal with him because he was aloof.

Cut from the same cloth? Nath really In his brief speech after filing his nomination, Nakul Nath told the crowd that they must have forgotten that his mother, who was present on the dais, too had represented the constituency. He spoke of his father and his Chhindwara model of development.

But he had nothing much to say about what he had to offer. The low-profile leader is likely to speak less to avoid creating controversies. But this hasn't earned him many followers.

No alliance, BJP and BJD's war rooms gear up for twin battle in Odisha

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik have a unique record of fighting elections with aggressive campaigns and then joining hands for the development of the state and the nation without much acrimony.

By Soumyajit Pattnaik

Recent developments in Odisha's politics have been full of twists and turns. The beginning of March saw the possibility of a pre-poll alliance between the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). But the parties couldn't resolve the deadlock over seat-sharing. The 2024 'Kalinga War' will soon be fought in the electoral battlefields and the war rooms have already come alive to devise battlefield strategies. Both parties are now mobilising their firepower after announcing their decisions to contest separately from all 21 Lok Sabha and 147 Assembly seats in the simultaneous elections.

The decision to form no pre-poll alliance led to a flurry of activity in both camps. Both parties are now busy selecting winnable candidates and preparing campaign roadmaps, armed with survey reports and feedback from various sources. The BJD has two war rooms already operational, at party president Naveen Patnaik's residence, Naveen Nivas, and Sankha Bhawan, the BJD party headquarters.

Patnaik's war room

Naveen Nivas is the nerve centre of the



2024 elections where the Odisha Chief Minister holds brainstorming sessions daily with top leaders of the party. The focus is on formulating precise strategies for each parliamentary constituency and the seven Assembly segments within them. While Patnaik is the commander-in-chief, his trusted aide VK Pandian is preparing region-

specific battle plans in consultation with key party leaders.

The directives from the war room outline the appropriate strategies to be adopted by the BJD's women, youth, and student wings, with a special focus on effective messaging through social media. Apart from the Chief Minister and Pandian, BJD

organisational secretary Pranab Prakash "Bobby" Das remains present during all meetings with leaders of each parliamentary constituency and Assembly segment. Meetings about particular parliamentary constituencies are attended by the respective sitting MPs or the probable candidates, all the MLAs of the constituencies, a party observer, and organisational leaders. While the BJD's list of candidates for both polls is officially awaited, the Chief Minister and Pandian during their one-on-one interactions with potential candidates are giving them green signals to start working immediately in the designated constituencies.

The war room in Naveen Nivas has received survey reports on the potential candidates and their winning chances. On the other hand, the war room at the party headquarters houses the party's social media teams, media briefing teams, and news monitoring cells. In terms of operations, the Sankha Bhawan war room responds to the BJP and Congress's allegations and keeps an eye on their social media activities and political statements made by key opponents.

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Why India Must Deepen Its Ties With Myanmar To Counter China

By Kanwal Sibal

Myanmar is as much a neighbour of India as other countries in our subcontinent. Whether India pays the same attention to Myanmar as it does to Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives or even Afghanistan, is a question. It is not neglecting Myanmar, of course. New Delhi provides development aid and is involved in projects there. India's religious and cultural connections with the country are deep, but the level of engagement with Myanmar does not match the one it has with the others. India has a 1,643-km border with Myanmar, shared by four of our Northeastern states viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. Ethnic groups straddle the border. It has seen insurgencies in Northeastern states, and some of these insurgents have bases in adjacent areas in Myanmar. India has sought cooperation from the Myanmar army to deal with these anti-Indian elements, but whether the Myanmar army, itself combating domestic ethnic insurgencies, is genuine in claiming that they do not fully control these elements is open to question. For the army, it may be a question of priorities or a degree of laissez-faire. On occasion, India has carried out operations against these elements, which is always a sensitive matter.

Modi Government's Focus On Northeast

The Modi government has paid sustained attention to Northeastern states in order to integrate them more firmly into the Indian



Union. The economic development of these states has been high on its agenda. Land access to them is only through the Siliguri corridor, and thus, to overcome geographical handicaps, the process of establishing transit links to them through Bangladesh is being pushed. The strategy of linking these states to markets in Southeast Asia through connectivity projects via Myanmar has been an Indian objective. The country has welcomed Japanese cooperation in developing Northeastern states. The sustained political attention being paid to these states by the Modi government should have normally meant much closer attention to developments in Myanmar, with which the stability and prosperity of the Northeast region is substantially linked. But

this has not happened to a sufficient extent. China's penetration of Myanmar is a major challenge to India. It is treating Myanmar as its backyard. It has created an economic corridor through the country, with gas and oil pipelines, that links China's Yunnan province to the Bay of Bengal. Through the Chinese-built Kyaukphyu, port oil from West Asia is already being pumped to Yunnan. Chinese submarines have been spotted at the Thit Poke Taung Naval Base in Myanmar. China will continue to expand its presence in the country. China has used the domestic insurgencies in Myanmar (the Shans, Chins, Kachins, Rakhine, Karens, etc.), the sanctions imposed on the country by the US and Europe, and its position as a permanent member of the UN Security

Council that can offer some diplomatic protection to Myanmar, to entrench itself in the country by extracting concessions from the military regime. With the current situation, when the Myanmar army is on the back foot and the ethnic insurgents are gaining ground, China has ensured that its interests are protected, even though anti-Chinese sentiment in the Myanmar military establishment and the public is not absent. The Russians too, who are apparently seen more positively than the Chinese, have been trying to increase their presence in Myanmar.

Concerns About Myanmar's Stability

There is rising concern that Myanmar could well get balkanised, with the possibility of some ethnic groups rejecting the central authority and declaring their "independence". Even in the main Bamar ethnic group (68% of the population), the Army is losing some support. The Army is encircled in some areas. It does not have the numbers to roll back the insurgencies. There is a real possibility of a collapse of the central authority. India seems to be still seeking a clearer understanding of what the bottom line of the army is, as well as that of the rebels.

But then, the one institution that has dominated the country for decades is the army, and therefore, its capacity to recover power cannot be ruled out. It is a fast-moving situation with inadequate clarity.

Opposition Unity: Forever In Making

The parliamentary system of democracy thrives only when the opposition is united in its pursuit to keep the government on its toes and hold the ruling regime accountable. However, if the opposition is weak, the ruling party often evades accountability.

Since Narendra Modi assumed office as Prime Minister, India has witnessed a unique phenomenon: the opposition has struggled to hold the government accountable. It is the duty of the opposition to raise issues concerning the people and pose tough questions to the Prime Minister and his cabinet, and if the government's responses are inadequate, it is the opposition's responsibility to challenge them. The past decade will be remembered as a period of failed opposition. While the opposition has its arguments, the media's lack of support for their cause is partly to blame. Nonetheless, the opposition cannot shirk its



responsibility.

Lacking Conviction

As the election process commences, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is striving to secure a record third consecutive term in government. However, the opposition appears to lack conviction. At a time when unity should be their priority, they seem disorganised. Instead of coordinating efforts to hold the ruling party accountable, the opposition is in disarray, lacking a common strategy.

Nearly a year ago, when the opposition convened in Patna to devise a plan to challenge the might of the Modi government, it was hailed as a promising new beginning. Despite the BJP's five-year tenure marked by controversial policies such as demonetisation, which adversely affected the economy and crippled small and medium-scale industries, leading to unprecedented unemployment, the BJP's electoral success in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections

was noteworthy, surpassing the 300-seat mark despite five years of incumbency.

Hope to Despair

If the Patna conclave marked a promising beginning, then the meetings in Bengaluru and Mumbai infused hope that the 2024 battle would be tough for the BJP. The necessary buzz and momentum required to uplift the morale of the opposition and those disinclined to vote for the BJP were generated.

Leading pollsters in the country opined that if the opposition could field a single candidate against the BJP nationally in at least 400 Lok Sabha seats, the BJP would face serious trouble. However, the euphoria dissipated when opposition leaders convened in Delhi for the fourth conclave in December. The Congress, slated to lead the opposition, suffered a setback due to significant losses in three North Indian states - Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh.

Prior to the elections, the Congress was optimistic about winning Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh and was well-positioned to give the BJP a tough fight in Rajasthan. The lethargy of the Congress had a detrimental effect on the opposition.

The BJP, under Modi's leadership, seized the opportunity to strike a decisive blow. Nitish Kumar, once regarded as the architect of the INDIA alliance, defected and allied with the BJP. Since then, the opposition has been unable to recover, appearing disorganised today. To confront the formidable election machinery of the BJP, the INDIA alliance should have acted swiftly. Even after Nitish's defection, INDIA had ample time to regroup as a unified entity, but it seemed immobilised. Ideally, if it was genuinely committed to challenging and defeating the BJP, it should have pursued four fronts simultaneously.

PM Modi's Big Bet On Elon Musk In India Might Just Work

Elon Musk's long courtship of Indian officialdom may have finally paid off. Prime Minister Narendra Modi wanted him to open one of his Tesla "gigafactories" in the country, as part of its efforts to expand its long-moribund manufacturing sector; Musk, meanwhile, wanted India to address tariffs on electric vehicle imports that rendered foreign-made Teslas uncompetitive.

On March 15, the government announced a new scheme to promote investment in EVs. Any company willing to invest \$500 million in a new manufacturing facility that begins production in three years (and with at least a quarter of its components added locally, to begin with) will also be allowed to import 8,000 high-end vehicles a year at a lower tariff of 15%. It's generally assumed that this quid pro quo will be enough to get Musk - and, hopefully, one or two other companies, like Vietnam's Vinfast Auto Ltd. - to bite. Certainly, the EV producers

that currently dominate the Indian market are already bracing for competition.

On the one hand, this looks like business as usual. Officials have made a habit of using the



supposed potential of the domestic market as an inducement for foreign investors. The stick of high tariffs together with the carrot of possible consumer demand growth should be enough to lure in people like Musk, they think. That said, there's a deeper story to be told here. Size matters: The Indian

government is a big believer in the transformative potential of a single large investor. Officials expended enormous amounts of energy wooing Apple Inc. They were ultimately successful, and



now think an entire mobile phone manufacturing ecosystem will grow up around Foxconn Technology Co.'s factories in south India. For the past few years, they've been working to convince Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. to do the same. It's an anchor investor strategy: Get a

whale like Musk in, and the minnows will follow. If Apple and Tesla are both putting hundreds of millions into backing the India story, it is something of a statement about the country's business environment, right?

This isn't the first time governments have tried this, of course. China famously waived its domestic ownership requirements to get Tesla to open a gigafactory in Shanghai. That seems to have paid off: Tesla says that over 95% of the parts that factory uses come from local suppliers. And Musk's claim that he couldn't invest big in a country that didn't allow him to get enough cars on the ground first did have a certain logic. Importing vehicles to begin with allows you to start creating a charging infrastructure, for example. That in turn grows the domestic market enough to justify the investment you make in local production.

There's a lot more that India could do to help this trend along. For example, EV makers who take

up this offer should be encouraged to invest in interoperable charging. Land is scarce, and finding space for multiple different kinds of EV charging stations would otherwise be a nightmare.

Tesla does have an advantage when it comes to making deals like this: Its business model stresses vertical integration. That's why its factories are giga-sized, after all. It's easier for them to make promises about localization since they have greater control over their supply chains than their competitors do. How will local companies deal with new entrants into India's EV market? The optimistic take here is that companies like Tata Motors Ltd., if they're worried about competition from the Teslas of the world now that tariffs have come down, should argue more strenuously for lower trade barriers all round. That's the only thing that would keep them competitive, given their more expansive supply chains.

Kangana Ranaut's Political Emergence: A Challenge to Bollywood's Status Quo

By: Rasheed Kidwai

News of actress Kangana Ranaut winning the BJP nomination from Mandi, Himachal Pradesh has rattled a section of Bollywood bigwigs who see her emergence as a political force a threat to their business and other interests. The fear is that if she gets into the parliament, she will definitely go hammer and tongs against those people and political parties who harassed her post Sushant Singh Rajput's death.

Kangana, throughout 2020, had alleged that actor Sushant Singh Rajput was "killed" as he knew "some dirty secrets" about Bollywood. At one stage, she had even offered to cooperate with the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB). The controversy relating to Rajput's death died down subsequently but Kangana became a factional person within the Mumbai film world. At another level, her feud with actor Hrithik Roshan was the nastiest battle in the history of the Indian film industry which had impacted many powerful dynasties in Hindi films.

If Kangana wins the Mandi Lok Sabha, which many pollsters and political analysts view as a near certainty, she would be the third woman Bollywood megastar after Vyjayanthimala and Hema Malini to be winning the parliamentary polls. Several of her male counterparts, namely Sunil Dutt, Vinod Khanna and Shatrughan Sinha not only hold the distinction of a successful transition from reel to the real world of politics but also



of adorning ministerial berths. Can Kangana score over Hema Malini and Vyjayanthimala on this count too, i.e. getting a ministerial berth in the next round of Narendra Modi's council of ministers? Privately, Bollywood insiders see it as a real possibility. Interestingly, among the many Bollywood A-listers, Kangana continues to be unpopular not only for her brand of Hindutva. For instance, today Kangana may be a huge style icon and is considered one of the best-dressed women in the industry. However, in her extraordinary journey from small town to Bollywood A-lister, she had to face many seemingly insurmountable

odds. Her English pronunciation and fashion sense were constantly ridiculed. Some industry observers think it was because of her background that many top actresses and their spouses who claim to be style icons themselves, had shunned her.

Like many from Narendra Modi's 'New India' small-town success stories, Kangana has turned the tables on those who believed that "outsiders" do not last in Bollywood. From 2019 onwards, Kangana consciously turned "political" when she began taking a jibe at the Indian National Congress, saying that India turned "truly independent"

under Prime Minister Modi. On the eve of the 17th Lok Sabha polls, Kangana had said, "I feel India is gaining its independence in the real sense of the term today. Because before this, we were servants of the Mughal, British and Italian governments. So please exercise your right and vote." Then too, some politically inclined persons in Bollywood had mocked her, pointing out that she badly needed basic lessons in history and political science. Kangana, however, remained unfazed and often accused the media of siding with the Kapoor, Khan, Roshan, Johar and Bachchan clans despite her phenomenal success and talent. This was an erroneous and fallacious charge. In fact, throughout the Hrithik Roshan episode, both electronic and print media had been giving a splash to each word spoken by her and her sister cum manager, Rangoli.

Kangana's struggle to find acceptance from Bollywood's iconic families improved when she, much like Priyanka Chopra, developed an 'I do not care' attitude towards the high and mighty of Bollywood. She realised, perhaps a bit in a hard way, that the more a person hankers after acceptance, the less acceptance s/he gets. How would Kangana behave after June 4, 2024, as an elected parliamentarian? She is unlikely to sober down or stop making sensational, jaw-dropping statements.

When an Operative Becomes a Journalist — and Why Ronna McDaniel Flopped

In the years before I took the vow of journalistic purity, I was a political operative — or aide — or hack. I worked in the Senate office and presidential campaign of Robert F. Kennedy. I wrote speeches for New York City Mayor John Lindsay. I worked with legendary political maven Dave Garth on any number of campaigns, writing ads, prepping for debates, hammering out slogans. In my spare time, I wrote magazine pieces and a book or two.

I left this lucrative line of work in 1976 because I realized I could not work in politics and write about it at the same time. More than two years after I quit, I started appearing on CBS' "Sunday Morning" as a media critic; by 1980 I found myself working at the national political conventions as an analyst along with Bill Moyers and James Kilpatrick. And for the next four decades, I did political analysis for four networks. So I know what it's like to make the journey that Republican National Committee Chair Ronna McDaniel seemingly tried to do when she accepted a role as a paid contributor to NBC News, before being ousted after a revolt at the network. As one of a small army of one-time political operatives-turned-news analysts, I have a clear, firm view on whether such a move is defensible: It depends.

The relevant questions are: What has this newly minted media figure really been hired to say; are they upfront about their prejudices and identified as partisans, or are they able to put aside their recent political work and speak the honest truth? There's a bit of cognitive dissonance that exists in this transformation; it's not easy to move from newsmaker to analyst in a matter of days.

The case of McDaniel raises a different question all its own: Why did the NBC News brass think it a nifty idea to hire someone who had slammed its own journalists and actively participated in an attempt to undo an election? That record alone suggests she may have failed on the key questions facing any operative-turned-pundit. Certainly that's what the journalists at the network believed. Still, NBC's massive error in judgment doesn't mean operatives should be off limits as analysts — and that includes hiring a conservative, Donald Trump-supporting political observer.

First, it is simply too draconian to make political work a permanent ban on a journalistic career. Should Walter Lippmann have been barred from his work as a columnist because he worked for the socialist mayor of Schenectady, New York? Should ABC News not have hired Dwight Eisenhower's press secretary James Hagerty as its president? More to the point, it makes little sense to impose

a one-size-fits-all test. It also may be difficult to accept this notion, but the idea that a one-time political foot soldier can put their preferences to one side is not that absurd. Think of Tim Russert, who spent years working for Democrats such as Sen. Pat Moynihan and Gov. Mario Cuomo. When he joined NBC News and then became moderator of Meet the Press, Russert demonstrated that he was fully comfortable holding public figures to account regardless of party.

Or, to get personal again, back in 1980, I was making the argument that Ronald Reagan was competing aggressively and successfully for traditional Democratic working-class votes. Thirty-five years later, in this space, I was writing that Trump was a far more serious presidential contender than conventional wisdom suggested, and that Hillary Clinton was a uniquely vulnerable candidate.

Did those judgments mean I wanted those things to happen? Not exactly. For any journalist — but particularly those who have come from the political universe and now are working to a different purpose — the most significant danger is to let the wish be father to the thought. Some media figures can even retain their political ties as long as they can demonstrate a degree of separation. Karl Rove has been an active player in conservative-Republican circles through all his years as a Fox News analyst and Wall Street Journal columnist. But he's also been highly critical of Trump

and the stratagems of the House Freedom Caucus. Maybe most relevant, no one who is watching Rove has any illusions about his leanings (or for that matter, the leanings of Fox News in general). For some of us, the transition to journalism meant moving beyond the role of a commentator. I spent time freezing in the snows of Iowa and New Hampshire; pushing my way through the mosh pits of convention floors; covering the last days of apartheid in South Africa — you know, reporting.

But with the rise of cable news, and the recognition that putting people behind a table in a studio is a lot cheaper than sending a reporter, producer and camera crew out to cover a story, "talking heads" now dominate the air. And they appear on these networks to offer more or less the same opinions they were offering as political players. It's not that such hiring necessarily raises ethical questions; it's that it doesn't move the discourse very much at all. More than once, I've thought the networks could save a lot of money by dispensing with the talking heads and deploying sock puppets, whose offerings would be no less predictable than their human counterparts.

In announcing the decision to cut ties with McDaniel, NBCUniversal News Group Chair Cesar Conde told employees she was first hired out of a desire to present audiences with "a widely diverse set of viewpoints" and that the company now intended to "redouble our efforts to seek

voices that represent different parts of the political spectrum." But will the anchors on MSNBC welcome a different pro-Trump arrival? Joy Reid has said she would happily host Republicans and specifically cites former GOP Reps. Adam Kinzinger and Liz Cheney, two of Trump's harshest critics. With respect, I think Reid is missing the point: "never Trump" Republicans do not expand political diversity at the network. And would MSNBC's audience accept a pro-Trump addition to the network's lineup? Like much of the Fox News audience, MSNBC's followers hear every night an affirmation of their views. Years ago, Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer told me she went home each night and watched MSNBC. Why, I asked, after endless hours in the Senate, do you do that? "Because," she said, "it's like sinking into a nice warm bath." It's not clear she or her fellow viewers would welcome an ice-cold splash of pro-Trump perspectives.

The bottom line though is transparency. If a paid talking head is on the air to speak for a particular point of view, then there should be no pretense that the audience is getting anything else. And if a political operative-turned-journalist is offering an analysis ostensibly unrelated to their past political ties, then that journalist needs to be damn sure that is what's happening. The easiest way to trap yourself into misleading the audience is to mislead yourself.

Gujarat man indicted in US in \$4,00,000 ponzi scam

A 23-year-old man from Gandhinagar has been indicted in a case of ponzi scam worth \$4,00,000 in Alabama in the US. The accused, Pathyam Patel, began selling securities without registration and kept collecting money after guaranteeing huge returns which he never invested in securities. Instead, he used them to meet his personal expenses.

According to officers of Alabama Securities Commission (ASC), Pathyam Patel, 23, who is also known as Pat Patel and was staying in Alabama, was arrested on March 6, based on nine counts of securities law violations.

"The indictment alleges that Patel sold in excess of \$4,00,000 in investment contracts to at least six investors. Patel represented that he was associated with Infinity Wealth Management, an investment advisory firm, which he claimed was registered with the US Securities and Exchange Commission," said a statement by ASC.

Patel claimed that he could earn substantial profits for investors by investing their funds



and guaranteed no loss of their principal amount. After receiving the investors' funds, Patel represented to certain investors that they had to pay additional fees to maintain their investments.

"Patel did not invest the funds as communicated to the investors. Instead, he used them for gambling on sporting events, personal expenses and paying other

investors. Patel had no ability to guarantee that the investors would not lose their principal (amount)," added the statement. At that time, Patel was not registered with the ASC to sell securities in Alabama, and the investment contracts he sold were not registered with the ASC. Infinity was not a registered investment advisor or broker-dealer, the statement said.

Congestion pricing lawsuits test limits of New York's 'green amendment'

Two of New York's biggest environmental policies are on a collision course.

Foes of congestion pricing, the long-awaited plan to reduce traffic in Manhattan by charging drivers, are aiming to block the tolls using a constitutional amendment designed to protect the environment. Ironically, the

scope of the rights in the green amendment. And that could spell trouble for the MTA, which is set to finalize its tolling plan at a Wednesday board meeting.

The daytime tolls — \$15 for cars and more for big trucks — are expected to improve the region's overall air quality. But a state and federal environmental

year devotes nearly 500 of its thousands of pages to "environmental justice" communities.

"The findings of the environmental assessment — and in particular, the project's substantial environmental benefits — reflect the project's consistency with the green amendment," MTA spokesperson Joana

Jack Lester, an attorney representing New Yorkers Against Congestion Pricing Tax and other plaintiffs challenging the tolling plan, said the green amendment and congestion pricing don't have to be in conflict, they just are because of the way the MTA is going about the tolling plan.

"It's one of those governmental, perhaps well-intentioned policies that just went off the rails, no pun intended, in how they tried to implement it," he said.

So far, several of the recent green amendment cases in New York have presented more obvious claims, according to a review of the green amendment cases being tracked by Pace University's law school.

One case involved a landfill, for instance. But there have been more surprising uses, too. A lawsuit to block solar energy subsidies and a lawsuit to ensure Buffalo puts fluoride in its tap water both cite the green amendment. It's still possible the green amendment issues don't get ruled on by a judge if the cases settle or if either New York or New Jersey challengers win before the tolling starts.

The judge in the New York cases is leaving complex constitutional questions for later, after the court rules on more basic questions about whether the environmental reviews were done properly. Traditionally, courts defer to bureaucrats and elected officials on those kinds of regulatory matters.

But the green amendment claims introduce a constitutional twist and uncertainty.

Federal judges in New Jersey and New York are expected to hear arguments in and rule on the more basic legal questions by mid-June, which is when the MTA wants to start tolling. That means even if the MTA wins on the more basic legal issues, the green amendment issue could be left unsettled, giving New York toll foes another bite at the apple. They could, for instance, seek an injunction to block the tolls before or even after they begin by claiming the tolls violate neighborhood residents' constitutional rights.

A ruling in one case last April involving a residential project in Chinatown, suggests some courts won't want to give foes of projects another bite at the apple in cases where more traditional environmental arguments failed. The judge wrote that she was hesitant to "create a brand-new route to challenge developments on an environmental basis" using the green amendment. But that ruling came after years of previous attempts to block the projects proved unsuccessful.



tolling plan is intended to help the environment by taking polluting cars off the road in New York City while raising money to pay for billions of dollars in upgrades to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's sprawling bus and subway network.

Nevertheless, one of the biggest wild cards in several lawsuits challenging the proposed tolls is the 2021 "green amendment" voters approved to ensure every New Yorker has a state constitutional right to clean air, clean water and "a healthful environment."

Three lawsuits challenging the congestion pricing plan argue it would actually exacerbate air pollution in high-smog areas by encouraging new traffic patterns that would create vehicular bottlenecks in those neighborhoods.

"How is that not going to be a violation of the green amendment?" said Alan Klinger, an attorney who is representing toll foes, including Staten Island Borough President Vito Fossella and the United Federation of Teachers. "Because it is certainly going to affect the quality of the environment for these communities."

The pending legal fights give federal courts an early crack at defining the

assessment shows congestion pricing will change traffic patterns as drivers, particularly commercial truck drivers, try to dodge the tolls by taking circuitous routes around Manhattan — potentially snarling traffic and increasing air pollution. These routes include parts of Staten Island, the South Bronx, Chinatown, the Lower East Side and places along the FDR and other peripheral highways — areas already considered "environmental justice communities," which means pollution there is supposed to get extra scrutiny. "The law says that environmental justice communities are supposed to get special attention and protection, not be treated worse," Klinger said.

Three of the five cases challenging the MTA's tolling plan and a federal environmental review — two in New Jersey federal court and three in New York federal court — focus on these sorts of changes. And all three New York cases raise the green amendment issue. So far, the MTA and federal transportation officials have not dealt directly with the green amendment issues in court, though their mandatory environmental assessment released last

Flores said in an email.

More broadly, the state, which effectively runs the MTA, has cited reducing overall air pollution as among the reasons Albany lawmakers supported congestion pricing in the first place. Plus, the state has said, there are plans to deal with some of the negative local impacts, including installing charging stations for electric trucks, monitoring traffic conditions and putting in plants to mitigate air pollution from changes in traffic patterns.

Because there is so little case law about New York's green amendment, it's hard to predict how courts will view the claims about congestion pricing violating residents' environmental rights.

"Whether one agrees or disagrees with that, their framing is not coming out of left field in terms of what arguments they are making," said Maya K. van Rossum, an environmental advocate who coined the term green amendment. She said the legal lines about where environmental rights begin and end will be drawn over time, just as courts have long wrestled with freedom of speech and religion cases.

Real estate brokerage Compass to pay \$57.5 MILLION compensation to sellers for overcharging them

Real estate brokerage Compass has agreed to pay \$57.5 million to settle claims it conspired to overcharge US home sellers by billions of dollars.

Compass is the first major firm to reach a settlement sum since the National Association of Realtors (NAR) agreed to pay \$418 million last week on behalf of smaller brokers.

Tens of millions of Americans who sold homes in recent years are likely to receive a payout from the settlements, including the latest one from Compass - but details of who will qualify are scant. The NAR has refused to answer repeated requests from DailyMail.com asking how sellers can claim compensation, which is now almost \$700 million across several cases.

Compass is one of many large home brokerages facing claims they violated anti-trust laws.

A judge still needs to approve the Compass settlement - which is thought to be a formality. Once they do, news of how to claim is set to be released. Compass, based in New York, also agreed to change its business practices to ensure home movers understand how brokers and agents are compensated.

CEO Robert Reffkin today said the company - which denied any wrongdoing - was pleased to resolve the claims to 'minimize



distractions.'

The decision was welcomed by Mike Ketchmark, an attorney representing the home seller plaintiffs.

He said: 'Brokers around the country are continuing to join with NAR in abandoning the broken system. We expect many more settlements in the coming months.'

The case concerns a longstanding practice designed to keep rates high and extract as much commission as possible. Among the changes it has agreed to make, Compass will require its brokerages and their agents to clearly disclose to clients that commissions are negotiable and not set by law.



They also must state that the services of agents representing homebuyers are not free.

It also agreed to require that its agents who represent homebuyers disclose right away any offer of compensation by the broker representing a seller.

Three other major brokerages have made similar deals to settle the litigation.

Re/Max Holdings and Anywhere Real Estate agreed to pay out \$140 million combined last fall.

Meanwhile Keller Williams Realty reached a \$70 million settlement in February.

Combined with the NAR's \$418 million agreement, it means the industry has

agreed to pay \$684 million in total. Currently commissions for buyer's and seller's agents amounts to between 5 and 6 percent of a home's sales price. This is usually divided between the two agents.

But it is much higher than in other countries - around double the average fees paid by home movers in the UK, for example. The NAR is the largest trade association in the US and only its fee-paying members are allowed to call themselves 'Realtors'. They are also the only people with access to its proprietary database of properties available for sale.

Those databases are referred to as 'multiple listing services' or MLSs and require the seller's agent to list the amount of commission their client is paying.

That, in theory, enables the buyer's agent to 'steer' buyers to houses on which the commission is higher and through which they can profit more in the event of a sale. According to a survey by consulting firm 1000watt, more than 76 percent of 640 real estate agents in the US said buyer's agents would be more likely to show a property if they knew the seller was paying higher commission.

This system, in turn, allows the seller's agent to tell sellers that if they don't offer up enough commission, buyers won't ever see their house.

UK Court Allows Sale of Nirav Modi's Luxury London Flat

A luxury apartment in London used by Nirav Modi and held in a trust can be sold for a value not less than GBP 5.25 million after a high court ruling in London on Wednesday.

Master James Brightwell, the judge presiding over a hearing attended remotely by the 52-year-old fugitive diamond merchant from Thameside prison in south-east London, accepted representations from the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to hold the proceeds from the sale of 103 Marathon House in a secure account after all "pressing liabilities" of the trust have been cleared.

The case involves Trident Trust Company (Singapore) Pte Limited as the claimant, seeking to sell its apartment asset in the Marylebone area of central London, and the ED arguing that the trust's assets represent the proceeds of a massive fraud on the Punjab National Bank (PNB) for which Nirav is facing extradition proceedings. "I am satisfied that it is a reasonable decision to allow for the property to be sold for GBP 5.25 million or above," Master Brightwell concluded. He took note of ED's other objections in the case relating to the creation of the trust itself, which were not pursued at this stage of the case. Barrister

Harish Salve, appearing on behalf of ED, told the court that they had agreed to the sale in principle based on undertakings that protect the interests of the ultimate beneficiary, which may be the Indian exchequer, and averts a "fire sale" of the asset.

The judge noted that the case was a "very unusual one", which involved a trust created in December 2017 in the name of Nirav Modi's sister Purvi Modi and their family as beneficiaries.

Under an arrangement with the Indian authorities, Purvi Modi and her adult children did not participate in the proceedings. It left Nirav Modi, one of the named defendants in the case, claiming that he was the "true settler" of the trust and should be treated as a beneficiary. He also alleges that he gifted, or made a loan of, GBP 625,000 to the trust to procure the purchase of 103 Marathon House, which also entitles him to the proceeds from the sale. Dressed in a casual t-shirt and sweater, Nirav followed Wednesday's proceedings from a room in the prison and interjected to flag an article in 'The Financial Times' about another money laundering case being investigated by ED.

Congress 'crippled'

Access to funds crucial to level electoral field

THE controversy over the freezing of the Congress' bank accounts raises concerns about the democratic credentials of Indian

polity. Accusations of manipulation levelled by former party chief Sonia Gandhi against the government point towards a bid to financially cripple the principal Opposition party ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. The Income Tax

(I-T) Department's move — under which three-decade-old 'tax

lapses' of the Congress have also been raked up — undermines the notion of a level electoral playing field. Denying the Congress access to its funds at this time can disrupt the party's ability to undertake electoral campaigns, thereby jeopardising the democratic process itself. The I-T Department's action paints a troubling picture of pre-poll harassment. This disconcerting development comes amid the disclosure of details of electoral bonds by the SBI following a Supreme Court order. Apprehensions

about the integrity of political funding have been exacerbated by the glaring disparity: the share of money from the bonds received by the BJP amounts to over 50 per cent. It is clear that the BJP, which received 38 per



cent of the vote share in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, enjoys a significant edge in electoral funding. The Congress, whose vote share was around 20 per cent, has been particularly impacted. The rules that safeguard the rights of all political actors to engage in the electoral process freely and fairly must be strengthened. Attempts to weaken the ability of Opposition parties to fight effectively must be thwarted by addressing the issues of equity in political financing and fair competition.

Cash-Strapped Pakistan Turns to India for Help Amid Economic Crisis



By: Sanbeer Singh Ranhotra

Trade between India and Pakistan has been at a near-complete standstill since 2019. That year, Pakistan-linked terrorists attacked India in Pulwama, leading to the death of 40 CRPF personnel. Consequently, India stripped Pakistan of its "most favoured nation" status, effectively placing a 200 per cent duty on Pakistani imports. Then, in August 2019, India revoked Jammu and Kashmir's special status by abrogating Article 370. Islamabad was outraged and downgraded diplomatic ties with India and suspended bilateral trade. Five years later, a cash-strapped Pakistan has realised it punched way above its weight and is hoping against hope to revive bilateral trade with India.

Pakistan's Foreign Affairs Minister Ishaq Dar on Saturday said that the country will "seriously examine" the question of resuming trade with India. "Pakistani businessmen want trade to resume with India," declared Ishaq Dar at a press conference in London. Importantly, the Government of Pakistan is under increasing pressure from traders and business owners

in Punjab to resume trade with India. This is a powerful lobby which Shehbaz Sharif's government wants to keep on its side. Also important to note is that Ishaq Dar is broadly viewed as a dove in Pakistan who generally wants good ties with neighbours. However, he yields no power in the face of the all-pervasive military establishment, which has just installed a new government in Pakistan that does not reflect the will of the people. Therefore, it remains to be seen whether Dar's olive branch for India has the backing of Rawalpindi. If not, his overture is dead on arrival. There are several reasons why Pakistan would want to interact more with India in the present geopolitical climate. For starters, India is now broadly recognised as a global power in ascendance. It remains the fastest-growing economy in the world and is poised to become the country with the third-largest GDP in the world by 2027. India's diplomatic heft and influence have risen considerably over the past five years. This has all been marked by Pakistan slipping into decline on several fronts. Economically, Pakistan faces an existential crisis. In fact, the economic misery that abounds Pakistan has a lot to do with why its businesses want to resume trade with India.

Diplomatically, Pakistan is facing global isolation. A conscious campaign by India to expose Islamabad's patronage of terrorism has cost Pakistan dearly.

Consider the numbers: In Pakistan's financial year that ended in June 2023, more than 12 million people fell into poverty, according to the World Bank. Pakistan is a nation struggling to survive under a mountain of debt. Inflation has neared a whopping 33 per cent in the latest estimates, while prices of at least 18 essential items have increased. Electricity bills soared last summer, even as bills for natural gas were up by more than 900 per cent in February from a year earlier. This made winters in Pakistan this year excruciatingly painful for the populace, which also recently got handed a government it did not choose. Meanwhile, Pakistan's debt crisis is simply refusing to relent. The Islamic Republic has \$8 billion in foreign currency reserves, while it is required to cobble up \$22 billion for debt payments and maintaining its current account deficit for the coming fiscal year. This has led to Pakistan seeking its 24th bailout from the International Monetary Fund. However, IMF bailouts are tough to come by. If and when they come, a host

of strings are attached, which neither the public nor the establishment in Pakistan is fond of. The IMF has so far forced Pakistan to raise tax revenues and slash subsidies doled out for utilities and fuel.

Essentially, Pakistan is hurting. Given the constant attacks by Baloch rebels and Pashto militants against both Chinese and Pakistani nationals, it would be safe to say that Pakistan is also bleeding. With so much going wrong for the country, Islamabad is desperate for wins wherever it can get them. The resumption of trade with India is one such shot in the dark. It will bring significant relief to businesses and traders in Pakistan, especially in the Punjab province. However, India is not very keen to oblige Pakistan just yet. **WHY INDIA IS UNLIKELY TO BUDGE**

One must remember that Pakistan is not extending an olive branch to India out of the magnanimity of its heart. The fact of the matter is that Pakistan is now more desperate than ever. It knows survival in its current state is not possible. If Pakistan is to survive as a globally relevant entity, it must immediately fix ties with India and clear all the roadblocks that it finds placed on its path. However, India's core issues with Pakistan remain unresolved. For

starters, the bilateral relationship remains downgraded in the absence of a Pakistani high commissioner in India. If Islamabad earnestly wants a rapprochement, it must begin with reinstating its high commissioner in New Delhi. Second, Pakistan's terror infrastructure remains intact. In fact, it is alive and kicking. In the absence of concrete action to dismantle its terror networks, Pakistan will find it impossible to convince India to resume bilateral trade.

Third, Pakistan must make peace with the fact that the reality in Jammu and Kashmir has been permanently altered for the better by the Modi government. Ties between both countries went downhill after India abrogated Article 370, and until Pakistan realises that it has no say or stake in Kashmir, it will continue getting the cold shoulder from New Delhi.

Finally, the onus of creating a conducive environment for repairment of bilateral ties rests solely on the shoulders of Pakistan. Remember, Pakistan is a country facing an economic crisis and global isolation. India, on the other hand, is powering ahead with robust economic growth and its standing in the world has improved manifold in recent years. If anything, Pakistan will stand to gain a lot from being in the good books of India in the present geopolitical climate. However, history is a testament to the fact that Pakistan entering the good books of India is nearly impossible, almost entirely for faults of its own.

Pakistan needs India. On the other hand, India is flourishing even without Pakistan. For Islamabad, it will take much more than a comment by its foreign affairs minister to bring a sense of normalcy to ties with India. Pakistan must act on India's core demands. Until Islamabad delivers on them, there is little to no scope for bilateral ties improving, let alone for trade resuming in all its might.

Can Kejriwal's arrest generate sympathy and propel AAP in Delhi?

The BJP's strategists hope for a repeat of 2019 due to a split voting pattern in Delhi, with voters who switched to the AAP in 2020 making a 'gharwapsi'.

By Amitabh Tiwari

Will Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest affect the Aam Aadmi Party's chances in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections? Both the Bharatiya Janata Party and the AAP are trading charges, with the latter alleging that the saffron party is out to finish Kejriwal through government agencies. The BJP, on the other hand, has countered that Kejriwal's arrest exposes corruption in the Delhi government. INDIA bloc leaders have rallied behind Kejriwal. India Today's Political Stock Exchange found

45 per cent of voters believe that Kejriwal's arrest will impact the 2024 general elections; 35 per cent of voters say it won't.

While 48 per cent of voters believe that Kejriwal's arrest will benefit BJP's anti-graft campaign, 39 per cent say it won't.

52 per cent of voters believe that Kejriwal's arrest will generate sympathy votes and 39 per cent say it won't.

48 per cent of voters believe that Kejriwal's arrest will unite the opposition; 36 per cent say it won't.

Split voting pattern in Delhi

Delhi witnesses a split voting pattern — voters back different parties in different types of elections. In national elections in the last 10 years, voters have backed the BJP, giving it all seven Delhi seats in 2014 and 2019. On the other hand, the same voters backed AAP giving it more than 60 seats out of the state's 70 in both 2015 and 2020. The winners of the last four elections in Delhi were: BJP (2014), AAP (2015), BJP (2019) and AAP (2020).

The BJP received a 33 per cent vote share in the 2013 Vidhan Sabha polls, AAP 30 per cent, and the Congress 25 per cent in a hung Assembly. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections a few months later, the BJP recorded 46 per cent vote share, the AAP 33 per cent, and the Congress 15 per cent. The BJP gained largely at the expense of Congress, which recorded its worst-ever performance tally falling below 50

at all India level. A total of 16 per cent of voters switched loyalties in 2014 from 2013.

In the 2015 Vidhan Sabha elections held within a year, the BJP's vote share declined to 32 per cent, while AAP's rose to a whopping 54 per cent. Congress' vote share declined further to 10 per cent. Others also registered a two per cent decline. AAP gained at the expense of the BJP, Congress and Others. A total of 21 per cent of voters switched loyalties between 2015 and 2014. They voted for different parties in different elections: 14 per cent of them chose BJP in the national elections and AAP in the state elections.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP's vote share increased to 57 per cent, while the AAP's declined significantly to 18 per cent. The Congress



vote share also jumped back to 23 per cent. Others, however, lost one per cent of the vote share. A total of 38 per cent of voters switched loyalties between 2015 and 2019. They voted for different parties in different elections: 25 per cent of them chose the BJP and 13 per cent Congress in the national elections almost entirely at the expense of AAP. In the 2020 Vidhan Sabha elections, the BJP's vote share again declined to 39 per cent, while the AAP's jumped significantly to 54 per cent. Congress's vote share scaled down to five per cent. AAP gained 36 per cent votes at the expense of both Congress and

the BJP equally given the local character of the poll. A total of 36 per cent of voters switched loyalties between 2019 and 2020.

So, Delhi today has 36-38 per cent of voters who are not ideologically aligned to any party and exhibit a swing in voting preferences depending upon the nature of elections. Split voting patterns are visible in many states in India including Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Kerala, Jharkhand, Haryana, and Delhi but not of this magnitude. Scenario analysis The AAP gained 36 per cent vote share in 2020, snatching 18 per cent each from the BJP and Congress. The grand old party has allied with the AAP for the 2024 elections; their vote blocks are fairly complementary as the AAP

has grown at the expense of the Congress in Delhi. This means, in effect, there are only 18 per cent relevant swing voters in Delhi who switched from the BJP to the AAP in 2020. The 2024 Lok Sabha results depend upon whether these voters return to the BJP due to the national character of the polls, or remain with the AAP due to the sympathy wave generated after Kejriwal's arrest. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP received 57 per cent, the Congress 23 per cent, and the AAP an 18 per cent vote share. Combined, we can assume the INDIA bloc has a 41 per cent vote share due to the complementary nature



of the vote blocks.

Four scenarios are possible:

Scenario 1: AAP gets no sympathy and all 18 per cent of

swing voters return to the BJP due to the national character of elections, in line with the trend in the last decade in Delhi. In this case, the BJP could retain all seven seats.

Scenario 2: The AAP manages to

keep one-third or 6 per cent of these voters and only two-thirds or 12 per cent return to the BJP fold. In effect, a six per cent swing in favour of the AAP compared to 2019, with a corresponding decline of six per cent in BJP's vote share, turns into a hypothetical case of 47 per cent vote share for AAP and Congress and 51 per cent for the BJP. In this case, the AAP-Congress combine could win two seats and the BJP five.

Scenario 3: The AAP manages to keep half or nine per cent of these voters and the other half return to the BJP fold. This is likely as the India Today Political Stock Exchange says 52 per cent of respondents believe

Kejriwal's arrest could generate sympathy. In effect, a nine per cent swing in favour of the AAP compared to 2019, with a corresponding decline of nine per cent in BJP's vote share, will result in a 50 per cent vote share for the AAP-Congress alliance and 48 per cent for the BJP. The former may then win five seats and the BJP two.

Scenario 4: The AAP manages to keep two-thirds or 12 per cent of these voters and the remaining third or six per cent return to the BJP fold. A 12 per cent swing in favour of the AAP compared to 2019, with a corresponding decline of 12 per cent in the BJP's vote share, may result in a 53 per cent vote share for AAP-Congress and 45 per cent for the BJP, with the former sweeping the state, winning all seven seats.

The BJP's strategists hope for a repeat of 2019 due to a split voting pattern in Delhi, with voters who switched to the AAP in 2020 making a 'gharwapsi'. The role of swing/non-ideological voters raises hope for the AAP. If it manages to create a narrative that Kejriwal has been wronged, generating sympathy even amongst half of these voters, it could gain five seats in Delhi together with Congress. Has the BJP given the AAP ammunition to bolster its prospects in the upcoming general elections in the state capital? Only time will tell.

Israel withdraws negotiators from Qatar after Hamas rejects truce deal



(News Agency)- Israel has recalled its negotiating team from Qatar after Hamas rejected its latest offer on a hostage deal and truce, an Israeli official said. The delegation led by the Mossad chief, David Barnea, had been in Doha for eight days. Israel has said that it will not relent to many of the demands put forward by the mediators, including Qatar and Egypt on behalf of the Hamas side. According to sources in the Israel defence ministry, Hamas had again put forward a demand of a total ceasefire, withdrawal of Israeli troops and rehabilitation of Palestinians in northern Gaza

from the south where they have been staying as refugees since the war broke out. Meanwhile, Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a statement on Tuesday night said, "Hamas wanted a permanent ceasefire and its decision to reject a US brokered compromise was clear proof of it not interested in continuing talks, and a sad testament to the damage caused by the UN Security council resolution." The statement also said, "Israel won't cave into delusional demands made by Hamas." The hawks in the Israeli establishment, including

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant were not willing for even a temporary truce. This is owing to the military intelligence reports that Hamas military infrastructure has crumbled and only four battalions were remaining in southern Gaza and that it was only a matter of time before Hamas caves in. The IDF chief has also briefed the Israel war cabinet that it was only a matter of time for the army to defeat Hamas and to take out its elusive and dreaded leader, Yahya Sinwar — the mastermind of the October 7, 2023 massacre.

Russian lawmakers mull over reinstating death penalty after terror attack

(News Agency)- Russian lawmakers are discussing lifting the moratorium on the country's death penalty, following a recent deadly terror attack at a Moscow concert hall.

"Today, there is no other form of punishment for these scumbags other than capital punishment," said Leonid Slutsky, head of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, referring to the suspects of the terrorist attack, at a plenary session of the State Duma, or lower house of the parliament, on Tuesday.

Slutsky also noted that incitement to terrorism should be punished by imprisonment, news agency reported. State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin proposed creating an inter-factional working group to analyze legislation regarding the use of the death penalty and migration policy. Chairman of the State Duma Committee on State

Building and Legislation Pavel Krasheninnikov said the committee is ready to discuss various proposals and bills on the moratorium on the death penalty, adding that it is ultimately important to "keep a cool head" when making such decisions. According to current legislation, capital punishment remains legal in Russia, however, a moratorium on the death penalty was instituted in 1996, after the country had joined the Council of Europe. Russia's Constitutional Court imposed a ban on the death penalty in

1999. The Kremlin said Monday that it is currently not taking part in any discussions on the potential return of the death penalty. A shooting occurred last Friday in the Crocus City Hall concert venue in suburban Moscow, followed by a massive fire. The Russian Investigative Committee said that at least 139 people were killed as a result of the terrorist attack.



Queens man indicted for sex trafficking of a child

(News Agency)-Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Alfredo Morocho was arraigned today on an indictment accusing him of recruiting a 17-year-old girl to have sex with strangers for his own profit, advertising her availability using semi-nude photos, and driving the victim to dates with customers. District Attorney Katz said: "No child should ever be exploited. The underage victim in this case was preyed upon for financial gain. The defendant is also accused of having sex with the victim himself. I have dedicated significant resources to supporting those impacted by sex trafficking and to hold accountable those who manipulate and take advantage of other people's vulnerabilities. We will not relent in the fight against this dehumanizing industry." Morocho, 37, of 110th Street in Corona, was arraigned on a nine-count indictment charging him with two counts of sex trafficking of a child, five counts of promoting prostitution in the second and third degrees and two counts of patronizing a person in prostitution in the third degree. Morocho faces up to 25 years in prison if convicted. Judge Peter F. Vallone Jr.

ordered the defendant to return to court on May 8. Morocho was also charged in a criminal complaint with bail jumping in the second degree after failing to appear in court after a 2018 arrest. According to the charges in the indictment: - In November 2023, the defendant met the 17-year-old victim at a deli in Jamaica and asked her and her friends if they wanted a job. -The victim informed Morocho that she was underage, to which the defendant responded that he could get her a job in prostitution and that he had customers. -Morocho later asked for semi-nude photos of the victim to send to customers. - Between December 1 and March 5, Morocho picked the victim up at her migrant shelter and drove her to an apartment near 43-18 108th Street in Corona and to other locations to engage in sex for money. - Morocho would keep all the cash after the encounters and give the victim half at the end of the day. - In addition to profiting from her prostitution, Morocho paid for sex with the victim between November and March. - On March 6, Morocho drove the

victim to the Renaissance New York Flushing Hotel at Tangram. Upon arriving, Morocho met with an undercover officer to negotiate the price of sex with the victim and was placed under arrest shortly thereafter. - Morocho was in possession of a business card advertising "in-calls" with a phone number linked to hundreds of online prostitution advertisements. The sex trafficking investigation was conducted by Detective Michael McGovern and Detective Kevin DeLeon of the New York City Police Department Human Trafficking Squad, under the supervision of Sergeant Kevin Kavanagh, Lieutenant Amy Capogna, Captain Thomas Milano and under the overall supervision of Chief Carlos Ortiz. Assistant District Attorney Marina Arshakyan and Assistant District Attorney Kiran Cheema, Supervisor, of the District Attorney's Human Trafficking Bureau are prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Jessica Melton, Bureau Chief, and Tara DiGregorio, Deputy Bureau Chief and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Gerard A. Brave.



Queens College President Frank H. Wu has named Ying Zhou interim associate director of the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Queens College Outreach Center, a satellite site of the LaGuardia Community College SBDC. Zhou will work part time in her new role and continue to serve as the executive director of the Tech Incubator at Queens College (TIQC), where she began in 2016. In a unique partnership, Queens College and LaGuardia Community College jointly established an SBDC presence on the Queens College campus in 2019, with support from U.S. Congresswoman Grace Meng (D-Queens). The Queens College center serves immigrant entrepreneurs and other underrepresented populations of Flushing, Queens, with assistance offered in English and Mandarin. The center is located at Queens College, Kissena Hall, 64-19 Kissena Boulevard, opposite the main campus.

Dec offers new online resource for novice hunters and sponsors of mentored hunts

Online Platform Increases Awareness, Facilitates Registration, and Improves Accessibility

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) today announced a new online resource both for new hunters and organizations offering mentored hunting opportunities. This tool will connect novices with experienced hunters who will help them develop the skills needed to be safe and successful when afield.

"One of the greatest hurdles to newly certified hunters going afield for the first time is the lack of a mentor or a support system to help them understand the basics of a successful hunt," DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos said. "New York State is home to dozens of groups and organizations offering mentored hunt opportunities and DEC's new platform will amplify



opportunities for new hunters to connect with knowledgeable and enthusiastic mentors to help create enjoyable experiences." Mentored hunts allow hunters with little or no hunting experience to learn additional firearm safety and hunting skills while building

confidence under the guidance of more experienced hunters. First-time hunters can now find mentored hunt events in New York and register for those learn-to-hunt opportunities on the new Mentored Hunt Program registration webpage. DEC's

Mentored Hunt Program registration page also provides a platform for those hosting a mentored hunt to advertise their event statewide.

Partnering organizations can fill out an application to have their event posted on the registration page and amplified to the public on DEC's platforms. DEC invites groups and organizations to register their mentored hunt events for turkey, deer, waterfowl, pheasants, and other small game. Interested groups should visit the Application to Host a Mentored Hunt site to register. By using DEC's Mentored Hunt program registration, users will: Make your event more visible to new hunters statewide; Ease registration for participants; Track registered participants to better plan your event; and

Promote your event to a wider audience of potential participants. New hunters are encouraged to check the DEC Mentored Hunt Program registration page regularly for upcoming events. Listed opportunities will vary based on time of year and upcoming hunting seasons. Attendance is often limited, and each event requires registration to attend. Hunts may or may not be a DEC-organized event, so please read individual event details for more information.

All hunters taking part in a mentored hunt must successfully complete a hunter education course and purchase a NYS hunting license prior to their participation. For more information, check out DEC's Learn to Hunt Opportunities on DEC's website.

Mayor's office of immigrant affairs launches english learning and support centers in immigrant dense neighborhoods

Over one million of city funding will go to launching English Learning and Support Centers for immigrant New Yorkers across the city.

NEW YORK –Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) Commissioner Manuel Castro today launched MOIA English Learning and Support Centers located across the city to support long time and recently arrived immigrant New Yorkers learn English and get connected to city resources. Over one million of city funding will go to non-profit organizations and public library branches to launch the centers. "This program expands language access and helps give non-native English speakers the tools they need to thrive in their workplace, at school, and elsewhere around the city," said Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services, Anne Williams-Isom. "Thank you to MOIA and all our partners in this work reaching so many individuals and families through nonprofits and libraries across the city with this innovative curriculum."

"We are excited to launch MOIA's English Learning and Support Centers, expanding the city's

existing efforts in adult literacy programs," said Commissioner of MOIA, Manuel Castro. "For our office, it is important to empower both newly arrived immigrants and longtime immigrants, to take beginner level English classes, learn about city resources, and connect with other students, all in their neighborhood."

The MOIA English Learning and Support Centers will connect immigrant New Yorkers to beginner and intermediate level English classes. The centers will use We Speak NYC, an award-winning curriculum developed by the city of New York as a tool to teach English and educate New Yorkers on city resources and services. The centers will also support immigrant new Yorkers by providing more information on resources introduced in the classes, making referrals to social and legal services, and acting as a hub for English language learning in their communities.

The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs began working with 10

immigrant serving community-based organizations to launch the English Learning and Support Centers. The organizations selected represent a diverse group with an extensive reach to immigrant New Yorkers across the five boroughs. Each organization provides cultural and linguistic services to immigrant New Yorkers. The following organizations will serve as centers:

Life of Hope
Mexican Coalition
Muslim Community Network
Mixteca
Project New Yorker
Korean Community Services (KCS)
United Sikhs
DSI International, Inc.
La Colmena
Laal NYC

This program has also been extended to 60+ branches of the Queens Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library, and New York Public Library. Each library will receive funding to support the

implementation of English Learning and Support Center classes, expanding current use of the We Speak NYC curriculum and providing increased support for connecting learners to City resources.

In addition to the launch of the centers, the We Speak NYC curriculum will also roll out three new episodes of its award-winning series, with support from the Mayor's Public Engagement Unit and the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice. Each episode provides authentic and relevant stories of immigrant New Yorkers overcoming obstacles with the help of City services and the support of their communities. The topics covered in the new episodes include environmentalism, tenant rights, and enrolling in health insurance.

In efforts to increase language access, MOIA has also provided subtitles for We Speak NYC episodes in the following languages: Arabic, Bengali,

French, Haitian Creole, Korean, Nepali, Polish, Russian, Simplified/Traditional Chinese, Spanish, Urdu, and Wolof.

For more information on how to access MOIA's new English Learning and Support Centers and our award-winning curriculum, visit www.nyc.gov/wespeaknyc.

"The Mayor's Public Engagement Unit is thrilled to announce our support for the MOIA English Learning Center as well as the release of two new episodes in the upcoming season. These episodes will spotlight the Tenant Helpline and GetCoveredNYC program, showcasing PEU's dedicated housing and healthcare outreach efforts," said Adrienne Lever, Executive Director of the Mayor's Public Engagement Unit. "Language stands as a cornerstone of community in New York City, and by expanding access to vital resources, we aim to bolster benefit outreach to eligible New Yorkers."



Bobby Deol turns villain for as-yet-untitled spy film starring Alia Bhatt

Bobby Deol, who created waves with his menacing character Abrar Haque in 'Animal', is all set to go gray once again for Alia Bhatt's upcoming spy film by Yash Raj Films.

"Bobby Deol's inclusion to the YRF Spy Universe is an incredible casting coup by Aditya Chopra! Bobby will become a cold-blooded, menacing villain set to destroy Alia Bhatt and Sharvari in this action spectacle that will blow the minds of audiences," said a source.

In the upcoming yet-untitled film, Alia

plays a female agent, directed by YRF's homegrown director Shiv Rawail.

The film also stars Sharvari, who is paired with Alia as super agents on a mission.

Rawail has previously helmed 'The Railway Men'.

The yet-untitled film will be the seventh film of YRF Spy Universe after 'Ek Tha Tiger', 'Tiger Zinda Hai', 'War', 'Pathaan', 'Tiger 3' and 'War 2'.

The film is reportedly set to go on floors later this year.



Rebel Wilson describes how her heart was 'cracked open' by a tennis player

Hollywood actress Rebel Wilson shared that her connection with an unnamed sports star changed her life.

Reflecting on her love life, the actress told people.com: "It was like a rollercoaster. Sometimes, when I was dating men, people would even comment. They're like, 'God, Rebel, you can take them or leave them. You weren't that ever invested'."

"And then, here was somebody where (I) felt so invested in and even thought at one point, 'Oh, I could give up my career for this person, travel around the world on the tennis circuit'."

Wilson, who announced her engagement to

Ramona Agruma last year, shares that the experience has changed her life and her attitude towards love.

The actress said: "I describe it as cracking open my heart. Like you could open a fresh can of tennis balls... that's what it did to me. And, I guess, when I saw people write love songs or poetry about love, I was like, 'Oh, that's nice'. But I don't think I'd ever understood that until I felt that for a person." Wilson said she still struggles to understand why the situation has proven to be so transformative for her, reports femalefirst.co.uk.



For Urvashi Rautela, Holi is all about family, pooja and organic colours

Actress Urvashi Rautela is excited to celebrate Holi with her family. The actress said she will have a pooja at home, after which she will be playing with simple organic colours.

"Holi is one of my favourite festivals, and I try my best to celebrate it with my family. My schedule doesn't always permit me that but this year, I have the liberty to celebrate it with my family. We will have a pooja at home and we will be playing with simple organic colours. Urvashi then urged to keep

colours away from animals.

"I would urge everyone else as well to use organic colours and also, please keep colours away from animals as it is harmful for their skin. Please celebrate and have fun without causing harm to the voiceless. Wishing everyone a very Happy Holi," Urvashi said. On the work front, apart from 'Love Dose 2.0' with Yo Yo Honey Singh, she has 'Jahangir National University' (JNU), where she is playing a college politician.

Joely Richardson on her career post 50: 'No one wanted me'



Actress Joely Richardson has opened up about ageism in Hollywood and how she had to pivot to start getting work again. She was talking about all the projects she's currently involved in, including Netflix's 'The Gentlemen' and 'One Day'. She also has Disney+'s 'Renegade Nell'. The actress

noticed a change after she turned 50, which she shared on ITV's This Morning, reports deadline.com.

She recalled that when her agent "retired young to be with her mom," she was looking for a new agent and didn't find much luck. "I went to get another agent, and it was like no one wanted me," she said. "And so, even though I had Golden Globe nominations, and blah, blah, blah, zero people wanted a woman over 50." The actress then

got new agents and said they "started finding little ins wherever we could, doing The Sandman (also Netflix), Lady Chatterley's (Lover) playing the northern housekeeper Mrs Bolton, just like trying to sort of get through the door so people would consider me for roles. And then, they started to come."

Adah Sharma spent nights in dance bar for role: 'Wanted to look convincing'

Actress Adah Sharma revealed that she spent nights in a dance bar for her role in 'Sunflower 2', as she wanted to look convincing on screen.

Adah said: "I wanted to look convincing and it's not just about when you are dancing, it is about how you sit and stand and how comfortable you are with

your body, even when you are not performing." 'The Kerala Story' star said that she stayed till 5 a.m. in the morning sometimes to observe.

The actress added: "They were kind enough to allow me to stay in the bar and observe. I tried to embody the confidence they have while talking to customers.

I used to go by 9 p.m. in the night and stay till 4 – 5 a.m. in the morning sometimes." 'Sunflower' series follows the lives of residents in a housing society as they become embroiled in a murder mystery. It stars Sunil Grover and Mukul Chaddha in the lead roles.



Fatima Sana Shaikh: Not very easy for a lot of people to make it into the industry

Fatima Sana Shaikh has been a part of Hindi cinema for eight years and she is having a dream run.

The actress said she was fortunate to get an opportunity in the industry as it is not very easy for a lot of people to make it.

Fatima made her debut in the Aamir Khan-starrer 'Dangal' in 2016, she was then seen in films such as 'Ludo', 'Ajeeb Daastaans', 'Thar', 'Dhak Dhak' and 'Sam Bahadur'.

In her slate of upcoming work, she has 'Metro...In Dino' and 'Ul Jalool Ishq'.

How does she see her journey?

Fatima told VOICE: "I feel very blessed. It's not very easy for a lot of people to make it

into the industry and I feel fortunate and blessed that I got that opportunity because I was a newcomer. I auditioned and I got the films because of my hard work."

Be it Geeta Phogat from 'Dangal' or her 'Dhak Dhak' role of Shashi Kumar Yadav and former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 'Sam Bahadur', Fatima has always portrayed women of substance on screen. "Those are the roles that excite me so I want to experiment and want to explore but if I am not excited about a role or a character or the graph then I don't spend a lot of time on it," said the actress on the sidelines of LFW x FDCI.

Joey King reveals she first experienced anti-Semitic outbursts when she joined Insta at age 12

Actress Joey King, who gained major fandom with her work in 'The Kissing Booth' franchise, has opened up about facing anti-semitism at the age of 12 and also having trauma counselors on the sets of Holocaust series 'We Were the Lucky Ones' set'.

Talking about her facing anti-semitism, the 24-year-old actress said it was when she joined Instagram at age 12.

"Within the first couple months I got my first anti-Semitic remark and it would dip in terms of how frequent or how much it would happen, and it would kind of roller coaster in terms of how often I would experience it, but that was shocking when I was that age," she said.

"Now I just expect it because anti-semitism is not the only thing I experience in terms of bullying online. So it almost feels like one of many symptoms of a grand diagnosis of horrible Internet people. I'm saddened, but I'm not really surprised." She is gearing up for 'We Were the Lucky Ones', a series based on Georgia Hunter's best-selling novel of her family's fight to survive the Holocaust. It also stars Logan Lerman, Sam Woolf, Robin Weigart, Lior Ashkenazi, Hadas Yaron, Amit Rahav and Eva Feiler.

"I think anyone who is a method actor is truly so brave and amazing, but I'm personally not a method actor," King told 'Just for Variety' podcast.

The actress added: "And when shooting a show like this, I just don't know how I could be because having those moments of release in between setups and in between takes with your friends (is needed)."

"Sometimes you need that release at the snack table with each other...because it got really dark," she added. The actress said that it would get so sad and there would be times where "you just didn't



know when it was going to hit you." "Everyone had different moments where we're all sitting there having a nice time together, just filming a scene and then someone is hyperventilating and crying because it's a wave that washes over you," she said. The channel also made trauma therapists available for cast and crew on set, reports variety.com. "They would come and check on each of us a lot, which I thought was so great," King said. King's movie nights with co-stars were particularly helpful: "We'd watch 'Finding Nemo' because we just needed to."

Raveena Tandon

reveals she is best friends with her children

Actress Raveena Tandon shared that she is best friends with her children and that it helped her build a relationship with her on-screen son in the show 'Patna Shuklla'.

Raveena Tandon who plays the character of Tanvi Shukla, said: "There is an instance in the film where Tanvi's son forgets his lunchbox, she chases the school bus to deliver it midway. I think that is one scene every mother will relate to."

"Every house has chaotic mornings but a mother will cut through the chaos and come through for her children and that is something even I have personally done when my children were going to school." She then went on to share details about

the relationship she shares with her daughter Risha and son Ranbir.

"I'm best friends with my kids and the same dynamics we've portrayed on screen with Tanvi's son. Bringing that chemistry on screen with Patna Shukla brought back some lovely memories for me with my children. I'm sure the audience will feel the warmth and pure friendship that Tanvi and her son share." 'Patna Shuklla' is based on a fearless lawyer who takes matters into her own hands when she sees a student entangled in an education scam, and soon realises that she is pitted against a Chief Minister candidate.

'Patna Shuklla' will be streaming on Disney+ Hotstar from March 29.



Sunny Leone explains how 'MTV Splitsvilla X5' connects with modern dating practices

Bollywood actress Sunny Leone has said that the new season of dating reality show 'MTV Splitsvilla X5: ExSqueeze Me Please' resonates with modern perspective on dating and that the rules have transformed.

The dating reality television show will be hosted by Sunny, who is joined by her new co-host Tanuj Virwani. 21 singles will vie for love and fame in the show.

Sunny said: "MTV Splitsvilla' is a true reflection of the evolving dynamics of love, staying genuine and connected with the changing trends in relationships. It resonates with the modern perspective on dating and how the rules have transformed."

"The 'ExSqueeze Me Please' theme this

season will add twists and turns that will surely heighten fans' excitement."

Tanuj added that he has been an avid follower of the show.

"As I come from the world of fiction, this is an exciting opportunity to step into non-fiction. It's a playpen for improvisation, fun, and self-improvement. "Catering to a new audience, I'm eager to connect with the youth of India, embracing the challenge and the opportunity to bond and vibe with them. I'm keen and extremely excited to see how the contestants play this quest for love."

"MTV Splitsvilla X5: ExSqueeze Me Please" will premiere from March 30 on MTV and on JioCinema.

Navigating the SEO Landscape: Google and AI-Generated Content



In the ever-evolving landscape of online content creation and search engine optimization (SEO), the symbiotic relationship between Google and AI-generated content is a topic of paramount importance. In this article, we aim to shed light on Google's approach to content quality, user satisfaction, and the evolving role of artificial intelligence.

Navigating Google's Perspective:

Google is committed to delivering high-quality, relevant, and valuable information to users. The consensus is that Google's algorithms prioritize user experience and content substance over the method of creation, be it human or AI-generated. The key takeaway is that

quality matters, and content creators should focus on producing material that adds genuine value to users.

Evolution of Search Algorithms:

Recognizing the dynamic nature of search engine algorithms is crucial for content creators. It's important to stay informed about Google's updates and guidelines, as these algorithms adapt to changing user behaviors, technological advancements, and emerging trends. A user-centric approach, addressing the needs of the target audience, is highlighted as a fundamental principle for success.

Rewarding Quality Content:

Google's emphasis on content quality remains consistent. The search giant's

ranking systems prioritize original, reliable content exhibiting expertise, experience, authoritativeness, and trustworthiness (E-E-A-T). Whether the content is AI-generated or human-crafted, the focus is on rewarding high-quality material that aligns with user needs.

Automation's Role in Content Creation:

While Google maintains a strict stance against the use of automation, including AI, for manipulating search rankings, it acknowledges the positive role of automation in generating helpful content. Google's perspective is that AI can be a tool to elevate expression and creativity, empowering content

creators to provide valuable information such as sports scores, weather forecasts, and transcripts.

Guidelines for Content Creators:

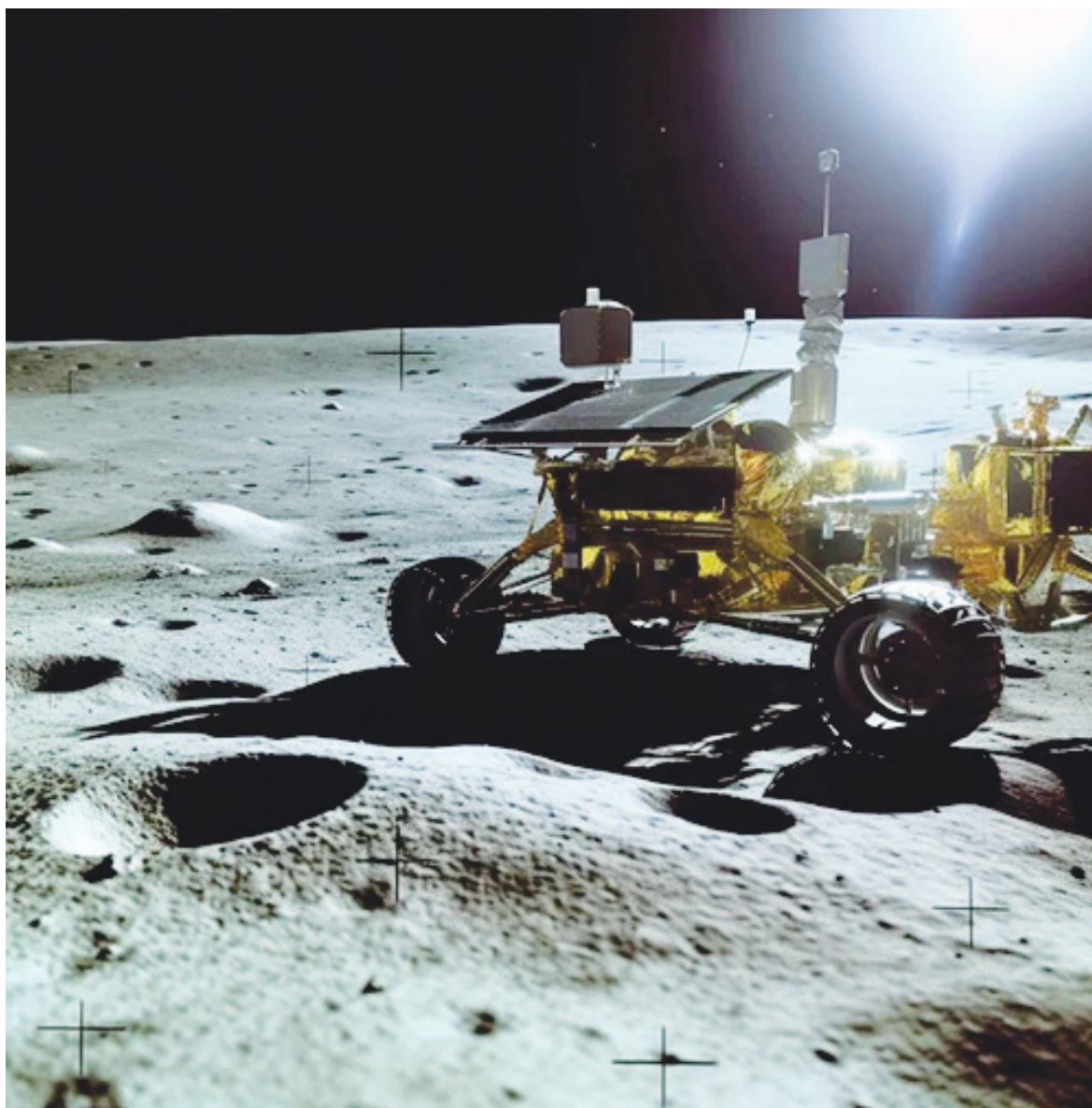
The unified message for content creators is to adhere to Google's guidelines for content creation and optimization. It is important to produce original, high-quality, people-centric content that aligns with E-E-A-T principles. This involves optimizing for relevant keywords, maintaining a clear site structure, and focusing on overall content quality.

Conclusion:

In the dynamic realm of SEO, the relationship between Google and AI-generated content is marked by a commitment to quality, relevance, and user satisfaction. Content creators, whether human or AI, are urged to prioritize a user-centric approach and stay informed about Google's evolving guidelines. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, the synergy between content quality and AI's capabilities will play a pivotal role in shaping successful SEO strategies.

You can visit Cleuz Blog to learn more about digital and technology information and updates.

International Astronomical Union approves Chandrayaan-3 landing site name 'Shiva Shakti'



The International Point.

Astronomical Union (IAU) has approved the Chandrayaan-3 landing site name 'Shiva Shakti'.

The approval came on March 19 after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement following the success of the mission on August 26, 2023.

"IAU working group for Planetary System Nomenclature has approved the name station 'Shiv Shakti' for the landing site of Chandrayaan-3's Vikram lander," the Gazetteer of Planetary Nomenclature, which provides detailed information about planetary names by IAU said. The announcement defined the origin of the name as, a "compound word from Indian mythology that depicts masculine (Shiva) and feminine (Shakti) duality of nature; PM Modi has said that the Landing site of Chandrayaan-3's Vikram Lander. On August 28, 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced at ISRO that the landing point of the Chandrayaan-3 Mission would be known as "Shiv Shakti

While the Chandrayaan-2 landing failure spot will be called "Tiranga point", the day of the touchdown of the Vikram Lander on the Moon (August 23) will be celebrated as "National Space Day" in the country, PM Modi had stated.

Prime Minister Modi made the announcements while addressing the gathering of scientists at the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) at the ISRO Command Centre. "India has decided to name the touchdown point where Vikram Lander made a soft landing on the Moon as "Shiv Shakti Point". The word "Shiv" stands for the welfare of humanity. "Shakti" stands for the required strength to get going to achieve the welfare of humanity," PM Modi said.

PM Modi has said that the Moon's Shiv Shakti point will be a symbol of unity from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari. "The Shiv Shakti Point will inspire future generations in the direction of the use of science for the welfare of humanity," PM Modi had underlined.

Move over Beijing, Mumbai is now Asia's billionaire capital

This represents a major milestone for India, positioning Mumbai at the forefront of wealth creation in Asia.

Mumbai has overtaken Beijing to claim the title of the Asian capital, with the highest number of billionaires for the first time, as per the latest Hurun Research Institute's global rich list.

This represents a major milestone for India, positioning Mumbai at the forefront of wealth creation in Asia.

New York leads the global rich list for cities with 119 billionaires, followed closely by London with 97. Mumbai, India's financial hub, has surged ahead with 92 billionaires, surpassing both Beijing (91) and Shanghai (87) in the Asian rankings, according to the latest Hurun rich list.

Globally, there are now 3,279 billionaires, representing a 5% increase from the previous year. Despite China still leading the country ranking with 814 billionaires, there has been a notable decline, with 155 billionaires lost compared to the previous year. The United States follows closely behind with 800 billionaires, while India secures



the third position with 271 billionaires.

"China had a challenging year," noted the research firm. "Wealth creation in China has undergone significant changes in recent years, with declines observed in billionaires' wealth from real estate and renewables."

Zhong Shanshan, founder and chairman of Nongfu Spring,

remains China's richest individual, while Colin Huang, founder of Pinduoduo, climbed to second place, surpassing Tencent CEO Ma Huateng. In the United States, artificial intelligence played a pivotal role in driving the increase in ultra-wealthy individuals. "Billionaires behind companies such as Microsoft, Google, Amazon,

Oracle, and Meta have seen substantial wealth surges as investors bet on the value generated by AI," the report highlighted.

According to Bloomberg's Billionaires index, Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, and Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla, hold the top two spots in the US with net worths of \$201 billion and \$190

billion, respectively.

Music icon Taylor Swift made her debut on Hurun Research's list with a net worth of \$1.2 billion, attributed largely to her successful Eras Tour. "Over half her fortune stems from royalties and touring, notably from her concert film and music catalogue's value," the report stated.

Meanwhile, India saw the second-largest number of new additions to its ultra-rich list, with 84 new members. The country's economy has emerged as the world's fastest-growing, with GDP growing by 8.4% in the October-December period.

Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani retains his position as Asia's wealthiest individual and the eleventh richest globally, with a net worth of \$110 billion. Meanwhile, Gautam Adani, founder of the Adani Group, briefly overtook Ambani in January but now ranks three spots behind with a net worth of \$97.9 billion, according to Bloomberg data.

Rupee hits record low as demand for US dollar gains momentum



The rupee plunged to an all-time low on Wednesday, driven by robust demand for the US dollar from importers and domestic oil companies.

Traders quoted in a Reuters report noted that the Reserve Bank of India likely intervened to stem further declines in the local currency, which helped limit its losses.

During the trading session, the rupee dropped to an intra-day low

of 83.45, marking its weakest level ever recorded. By the end of the session, it was quoted at 83.3750 against the US dollar, registering a 0.1% decline for the day.

A foreign exchange trader at a private bank told Reuters that aggressive buying from local oil companies and importers exerted downward pressure on the rupee during the final minutes of the trading session.

Elon Musk thought that OpenAI would fail: Sam Altman

OpenAI's CEO Sam Altman has said that Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk thought that the ChatGPT-maker company would fail and "he chose to part ways". In an interview with podcaster Lex Fridman, Altman said that "Musk thought OpenAI was going to fail. He wanted total control to turn it around. We wanted to keep going in the direction that now has become OpenAI. He also wanted Tesla to be able to build an AGI effort".

"At various times, he wanted to make OpenAI into a for-profit company that he could have control of or have it merge with Tesla. We didn't want to do that, and he decided to leave, which is fine," he added.

Moreover, the CEO suggested that the company is still committed to its original cause as it is putting powerful



technology in the hands of people for free, as a public good.

"We don't run ads on our free version. We don't monetise it in other ways. We just say it's part of our mission. We want to put increasingly powerful tools in the hands of people for free and get them to use them," Altman said. Recently, Musk sued OpenAI

and Altman, alleging they breached their original contractual agreements around AI. OpenAI then hit back at Musk's lawsuit, saying as the company discussed a for-profit structure in order to further the mission, "Musk wanted us to merge with Tesla or he wanted full control".

What is Down Syndrome? The genetic condition that affects children

Children affected by the condition typically are slower to speak than others and usually have an IQ in the mildly to moderately low range.

Down Syndrome is one of the most common genetic disorders that affects children born with an extra chromosome or an extra piece of chromosome. Approximately, 1 in 800 children are born with this condition annually in India.

Children affected by the condition are typically slower to speak than others and usually have an IQ (a measure of intelligence) in the mildly to moderately low range.

Usually, people are born with 46 chromosomes, but those having Down syndrome have an additional copy of chromosome 21, also known as Trisomy. "The extra copy of this chromosome health problems in individuals ranging from physical, developmental and cognitive issues. Testing for Down syndrome can help identify this disorder in unborn babies," said Dr Archana Dhawan Bajaj, Gynaecologist, Obstetrician and



IVF Expert, Nuture IVF Clinic, New Delhi.

Dr Aakaar Kapoor, CEO and Lead Medical Advisor, City X Ray & Scan Clinic, said that children with Down syndrome may experience difficulties with their mental and physical development as a result of this additional copy, which alters how their body and brain grow. "Each person experiences the condition differently. In some, it

might show up as mild to severe learning difficulties, while others may have severe health problems like heart problems and gastrointestinal ailments. Additionally, children affected with the condition typically are slower to speak than other kids and usually have an IQ (a measure of intelligence) in the mildly-to-moderately low range," Dr Aakaar Kapoor told IndiaToday.In.

The condition can be detected before birth through prenatal testing. Screening tests to assess the likelihood of Down Syndrome can be performed in the first and second trimester of pregnancy.

After birth, the syndrome may be diagnosed by experts through physical examination.

However, a blood examination can also confirm the diagnosis. The earlier the diagnosis is made, the better it is, as proper medical and developmental support can be given to the child and the family.

"An ultrasound and blood test in the first trimester can be used to screen for Down syndrome as early as 11 to 14 weeks of pregnancy. A blood test known as the multiple marker serum screening test can also be used for screening between 15 and 20 weeks. The

sequential screen, which combines first and second-trimester screening tests, is a choice made by some women," said Dr Archana Dhawan Bajaj. A mother's age, blood test results, and foetal ultrasound measurements are all taken into account by each of these tests. Dr Bajaj said, "These tests are useful, but they only provide detection rates of 80–90% for cases of Down Syndrome. They cannot identify every case." World Down Syndrome Day is celebrated every year on March 21 to raise awareness about this condition and to reduce the societal stigma attached to it.

"Early detection and improved healthcare have contributed to better understanding and support for those affected with Down syndrome in India," concluded Dr Kapoor.

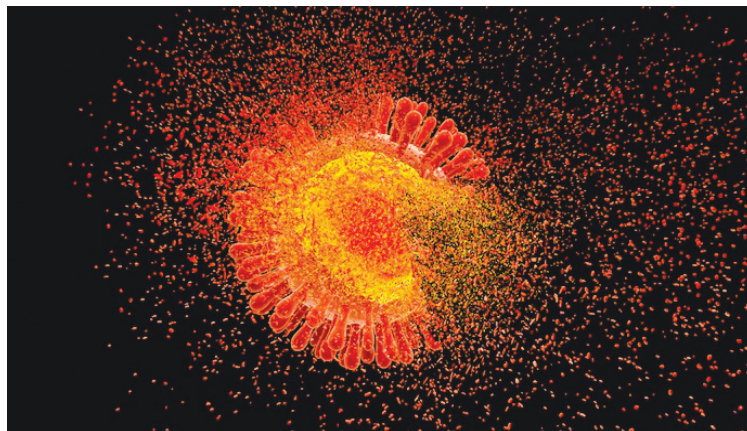
Scientists can edit HIV from cells, hinting at cure: Report

Scientists can cut HIV out of cells using the award-winning technology called CRISPR.

Scientists can eliminate HIV infection from cells using the powerful CRISPR technology (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats), BBC reported. This gene-editing technology, which won the Nobel Prize in 2020, is used as genetic scissors at the molecular level (in the cell), cutting DNA at specific places to remove bits that are bad or inactivated.

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. If it is not treated, it can lead to AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). There is currently no effective cure for HIV/AIDS. The current medicines can stop the virus from attacking but can't eliminate it.

A team from the University of Amsterdam presented their early findings at a medical conference this week. They said that their work is at its preliminary stages and that there won't be a cure for HIV any time soon, BBC reported. Reacting to the study, Dr



James Dixon, stem-cell and gene-therapy technologies associate professor at the University of Nottingham, said that much more research is still needed. "Using CRISPR

technology to snip out or deactivate the HIV genome is a well-discussed but promising strategy. However, the delivery of these systems remains a significant issue and much more work will be needed to demonstrate results in these cell assays can happen in an entire body for a future therapy," Dr James Dixon told Science Media Centre. Virus expert Dr Jonathan Stoye said that it could be challenging to remove HIV from the body, which is present in many cells.

"The challenge of removing HIV genomes from all the cells that make up the long-lived viral reservoirs in such people is extremely challenging. In addition, off-target effects of the treatment, with possible long-term side effects, remain a concern. It therefore seems likely that many years will elapse before any such CRISPR-based therapy becomes routine even assuming that it can be shown to be effective," Dr Stoye also told Science Media Centre.

High blood pressure, indigestion: How stress impacts your physical health

In the digital age, stress has become a common factor for everyone. While it pertains to mental exhaustion, chronic stress can translate into physical effects.

Prolonged stress triggers responses in the body, including increased heart rate, tense muscles, and shallow breathing. It could also weaken the immune system, raise blood pressure, and lead to headaches, digestive issues, and sleep disturbances.

Dr Danish Ahmed, psychiatrist at Max Super Speciality Hospital, said that while stress is part of our lives, it can also be challenging to improve our performance. "Some stress helps with performance and resilience. This part of stress is called 'eustress.' The good kind of stress," Dr Danish Ahmed told IndiaToday.In. But when it has a negative impact on our performance in terms of physical and emotional health, it is called

"distress." Often more than the situation, it is the way we process it in our minds and handle it that makes a significant difference, added Dr Ahmed. The body and mind are interlinked. Stress in the mind can affect the body negatively. It could lead to symptoms such as racing heartbeat, cold, clammy extremities and irritable bowels, peculiar cough or burps, problems with swallowing, breathlessness, blood pressure and blood sugar fluctuations, and headaches.

The Bloodstained Chronicles of Balochistan: A Legacy of Struggle and Resilience



By: Arun Anand

Balochistan is on fire. Three major attacks have happened since the beginning of this year on Pakistan-China installations in Balochistan. In the latest attack, which took place on the night of March 25 this year, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) fighters reportedly breached the security perimeter of PNS Siddique, Pakistan's second-largest naval air station at Turbat. The BLA has claimed to have killed 12 Pakistani security personnel. The official version of the Pakistan Army said one security personnel was killed while four BLA fighters were neutralised. Earlier, a massive attack happened at Gwadar Port on March 20 and at Mach town on January 29.

The last two attacks indicate a pattern that BLA is now targeting officials and assets from both Pakistan and China. They see them as 'partners in crime' when it comes to the loot and plunder of resources of Balochistan through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). These attacks should be seen as a clear rejection of the CPEC by the Baloch population. WHY BLACK DAY ON MARCH 27?

After India was partitioned and Pakistan came into existence, the region experienced a short span of sovereignty of 277 days during which Pakistani authorities resorted to deceit, manipulation, and treachery. Primarily known as the state of Kalat and having the status of a sovereign state during British rule, it aspired for independence. However, this yearning for self-rule was met with staunch opposition and duplicity from Pakistan.

The Khan of Kalat, seeking legal guidance from Muhammad Ali Jinnah, inadvertently laid the groundwork for his own downfall.

Initially bolstered by Jinnah in his pursuit of independence, the Khan of Kalat soon found himself betrayed as Pakistan manoeuvred to assert dominance over Balochistan. Despite assurances of respecting Baloch sovereignty, Pakistan, with British backing, schemed to undermine Kalat's independence. As pressure mounted, the Khan of Kalat found himself isolated, encountering dissent from within his own ranks and diplomatic coercion from Pakistan. Refusing to capitulate to Pakistani demands for amalgamation, the Khan endeavoured to garner support from Baloch leaders and fortify his military stance. But these endeavours proved futile as Pakistan, bolstered by British interests, orchestrated a concerted effort to dismantle Kalat's autonomy. The subsequent proclamation of the separation of pivotal territories from Kalat further weakened the latter's position, rendering it isolated and susceptible to Pakistani coercion. Pakistan military invaded the state of Kalat on March 27, 1948, and illegally annexed it after a bloodbath. The bloodstained chronicles of Balochistan with Pakistan stand testament to the enduring struggle for autonomy and the unyielding pursuit of freedom amidst adversity.

MULTIPLE INSURGENCIES

The coercive annexation of Kalat into Pakistan ignited deep-seated grievances and dissent among the Baloch populace. Numerous Baloch nationalists perceived this annexation as an affront to their autonomy and an attack on their cultural heritage. They rallied behind Prince Abdul Karim, the Khan of Kalat's brother in 1948, yet their insurgency was swiftly suppressed by the Pakistani military, resulting in Prince Karim's incarceration.

Despite subsequent uprisings in 1958, 1962, and the early 1970s, the Pakistani state succeeded in quelling the resistance. In 2005, the Baloch movement experienced a resurgence when Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, a former Pakistani defence minister and governor of Balochistan, took up arms against the state. Bugti's demands, including greater control over Balochistan's natural resources, thrust him into direct confrontation with the formidable Pakistani Army. Nevertheless, Bugti met his demise the following year, under suspicious circumstances and the needle of doubt pointed towards General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's then-military ruler. In retribution, a rocket assault targeted Musharraf shortly after Bugti's demise. Once a proud bastion of independence, Balochistan now languishes as Pakistan's most forsaken and impoverished province, despite its substantial contributions to the nation's economy by virtue of its abundant mineral wealth.

COERCION OF THE BALOCH POPULACE

The Baloch populace has been trying to raise its voice, because of which they are increasingly bearing the brunt of the state's actions. The Baloch populace residing within the territorial confines of Pakistan is being subjected to mass violations of human rights, including extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, and instances of torture, carried out by state security apparatus in coordination with affiliated entities.

According to findings disclosed by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), spanning the period from 2003 to 2019, no fewer than 7,000 individuals

in Balochistan were either killed or abducted by the government authorities. A significant proportion of them were political and social activists, students, and intellectuals. In a similar indictment of the Pakistani authorities, the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) contended that since the inception of the new millennium in 2001, a cohort approximating 8,000 Baloch individuals has encountered enforced disappearance, with a substantial number presumed to have succumbed to fatal outcomes. Records furnished by Amnesty International for the temporal span encompassing 2010 to 2016 attest to the culpability of state security forces in the deaths of over 1,000 Baloch individuals, while more than 600 individuals remain unaccounted for. Additionally, the same report shares in detail the rampant torture of Baloch detainees, resulting in a large number of them succumbing to their injuries. Baloch activist Munir Mengal delivered an impassioned discourse before the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on March 19, 2023, wherein he unveiled the profundity of injustices perpetrated against the Baloch populace, citing a disconcerting report disseminated by a non-governmental organisation. This dossier meticulously chronicled 787 instances, inclusive of 101 women and 63 children below the age of 13, who were subjected to torture, ruthless coercion and control. Remarkably, the unearthing of 31 disfigured cadavers belonging to disappeared individuals serves as a poignant testament to the gravity of these transgressions. Regrettably, a mere 96 individuals managed to secure their release, leaving a plethora of others to endure unfathomable adversities.

Unable to harness the region's potential, Pakistan has turned to its ally China to exploit Balochistan's resources. However, this alliance has exacerbated tensions, culminating in assaults by Baloch militants against Chinese nationals in Gwadar, the pivotal port city crucial to the CPEC. The integration of Gwadar into CPEC has instilled fears among the Balochs of demographic upheavals and marginalisation within their own province. Despite efforts to portray figures like Anwarul Haq Kakar, a Pashtun leader, as representatives of Balochistan, there is growing discontent in this region. This discontent is getting reflected through armed resistance of the Baloch groups resulting in heavy casualties for the Pakistani establishment. Unfortunately, the absence of democratic institutions in this region and Pakistan as a whole doesn't leave much scope for a peaceful resolution of the Baloch problem.

Inside the Historic Suit That the Gun Industry and Republicans Are on the Verge of Killing

by Vernal Coleman

Twenty-five years ago, Scott King, then mayor of Gary, Indiana, spoke solemnly as he described a new strategy the city was taking to deal with the flow of illegally purchased guns fueling violent crime there. Undercover Gary police officers had fanned out across the area for Operation Hollowpoint, successfully purchasing guns and ammunition at federally licensed firearm retailers despite representing themselves as suspicious buyers. King presented surveillance footage in an 18-minute video produced by the city. Inside one pawn shop, a bespectacled clerk and two undercover police officers are shown discussing a 9 mm pistol. After the male officer admitted he did not have the permit required to buy the gun, the female officer accompanying him told the clerk she did. The clerk then suggested she buy the gun on her partner's behalf in violation of federal gun restrictions.

"Might as well put it in your name then so I don't have to make a call," the clerk responded. "The feds are constantly screwing with people."

The footage, which documented four suspicious purchases at different retailers selling guns, showed "how easy juveniles, felons and other prohibited purchasers can acquire guns from legitimate gun dealers through the use of a straw purchaser," King said in the video.

The stings formed the basis of the city's historic lawsuit seeking to hold local gun retailers and major gun manufacturers, such as Smith & Wesson, Glock and others, responsible for illegal sales like those uncovered in the investigation. As part of the suit, the city sought monetary damages and changes in industry practices.

Relentless legislative and legal efforts across the country have eliminated a flurry of lawsuits initiated by cities against the



industry two decades ago. A bill approved by the Indiana legislature and signed into law this month by Gov. Eric Holcomb may be the final blow to Gary's suit, the last one standing from that original group of cases.

But the problem of illicit gun sales outlined by King and detailed in that grainy footage remains and continues to contribute to violence in northwest Indiana, nearby Chicago and beyond. Over the years, Gary's lawyers have sought to keep the suit going by arguing that negligence plagues the firearms industry, not just in the city but across the region, creating an ongoing public nuisance. To emphasize that point in court filings, they've included long lists of federal indictments of gun traffickers and their ties to illegal purchases at northwest Indiana retailers.

Combing through the suit's voluminous records, ProPublica found and then analyzed over 100 separate criminal cases involving straw sales — transactions where suspects participated in schemes to buy guns from federally licensed retailers and resell them to people barred by law from purchasing guns themselves.

The federal gun cases represent a small but illustrative sampling of the nation's

illegal gun trade, whose contours are well known to law enforcement but shrouded in mystery to the public because of industry-backed laws that keep a tight lid on data involving illicit gun sales.

Some of the cases examined by ProPublica involve just one transaction for a single firearm. Others are part of elaborate and organized schemes, where prolific traffickers use others with clean records to purchase multiple guns from one retailer, then head to the next gun shop and repeat the process over and over again. Most can be tied back to at least one northwest Indiana gun retailer. One of the cases involves three guns purchased in 2020 that ended up in the hands of a wanted fugitive. He later turned one of those pistols on two police officers in Wisconsin, seriously injuring both. "I knew that at some point I may die that night," one officer later testified.

But just as those examples showcase the scope of the straw sale problem in the United States, the vigorous effort by the firearms industry to quash the suit shows its commitment to the push back against stepped-up regulation and legal threats.

The defendants have countered Gary's claims at every turn, arguing that manufacturers have no part in the illegal

gun trade and denying responsibility for criminal acts committed by buyers. In a 2000 joint response to the city's allegations, attorneys for the defendants wrote that after manufacturers sell firearms to licensed retailers, they have no control over "the subsequent negligent or unlawful transfer, possession, 'availability' or use of firearms."

In 2021, after years of legal wrangling, the Gary suit reached a crucial stage. The Lake County, Indiana, judge overseeing it ordered the sides to finalize agreements for turning over thousands of pages of internal records as part of a legal process known as discovery.

Gary's attorneys have for years sought those documents as they try to prove that manufacturers are aware of the straw sales occurring at the Indiana retailers they supply. But the discovery process might never be completed, now that the Indiana legislature has passed a bill making the Gary lawsuit and any like it illegal. The intent of legislators was clear: The law was made retroactive to Aug. 27, 1999 — three days before Gary filed its lawsuit. The legislative maneuver, and explanations for it, have frustrated the current mayor of Gary, Eddie Melton. Some proponents of the bill suggested that for as long as the lawsuit was allowed to continue, the firearms industry would pass over Indiana to do business in other states.

"I've looked at that as a slap in the face in terms of the law, the lives that have been lost and the reason that the city has been fighting this fight for so long," he said in an interview. "We just want that fair day in court." In February, Melton arrived at the state Capitol with the political fight over the gun industry bill in full swing. The legislation targeted the Gary lawsuit directly by restricting the power to bring such action to the Indiana attorney general.

INTERNATIONAL CRICKET COUNCIL MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP COMING TO NASSAU COUNTY, NEW YORK

A procession for a trophy took place in Nassau County on Tuesday to celebrate the progress of construction of a 34-thousand seat stadium, turning a field in Eisenhower Park into an international cricket stadium to host the World Cup in June.

"We will have fans from all over the world," Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman said. Eight matches will be held in New York over 12 days. Tuesday's trophy parade was led by Chris Gayle, two-time T20 World Cup champion, of Jamaica.

"It's good to be here in Nassau as well for the first time to actually see the stadium, actually what it's going to be

like," Gayle said.

The biggest match will be India versus Pakistan.

"A game that attracts a global audience of hundreds of millions and that had almost 2 million applications alone," Geoff Allardice, chief executive of the International Cricket Council, said.

Leaving little chance to get tickets for Nassau County residents like Joshua Jon of Albertson.

"I was not able to buy tickets because as soon as we went in, it was sold out," he said.

"We are working out now a plan to make some of those tickets available to the general public maybe through a lottery

system," Blakeman said.

Blakeman's joint press conference with the International Cricket Council was many times overpowered by angry protesters.

Nassau and Suffolk Building Trades Council representing plumbers, carpenters, sheet metal workers, and laborers says talks with the International Cricket Council fell through to work on the project.

"This is atrocious. Our men should be here," Joe Squicciarini of Plumbers Local 200 said.

"Those are our members that are on the out of work list so those are currently individuals that don't have a job, looking

over the fence at what's going on over here with guys from Canada and California and all over the place at the park that we grew up in," Vincent Alu of Laborers Local 66 said.

The International Cricket Council responded.

"We believe we're working well with everyone to make this a success for the county on all fronts and that includes with the laboring side," Brett Jones, CEO of T20 World Cup USA, said.

The ninth edition of the T20 World Cup takes place in June with 20 teams competing across 55 games across the United States and West Indies.

Trump got some good financial news this week. But there's a dark side

By Margaret Sullivan

Donald Trump has had an encouraging day or two on the money front.

On Monday, a New York appeals panel lowered – to a mere \$175m – the amount the former president needs to cough up as he challenges the huge judgment against him in his civil fraud case. It's not clear whether Trump can obtain such a bond – he has another week or so to try. He couldn't raise an earlier, much higher sum, but this seems much more likely. That means it's possible that he can avoid having liens put on his buildings (his "babies", as he called them). Welcome news in Trump World.

Then, on Tuesday, his media startup had a wildly successful stock market debut as a public company. Since Trump owns 60% of Trump Media & Technology (which owns Truth Social), his stake is now worth more than \$5bn, the Washington Post reported.

That development gave him a big status boost: Bloomberg put him, for the first time, on to its list of the 500 richest people. Still, there's a hitch; he can't sell his shares for six months. So the windfall doesn't help with his immediate challenges.

Meanwhile, Trump keeps singing the blues. He even indirectly compared his troubles to someone else with a large



following, praising as "beautiful" this message from a fan: "It's ironic that Christ walked through His greatest persecution the very week they are trying to steal your property from you."

I don't feel concerned for Trump who, after all, is responsible for his thorny situation, despite his claims of victimhood.

But I do worry about America's national security amid Trump's financial ups and downs, because they make way for influence-peddling and mischief. One reason is that major shareholders in Trump Media won't be forced to publicly and immediately disclose their stakes. That's potential trouble since we know

that Trump's businesses got millions from foreign governments and officials while he was president.

As Noah Bookbinder, who heads the watchdog group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, told the Post, it's been obvious for years that he's open to such influence.

"This seems like an opportunity that is tailor-made for that," Bookbinder said.

In other words, Trump is – as always – on the make. And his sheer heft of his legal and financial baggage makes that propensity much more dangerous. Trump's situation creates "an unprecedented opportunity to buy influence with a leading presidential candidate and a sitting president should he be re-elected", the non-profit organization wrote in an analysis last month. Without suggesting any malfeasance, I'll note one example of overlapping interests: a Republican mega-donor, the billionaire Jeff Yass, was the biggest institutional shareholder of the shell company that merged with Trump's social media company, according to the New York Times. Yass's firm is also a major investor in the parent company of TikTok; the House of Representatives just passed a bill that would force that Chinese parent company either to sell its popular video app or see it banned in the US.

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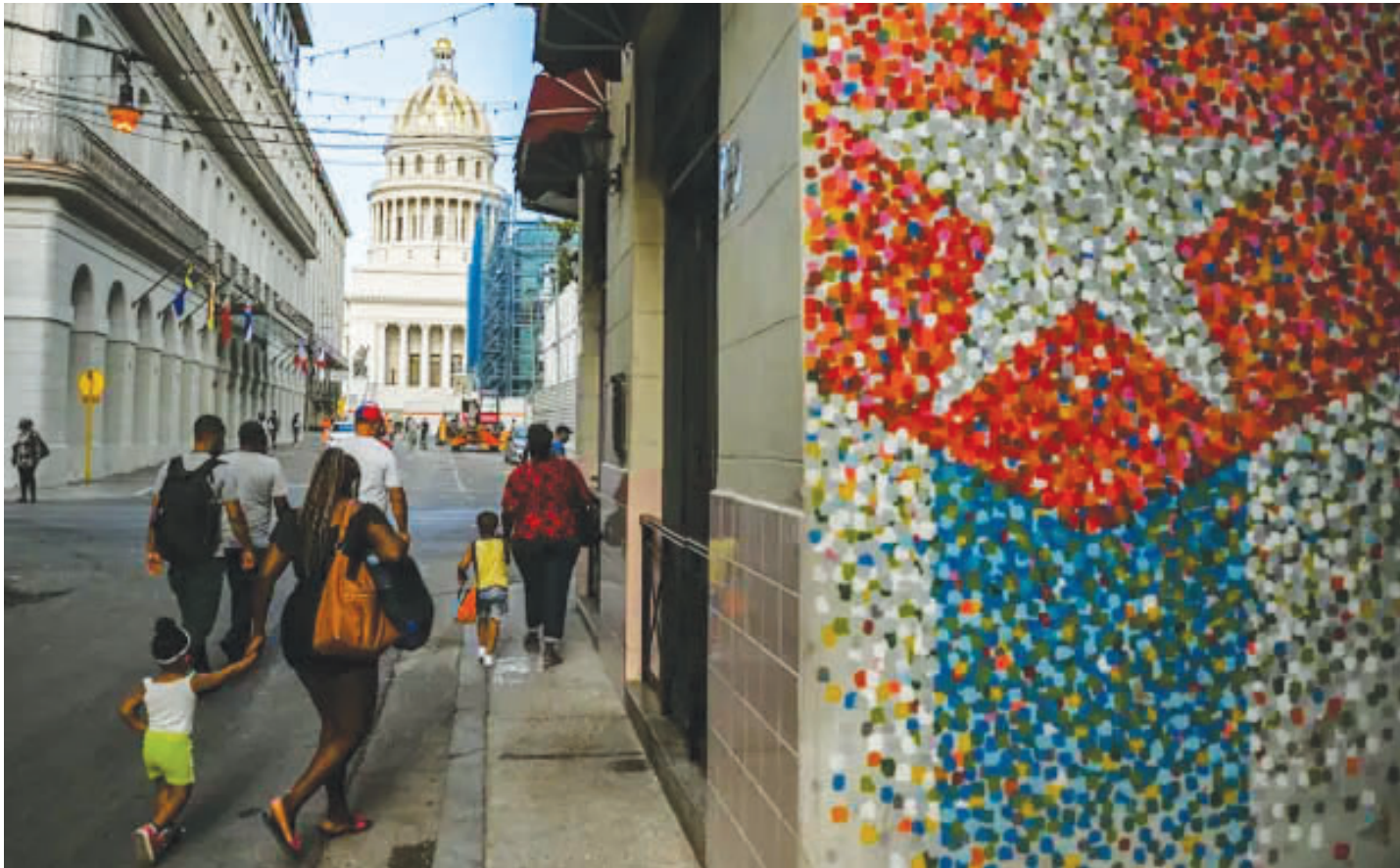
Sharks can be terrifying.
But what's really scary, and even
deadly, is distracted driving.



**Eyes forward.
Don't drive distracted.**

NHTSA **ad**
COUNCIL

Obama opened a door between Cuba and the US. Why is Biden closing it again?



By Bhaskar Sunkara

On 6 April 1960, the US diplomat Lester D Mallory wrote a memo advocating an embargo “denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government”. Sixty-four years later and the policy that Cubans call el bloqueo (the blockade) is still in force. It hasn’t achieved its stated aim of overturning the Cuban Revolution – but it has fueled years of desperation and justified anger. Barack Obama came to recognize this by his second term. During a historic 2016 visit to Havana, he said that he had come “to bury the last remnant of the cold war in the Americas” and “to extend the hand of friendship to the Cuban people”. By then his administration had already made tangible steps in that direction. US restrictions on travel and remittances were eased and the countries’ respective embassies were reopened in Havana and Washington DC. Crucially, Cuba was also removed from the state-sponsors-of-terrorism list and allowed to do business with US banks that are the linchpin of the world financial system. History’s longest standing sanctions regime was not completely dismantled, but the progress was immense, with benefits seen almost immediately by Cuban workers.

The surprise election of Donald Trump changed all of that. Influenced by Cuban-American politicians like Marco Rubio and a vocal lobby in Miami, he restored travel restrictions and banned dealings with state companies that comprise the bulk of Cuba’s economy. But Trump’s most provocative action came just days before he left office in January 2021, when he returned Cuba to the state-sponsors-of-

terrorism list. This despite the two countries cooperating extensively on counterterrorism and successful Cuban efforts to encourage Latin American guerrilla groups like Farc to end armed struggle.

On the campaign trail, Joe Biden promised a return to Obama’s approach, but he has delivered little change. Cuba remains isolated from important sources of trade and finance – even from non-US actors – as a result. These difficult conditions led to recent protests against food shortages and electricity outages in Santiago and much more widespread demonstrations throughout the island in July 2021.

Hawks in the US see a state in its weakest position in decades and believe that inflicting even more pressure on the Cuban people will lead to the end of Communist party rule. In reality, the embargo has only slowed down promising reform efforts and allowed the government to credibly blame economic conditions on an outside force.

Actions against Cuba started before Mallory’s memo, immediately following the 1959 victory of Fidel Castro’s revolutionary forces against the hated Fulgencio Batista dictatorship. Ironically, considering the longstanding US designation of Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism, actions supported by Washington ranged from small acts of industrial sabotage to attacks on civilians to a full-scale invasion in 1961.

Despite this pressure, the Castro government implemented important measures. A literacy campaign reached more than 700,000 people, mostly in neglected rural areas. These Cubans also benefited from sweeping land reform, rural electrification and the nationwide establishment of free, high-quality healthcare and education. A one-party state was

established, but there was widespread support for and participation in these efforts.

Abroad, the work of Cuban doctors and technical specialists continues to be praised across the developing world. Medical brigades have been sent to over 100 countries since the revolution, including after the 2010 Haitian earthquake and the 2014 west African Ebola outbreak. In the last two decades, another effort has cured 3 million patients in developing countries of visual impairments.

The role of Cuban military forces was also instrumental in the defeat of apartheid. At the cost of thousands dead and wounded, Cuba and their Angolan allies beat back the South African army in an effort that Nelson Mandela said “destroyed the myth of the invincibility of the white oppressor” and “served as an inspiration to the struggling people of South Africa”.

Yet the economy underwriting these efforts was built on a shaky foundation. To counteract the impact of US embargo, Cuba became dependent on Soviet bloc support. Comecon countries provided subsidized oil, food and machine parts. They also offered a market for sugar, nickel and other exports at above-market rates. In 1989, 13m tons of fuel were imported from the Soviet Union alone, which also supplied Cuba with 63% of its food imports and 80% of its imported machinery. Meanwhile, most of Cuba’s sugar, citrus and nickel exports were sold to the USSR. Eastern bloc support managed to mask some of the weaknesses in Cuba’s state-run economy, but the embargo itself predetermined the over-reliance on subsidies that Washington directly pressured Soviet premier Mikhail

Gorbachev to wind up. After the final collapse of European state socialism, the economic situation in Cuba went from strained to catastrophic. With popular discontent mounting in the early 1990s, Castro declared “a special period in time of peace”. Investment projects were put on hold; electricity consumption was slashed, along with food and clothing rations. Key factories were forced to shutter for absence of imported inputs. A lack of fertilizers and spare parts for tractors led to a freefall in agriculture. Cuban GDP dropped 40% in the early 1990s alone. In Washington, the crisis was seen as an opportunity to score a final cold war victory. The rightwing Heritage Foundation called Castro not just “an anachronism, but a dangerous one” and pressed for a heightening of the embargo to finally produce “its intended result of destabilizing the island’s communist government”. The Clinton administration followed their script in lockstep. A tightening economic embargo was headlined by the 1996 Helms-Burton Act, which expanded the scope of prohibited transactions and increased sanctions on violators, including foreign companies.

For America’s ideologues, questions of property rights were always foregrounded. Helms-Burton allowed US citizens whose wealth was redistributed by the Cuban revolution to sue individuals and companies that “trafficked” in those long-expropriated assets. Despite some Democratic opposition in Congress, Bill Clinton trumpeted the act as a measure that would “encourage the development of a market economy”.

Yet, Cuba adapted during the special period and survived. It opened itself to foreign investment, promoted tourism as a source of hard currency and decentralized some of its economy. The country also found new allies, with the election of a wave of leftwing governments in the region. Venezuela, in particular, provided vital oil and financial aid in return for Cuban medical and teaching assistance.

Reform efforts hastened after Raul Castro succeeded his brother in 2008, with a tripartite model of growth that married the traditional state economy with international investment and private entrepreneurship. Economic performance was mixed, particularly in agricultural and energy sectors, but more open debates about necessary changes and new experiments showed a government on the right track. Obama’s fleeting opening encouraged these positive tendencies. Trump’s U-turn from his predecessor couldn’t have come at a worse time for the Cuban people. Already suffering from the health effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on international tourism, the Cuban economy sharply contracted in 2020.

The Disney-DeSantis détente is here

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Disney were at each other's throats. Now Disney is dropping its lawsuit and the governor is putting up a technocrat to oversee the theme park's governance as tensions cool.



By KIMBERLY LEONARD

Gov. Ron DeSantis and the Walt Disney Company were at war when he was running for president. Now that he's back in Florida, both sides are trying to find a way to let it go. Disney on Wednesday reached a settlement in Florida and will no longer seek to retain its self-governance of Walt Disney World, a stunning turn in a battle with DeSantis that stretched more than two years. The settlement in state court — and DeSantis' appointment of a new, technocratic administrator to the governing board overseeing the land surrounding the famous theme park — starts to put to rest a bitter feud that began after Disney publicly opposed the Parental Rights in Education Act, a bill it derided as "Don't Say Gay" because it forbade instruction about sexual orientation and gender identity in public schools. In retaliation, DeSantis and the GOP-controlled Legislature took over Disney's governing district,

essentially taking away a decadeslong special arrangement that allowed Disney to self-govern. Details of the settlement filed in state court lawsuit were presented Wednesday during the meeting of the Central Florida Tourism Oversight District board, which is composed of DeSantis-appointed officials to oversee the area. The company considers "null and void" a maneuver it made in early 2023 to hold control over the land in perpetuity in a bid to circumvent the new board's authority. Disney also agreed to dismiss a lawsuit over public records. "We're proud of the landmark work the District has accomplished and look forward to what lies ahead," Charbel Barakat, the vice chair of the oversight district, said in a statement. "With this agreement, we're eager to work with Disney and other businesses within Central Florida to make our destination known for world-class attractions and

accountable governance." The board agreed to the settlement terms during Wednesday's meeting. DeSantis, who in the past and on the campaign trail had railed against Disney, said on Wednesday that all the state's actions have been "vindicated" so far and noted that Florida has been largely successful at defending its actions in court. And he said that the creation of a new board to oversee the area made sure that the decisions were made in the "best interest" of the state. But he also sounded more conciliatory that he has in the past, and said that the battles were pushed by Disney corporate officers in California and not Florida. He pointed out that the state board and Disney plan to negotiate a new development agreement for the district. DeSantis also urged Disney to consider expanding its footprint in central Florida to match a dramatic expansion recently announced by theme park rival Universal. "This is moving forward," DeSantis said. "I think that's what the

company wants to do."

Jeff Vahle, president of Walt Disney World Resort, said in a statement that the company was "pleased" to end the state court lawsuit. "This agreement opens a new chapter of constructive engagement with the new leadership of the district and serves the interests of all parties by enabling significant continued investment and the creation of thousands of direct and indirect jobs and economic opportunity in the state," he said. In November, Disney released a report touting how much it helped Florida's economy, as part of a broader effort to send the message to state lawmakers that it created business, tax revenue and jobs. It also has started dangling plans to grow, saying that if the environment was right in states like Florida, it would expand its parks. Executives have specifically said they're preparing to

"turbocharge" Disney parks and experiences across the globe, with \$60 billion over the next decade.

The news of the settlement came right around the time that the five-member board decided to install Stephanie Kopelousos, a new DeSantis-recommended administrator who is widely viewed by Tallahassee insiders as favorable to the entertainment giant.

POLITICO previously reported that the appointment was considered to be an olive branch by the governor because she is seen as qualified for the job.

Kopelousos used to be intergovernment and legislative affairs director for the governor. She has a long public service record on Capitol Hill, in Tallahassee and at the county level, and most recently worked for the DeSantis presidential campaign. She's also far from a knee-jerk, flaming-throwing Disney critic. Before the feud, Kopelousos wrote a carve-out in a 2021 bill for companies that own theme parks that otherwise aimed to crack down on Big Tech over allegations that they censored conservatives, per Seeking Rents. The move helped Disney, which owns Walt Disney World and a Disney+ streaming service.

During a board meeting on Wednesday, she pledged to "foster collaboration, drive innovation and most importantly ensure that we are the premier tourism destination in the country."

In January, a federal judge tossed out a separate lawsuit filed against DeSantis and the board, saying Disney lacked standing and jurisdiction in arguing that actions pushed by DeSantis were retaliatory and violated the First Amendment rights of the company. The company had appealed that decision, and the settlement agreement reached Wednesday said Disney will ask to delay that case "pending negotiations among other matters of a new development agreement between Disney and the District."