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From Ukraine to Gaza:

Are We on the Brink of World War III?



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Right To Information Act will become a dead letter if...: Supreme Court to Centre



(Sai Bureau) The Supreme Court on Monday directed the Centre and state governments to fill vacancies in Information Commissions across the country, saying that if the posts were not filled then the whole purpose of the Right to Information Act would be

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What are electoral bonds and what is the controversy?

A five-judge bench of the Supreme Court is hearing petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the electoral bonds scheme. But what are electoral bonds? Why were they introduced? And what is the controversy?



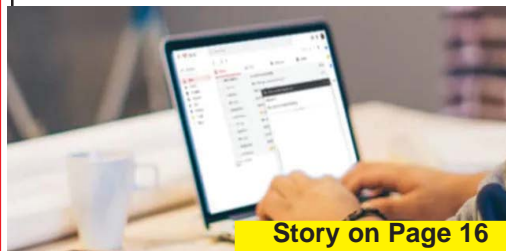
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3 Punjabi-origin NRIs enter Manitoba, Canada Assembly

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Google Will Delete Millions Of Gmail Accounts Next Month



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Hero MotoCorp Chairman Pawan Munjal's Delhi Properties Worth Over Rs 24Cr Attached by ED

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Indian-origin man charged with murder of Indian woman in UK



(Sai Bureau)-A 23-year-old Indian-origin man has been charged with the murder of an Indian woman who was found with stab wounds in south London. A 23-year-old Indian-origin man has been charged with the murder of an Indian woman who was found with stab wounds at home in Croydon in south London. Shail Sharma remains in custody after Mehak Sharma was pronounced dead after police and paramedics were called to the property on Sunday evening.

The Metropolitan Police said that the victim's next of kin have been informed and a special post-mortem will take place on Tuesday. "Mehak's next of kin have been informed and formal identification awaits," the Met


Police said. "A special post-mortem examination is scheduled to take place on Tuesday, October 31," the police said. According to local media reports, Mehak is believed to have arrived in the UK from India only recently. Her relationship, if any, with the murder suspect remains unknown. Shail Sharma was arrested at the scene at Ash Tree Way in Croydon on Sunday and is due to appear before Wimbledon Magistrates' Court on Tuesday. "Anyone with information that may assist the investigation, including anyone who saw or heard a disturbance on Sunday afternoon at the address in Ash Tree Way, is asked to call police," the Met Police said.


3 Punjabi-origin NRIs enter Manitoba, Canada Assembly



(Sai Bureau)-Three Punjabi-origin Canadians have been elected to the Manitoba provincial assembly. While Diljeet Brar won from Burrows, Mintu Sandhu (Sukhjinderpal) and Jasdeep Devgan were elected from The Maples and Mc Phillips, respectively. All three belong to the New Democratic Party (NDP), which won the majority and will form the government in the province. Brar and Sandhu are also in the race a cabinet post. A total of nine Punjabi-origin NRIs were in the fray. Six candidates — Navraz Brar from Burrows, Sumit Chawla from The Maples, Kirt Hayer from St. Boniface, Paramjit Shahi from Fort Richmond, Manjit Kaur Gill from

Waverley and Amarjit Singh from Southdale lost the poll. Born in Bhuchangari village of Muktsar, Brar graduated with a master's degree and worked as a broadcast journalist before moving to Canada in 2010. He also worked in Manitoba Agriculture Department till 2018. Sandhu moved to Canada with his parents at an age of 16 years in 1989. He owned a gas station and worked to modernise transportation system in Manitoba. Devgan worked as a director of government and community engagement at University of Manitoba. He is the youngest ever vice-president of the Sikh Society of Manitoba.






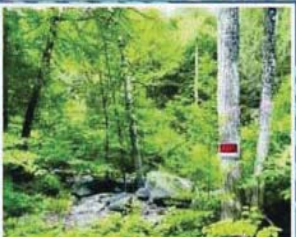
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'I Just Put It Through': Man Drives Knife Through Indian Student's Head at Public Gym in US' Indiana

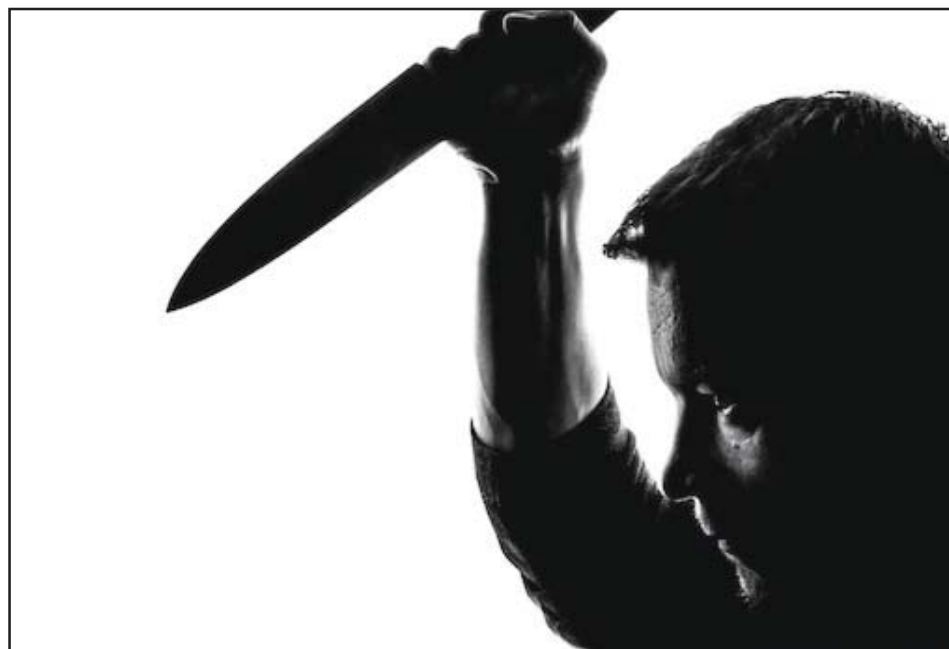
(Sai Bureau)-A 24-year-old man stabbed an Indian student studying in the US fearing that the latter would assassinate him at a public gym in the state of Indiana. Jordan Andrade stabbed Varun in the head at a Planet Fitness' massage room claiming that "someone" told him that 24-year-old Varun is "creepy" and "threatening" and feared that Varun would "assassinate him".

The incident occurred in the city of Valparaiso in Indiana.

Andrade was detained following the incident in the gym itself. Varun has been admitted to a Fort Wayne hospital due to the severity of his injury, and was reportedly given a zero to 5% chance of survival, according to a report by The Times of Northwest Indiana.

Valparaiso police said that other gym members called them to the Planet Fitness club at 1270 Strongbow Center Drive when they found Varun seated in a massage chair with a head injury, around 9am Sunday (local time).

Police said that they found a large pool of blood and a folding knife on the counter. The folding knife belonged to Andrade with



which he used to open boxes at a Menards store.

Police said that Andrade told them Varun never got out of his chair and did not instigate any contact. The police said that Andrade stated that the "only physical contact was (the man) attempting to push Andrade off him after Andrade started attacking".

When police asked him where he stabbed Varun, Andrade said: "Uh, I just put it through. I don't even want to say it. It was

in his head."

Andrade said he acted defensively against the other man and "took him out" using the knife. Other gym goers described Varun as someone who "generally kept to himself, was quiet and reserved".

However, Andrade felt Varun was "a little weird" and assumed him to be a threat when he entered the massage room of the gym. "Andrade then described (the man) as a threat to him so he, 'just reacted'," the police was quoted as saying by the The Times of Northwest Indiana.

The assailant described Varun as "little" and claims to be a former high school football player capable of bench pressing 117 kilos. The Porter Township resident remained behind bars at the Porter County Jail and will make an initial appearance on the charges Wednesday afternoon before Porter Superior Court Judge Jeffrey Clymer.

Indian-origin fraudster ordered to pay back stolen funds in UK



(Sai Bureau)-An Indian-origin fraudster who swindled thousands of pounds from his employer to pay back money he stole from a previous employer has been ordered to pay back GBP 78,000 by a UK court.

Mayur Gaglani, 48, from Penarth in Wales is believed to have stolen around GBP 250,000 from the first company, 'Wales Online' reported last week. He then got a new job at a small company selling electrical items in order to pay off the stolen money from the first company and used false invoices and the company's credit card for that purpose.

An investigation into Gaglani's financial affairs had revealed that he had spent over GBP 5,000 of the company's funds while on vacation. He was arrested and formally interviewed by police and is said to have gone on to make "full admissions" about his fraud. According to the court report, a "proceeds of crime" hearing at


Cardiff Crown Court on Friday heard that Gaglani benefited to the tune of GBP 78,033 as a result of the theft but had available assets worth GBP 375,000. It led Judge Rhys Rowlands to order him to pay the sum of GBP 78,033.

Prosecutor Ieuan Bennett told the court that the defendant created false invoices for work apparently charged to his employers.

"The invoices were then paid out via the company but in fact the company was not going to pay genuine suppliers but it was going to the defendant's bank account. This amount totalled a little over GBP 64,000," he said.

The court heard that Gaglani told the company's director, Matthew Porter, that he was in a civil dispute with his former employers. Porter loaned him money to help him pay off his debts, which it turned out he used to try and clear up his previous fraud.

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Urgent need for a new initiative to ensure universal energy access by 2030: Researchers



(News Agency)- A team of global researchers and practitioners on Monday proposed the creation of a new mission energy access programme to accelerate efforts to ensure universal energy access by 2030. In a paper titled 'Mission Energy Access for a just and sustainable future for all' published in the journal Nature Energy, the authors noted that despite efforts to enhance energy access, there were about 675 million people worldwide who had no access to electricity and about 2.3 billion people who had no

access to clean cooking facilities in 2021. Furthermore, in the absence of additional efforts and measures, as many as 660 million people (mostly in the least-developed countries and in sub-Saharan Africa) will remain without access to electricity, and 1.9 billion people will still be dependent on polluting fuels and technologies (mostly biomass used in traditional cookstoves) for cooking in 2030.

"A mission-mode approach to enhancing energy access is needed urgently, given the persistent gap between the

aspiration to ensure universal energy access by 2030 and the efforts to deliver on this goal," said professor Ambuj Sagar, School of Public Policy, IIT Delhi. By greatly enhancing the development of innovative and affordable solutions for enabling access to clean and modern energy and its productive uses and the acceleration of large-scale deployment of these solutions, "such a mission would help deliver a triple dividend of increasing energy access, enhancing social and economic benefits, and advancing climate goals", Sagar added.

The author team included Dr Ajay Mathur, International Solar Alliance, Gurugram; Dr Fatih Birol, International Energy Agency, Paris; Dr. Yacob Mulugetta, University College London, London; Dr. Damilola Ogunbiyi, Sustainable Energy for All, Vienna, Austria; Dr. Youba Sokona, University College London; and Achim Steiner, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Punjab Cabinet approves pre-GST arrears settlement scheme for traders

(News Agency)- In a Diwali gift to traders, the Punjab Cabinet led by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Monday gave approval for introducing the One Time Settlement (OTS) Scheme for settling pre-GST arrears, benefitting more than 60,000 traders. A decision to this effect was taken by the Council Of Ministers at its meeting here. A spokesperson for the Chief Minister's Office said the scheme has

been launched for recovery of outstanding dues for settlement of pre-GST arrears to enable reduction of compliance burden of legacy cases.

The OTS will be applicable from November 15 and will be valid till March 15, 2024, and taxpayers whose assessments have been framed till March 31, 2023, with amount of total demand (tax, penalty and interest up to March 31, 2023) up to Rs 1 crore shall be eligible to apply for settlement under this scheme.



The OTS would provide complete waiver in case of arrears up to Rs 1 lakh as on March 31 which would cover nearly 39,787 cases and a further waiver of 100 per cent interest, 100 per cent penalty and 50 per cent of the tax amount is being given in nearly 19,361 cases. On the pattern of neighbouring Haryana, the Cabinet also gave nod to start 'Mukh Mantri' Tirath Yatra Scheme for enabling the people of the state to visit various pilgrimage sites across the country free of cost from the upcoming Parkash Purab of Guru Nanak Dev on November 27.

The pilgrimage places include Sri

Hazur Sahib Nanded, Patna Sahib, Varanasi, Ayodhya mandir, Vrindavan, Sri Ajmer Sharif, Anandpur Sahib, Amritsar, Mata Vaishno Devi, Mata Jawalaji, among others.

As per the scheme, there will be two modes of travel. For long-distance destinations, the mode of travel will be train whereas for shorter distances the mode of travel will be by road.

The Cabinet also gave its consent to double ex-gratia grant of disabled soldiers both from military and paramilitary force with disability from 76 to 100 per cent to Rs 40 lakh, disabled soldiers with 51 to 75 per cent disability to Rs 20 lakh and disabled soldiers with 25 to 50 per cent disability to Rs 10 lakh. Soldiers with disability from 76 to 100 per cent were earlier getting Rs 20 lakh, disabled soldiers with 51 to 75 per cent were getting Rs 10 lakh and disabled soldiers with 25 to 50 per cent disability were earlier getting Rs 5 lakh as assistance.

Kejriwal to hold meeting with AAP MLAs over ED summon in liquor policy case

(News Agency)- Days after skipping the Enforcement Directorate (ED) summon in connection with the excise policy case, Delhi Chief Minister and AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal has called a meeting of his party MLAs. According to party leaders, the Aam Aadmi



Party (AAP) national convenor has called the meeting of his MLAs at the Delhi Secretariat later on Monday. The meeting comes days after the ED summoned Kejriwal for questioning in connection with the excise policy case, in which his party leaders, including former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, and the party's communication in-charge Vijay Nair, have

already been arrested. The meeting gains significance as the AAP had earlier raised concerns that the ED might arrest Kejriwal during his questioning on November 2, which the Chief Minister later skipped.

Instead, Kejriwal went for a three-day campaign tour to poll-bound Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. He had written to the ED claiming that the summon to him was illegal and politically motivated.

The ED is yet to issue a fresh summon to the Delhi Chief Minister in the case.

Last week, the Supreme Court had denied bail to Sisodia. A bench of

Justice Sanjiv Khanna and S.N.V. Bhatti delivered the judgment denying bail to Sisodia in the alleged liquor policy scam.

The apex court also directed that Sisodia's trial should be completed within six to eight months. The bench added that within three months, if the trial proceeds slowly, Sisodia can again file a bail application.

AAP makes contingency plans to run Delhi from Tihar if Kejriwal is arrested

(News Agency)- Whenever a case is registered or someone is arrested, it's always an AAP member. They started by arresting AAP MLAs, then ministers, and now an MP. BJP leaders are now openly threatening to send Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to jail. "All our MLAs conveyed a unanimous message to the Chief Minister. Even if the BJP tries to imprison our CM in Tihar Jail, he should not, under any circumstances, consider resigning. We must not allow BJP's conspiracies to succeed," she said. "The people of Delhi didn't vote for individual MLAs or parties, they voted for Arvind Kejriwal. We cannot betray the trust the people have placed in us. If necessary, we will seek court permission to conduct Cabinet meetings, manage official files, and interact with officers from within the confines of the jail," Atishi added. Her ministerial colleague Saurabh Bhardwaj weighed in on the case of former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia,



Kejriwal that he should maintain his role in the government even if the Central agency takes him into custody. Addressing the media, Power and Education Minister Atishi said that all the MLAs have expressed the sentiment of the people of Delhi. "Repetitively, we hear the same refrain from all quarters.

Whenever a case is registered or someone is arrested, it's always an AAP member. They started by arresting AAP MLAs, then ministers, and now an MP. BJP leaders are now openly threatening to send Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to jail. "All our MLAs conveyed a unanimous message to the Chief Minister. Even if the BJP tries to imprison our CM in Tihar Jail, he should not, under any circumstances, consider resigning. We must not allow BJP's conspiracies to succeed," she said. "The people of Delhi didn't vote for individual MLAs or parties, they voted for Arvind Kejriwal. We cannot betray the trust the people have placed in us. If necessary, we will seek court permission to conduct Cabinet meetings, manage official files, and interact with officers from within the confines of the jail," Atishi added. Her ministerial colleague Saurabh Bhardwaj weighed in on the case of former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia,

Bundle of lies, says K'taka CM on PM Modi's remarks on his tenure

(News Agency)- Taking objection to the statement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his tenure and attacks on him over corruption, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah dubbed them as a bundle of lies. Speaking to reporters, Siddaramaiah said that the statement is given only with the intention of making allegations. "All these are a bundle of lies," he claimed.

PM Modi had launched a scathing attack on the Congress government in Karnataka and charged that CM Siddaramaiah and Dy CM D.K. Shivakumar were looting Karnataka. "The BJP government has been accused of receiving 40 per cent commission. Our government is probing the matter. The Prime Minister should also talk about this. Various investigation agencies are under the Central government. Without evidence false charges should not be



made.

"The whole nation is bankrupt today. The Central government is adopting a stepmotherly attitude towards Karnataka. It is not releasing the drought relief funds. The Prime Minister had claimed that it is impossible to

implement the five guarantees. But our government has implemented all of them. I did not expect such statements from the Prime Minister. In his (PM Modi) political speeches criticizing states will not bring dignity to the PM," Siddaramaiah said. Replying to questions on Modi targeting him during the election campaign in Madhya Pradesh, Siddaramaiah stated that wherever he (Modi) went for campaigning the BJP had lost. "The leader of the opposition has not been named until now in Karnataka. This indicates the bankruptcy of the BJP."

When asked about BJP MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal's statement that he will be replaced soon, Siddaramaiah maintained that the high command would take a call on these matters. "He doesn't have the right to speak. The BJP is not able to elect a leader of the opposition," he stated.

PM Modi in no mood to heed Kharge's advice to keep civil servants, soldiers out of politics: Congress

(News Agency)- The Congress on Monday welcomed Election Commission's decision barring sending of senior government officers as 'rath prabharis' to poll-bound states

soldiers out of politics.

"The Congress party will pursue all options to put an end to this completely unacceptable and dangerous practice that degrades and threatens our democracy".

His remarks came days after the poll panel had said that the 'rath prabhari' of the Narendra Modi-led government cannot be implemented in poll-bound states like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Telangana, and Mizoram which will be go to polls from November 7 to November 30 and counting of votes scheduled on December 3. The poll panel said that it has been brought to the notice of the Commission that a letter has been circulated to the Ministries for nomination of senior officers as



but noted that it is clear now that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in no mood to heed Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge's advice that civil servants and soldiers be kept out of politics. It also said that it will pursue all options to put an end to this completely unacceptable and dangerous practice that degrades and threatens the country's democracy. In a post on X, Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said: "While it is welcome that the Election Commission has acted on the complaint

of Congress and forced the Modi government to backtrack on sending senior bureaucrats as 'Rath Prabharis' to poll-bound states, the larger issue of the blatant use of officers for what is essentially a programme to implement one-man's personal political propaganda remains.

"It is clear now that the PM is in no mood to heed to Kharge ji's letter to him on 22 October to keep civil servants and

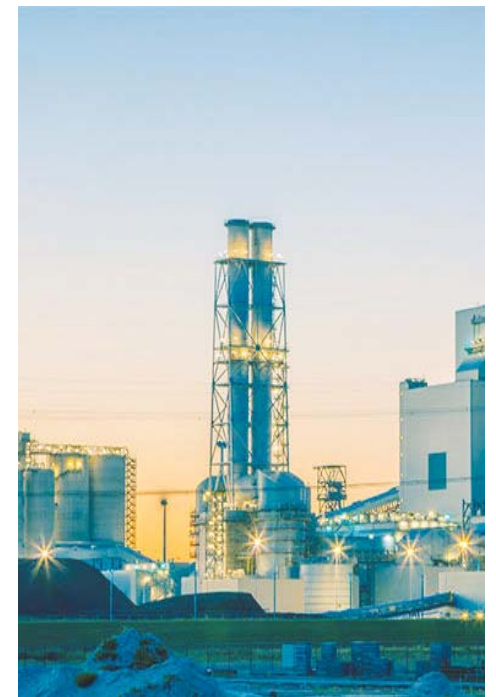
"District Rath Praharis" as special officers for the proposed 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra' starting from November 20.

In a letter to the Cabinet Secretary on October 26, the Commission said that it has announced the schedule for elections to the Assemblies of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Rajasthan and Telangana, and a bye-election in Nagaland on October 9.

"The provisions of the Model Code of Conduct for the guidance of political parties and candidates have come into force from the date of announcement tentatively till December 5, 2023. In view of the foregoing, Commission has directed that the aforesaid activities should not be taken in the constituencies where Model Code of Conduct is in force up till December 5, 2023," the EC had said.

AAP accuses Gujarat govt of undermining job opportunities in power sector

(News Agency)- The Gujarat unit of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Monday criticised the state government and its policies, saying the decision to



outsource operations of the power substation had led to a significant loss of potential employment opportunities. Gujarat unit AAP general secretary Sagar Rabari said "the government's decision to outsource operations of the entire 66kV substation infrastructure to private entities, in deals totaling Rs 753 crore, has led to a significant loss of potential employment, particularly affecting rural communities".

The AAP leader shed light on the predicament faced by local electrical engineers who had formed companies under government initiatives like Start Up India. He pointed out that "over 80 such companies were set up with the expectation of securing government contracts for substation projects. However, the government shifted the goalposts by imposing additional conditions after tenders were issued, mandating that bidders must have experience in managing at least two substations". Rabari argued that this retrospective condition unjustly disqualified 51 of the 80 companies, essentially sidelining the youth who had invested heavily with hopes pinned on these government projects. The exclusion from the lucrative tender process, he said, plunged many into financial despair and was perceived as a ploy to favor more significant, established players.

Drunk driver kills one, injures 3 pedestrians in South Delhi

(News Agency)- One woman was killed and three people were injured while crossing a road, after a man driving rashly under the influence of alcohol, hit them in South Delhi. A police officer said on Monday that the injured were identified as Harish (54), Seema (46), Rekha (46) while the deceased was identified as Neetu (45). On Monday morning the Greater Kailash-I police station received information about a mishap at Archana red light bus stop and found a damaged grey-coloured car at the accident site. "The driver of the car, identified as Vinay (23), was detained by the public and taken into custody by PCR staff. The accused driver was heavily intoxicated (with an alcohol test reading of 280 ml)," said the police officer. Investigation revealed that Vinay, a resident of Najafgarh, was travelling from Moolchand to Chirag Delhi. "He was driving the car recklessly and when he reached the Archana red light, the car struck four people who were crossing the road. The injured individuals were transported



to AIIMS Trauma Centre in a PCR van," said the officer. "Medical Legal Case (MLC) reports for the injured are being prepared at AIIMS Trauma Centre. Statements of the injured persons will be obtained once they are fit to give information," the officer said. The accused Vinay works as a private financier with his uncle Devender Sehrawat. "On Sunday night Vinay along with others celebrated the birthday of Devender Sehrawat at CR Park. In the morning Vinay along with his friend Rahul took the key of another friend's car and went to Moti Nagar to bring Chhole Bhatore.

'Odd-Even' vehicle scheme in Delhi from Nov 13 to 20, says Min Gopal Rai

(News Agency)- In view of the rising air pollution in Delhi-NCR, Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Monday said that the 'Odd-Even' vehicle system will be implemented for a week in the national Capital from November 13 to 20. Addressing a press conference here after a high-level meeting with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and several other senior officials, Rai said, "In view of air pollution, the 'Odd-Even' vehicle system will be applicable for one week from November 13 to 20." He said that there is a complete ban on firecrackers in Delhi. "Despite the ban on firecrackers, today we have directed the police to be

alert due to Diwali, World Cup match and then Chhath puja," he said.

Rai said, "We also appeal to the BJP governments in the BJP-ruled states of Uttar



Pradesh and Haryana to ban firecrackers to control the pollution in Delhi-NCR."

"During the meeting it was discussed that pollution may rise in the national Capital after Diwali. So a day after Diwali the 'Odd-Even' vehicle system will be

launched for a week," he said and after that a review will be done.

"The AQI has been dropping since October 30 due slow winds and on November 5 it was 454 and today the AQI is 436," claimed Rai. Rai also said that the ban on BS-III petrol vehicles and BS-IV diesel vehicles, as enforced in GRAP-4, will persist. "All trucks, except LNG, CNG, and electric trucks carrying essential commodities and serving essential services, are prohibited from entering Delhi. In GRAP-3, exemptions were granted for demolition work on flyovers, overbridges, and power transmission pipelines, but now, these activities are also banned," he said.

Indian man sentenced to life for stabbing wife to death in Florida

(News Agency)- An Indian man has been sentenced to life in the US state of Florida for fatally stabbing his 26-year-old wife 17 times and then driving over her body before fleeing from the scene in 2020, a media report said. Philip Mathew pleaded no contest to the first-degree murder of Merin Joy, who was planning an escape from an abusive relationship, the Sun Sentinel newspaper reported last week.



According to police, Mathew blocked Joy's car in with his vehicle at the parking lot of Broward Health Coral Springs

hospital, where she worked. He then slashed her body on the ground before

driving off, police added.

After the incident, one of Joy's colleagues said that Mathew drove over her "like she was a speed bump," and as they rushed to her aid, Joy could only cry to them over and over, saying "I have a baby," the news report said. Joy revealed the identity of her attacker before succumbing to her injuries, which eventually led to Mathew's arrest.

On November 3, Mathew also pleaded no contest to aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. He was sentenced to life in state

prison with no possibility of release, plus the maximum five years for the aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. The decision was made to waive the death penalty because of the certainty of the life sentence and because the defendant was giving up his right to appeal, said Paula McMahan, spokeswoman for the State Attorney's Office. "Joy's mother is "glad to know her daughter's killer would remain the rest of his years in jail and she's relieved to know the legal process is over," Joby Philip, Joy's cousin, told the Sentinel.

Mystery box challenge amps up the heat in 'MasterChef India' kitchen

Mumbai- The new episode of the cooking-based streaming show 'MasterChef India' will see Chef Prateek Sadhu, gracing the kitchen and bringing an intriguing twist to the competition. During the course of the episode, Prateek introduces the Top 10 home cooks to the 'Safe or Secret Mystery Box Challenge'. The challenge features two mystery boxes – one safe and clear, and the other secret and opaque. The Safe Mystery Box is for the

contestants to use a minimum of four ingredients and craft a dish within a strict 60-minute time frame. The Secret Mystery Box conceals its ingredients, posing a greater challenge with a cooking time extended to 75 minutes.

One of the standout moments of the challenge is the introduction of the habanero chilli, a spice notorious for its scorching heat. Contestants Nambi Jessica Marak, Prachi Agarkar and Rukhsaar Sayeed

choose the ingredient as a brave choice. However, it is Prachi Agarkar who truly sets the kitchen ablaze.

Chef Prateek Sadhu said: "I am completely impressed by the incredible performances in the Safe or Secret Mystery Box Challenge. The use of old ingredients as well as the innovative flavour combinations were remarkable. It takes an immense level of courage to meld these diverse flavours into a dish. I am impressed by home cooks'

willingness to take risks, ability to harmonise flavours and dedication to culinary craft."

He further mentioned: "Initially, I had some doubts about how they would execute their ideas and blend those flavours seamlessly. But upon tasting their final creations, I must say that these top ten contestants of MasterChef India have left me astounded." Prachi Agarkar, said: "Working with

habanero chilli was a challenge

but I wanted to push boundaries. The spice level was intense and I

knew I had to balance it perfectly to create a memorable dish. Seeing the judges' reaction made it all worthwhile. I am proud of what I accomplished in the kitchen through the Safe or Secret Mystery Box Challenge." 'MasterChef India' streams on Sony LIV.

The Curious Case Of US Presidential Election

A year from now, the US will have a new President but the nation's electoral challenge is getting curiously and curiously. An incumbent President, despite all his efforts, is unable to generate enthusiasm and a potential challenger is unable to get any relief from the courts. And the two main political parties seem rudderless. There are a number of ostensible challengers to President Joe Biden among the Democrats and in the Republican ranks. But no one has been to make a breakthrough of the kind that is usually expected at this stage in the election cycle. American democracy looks stale and tired precisely at a time when it should be leading the march in salvaging the credentials of the western democratic model.

This week's off-year election results gave the Democrats something to cheer about amid growing doubts pertaining to Joe Biden's winnability. Abortion emerged as a strong vote-catching issue as Republican leaning Ohio and strongly Republican Kentucky both gave victories to abortion rights advocates. This strong pushback against the overturning of Roe v. Wade by the Supreme Court last year has generated significant enthusiasm within the Democratic Party rank and file to bring their base out and develop coalitions with the moderates. The Democrats are getting mobilised around this issue, thereby even a state like Ohio which Trump had won by eight percentage points in 2020 is now seemingly in play for the Democrats.

These results will certainly bring the bounce back in the Democratic camp but they will do little to assuage the concerns around the candidacy of Joe Biden who is not doing well in opinion polls. His approval rating at 38% reached the lowest point in his presidency this month as concerns about growing inflation and cost of living continue to dominate airwaves. This, despite the fact that Biden has had an impressive legislative record so far with his \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package, infrastructure investments, support for computer chip plants and taxes on corporations and the high income group to help fund healthcare. Biden's handling of the economy continues to be the albatross around his administration's neck. And then there is the issue of his age which has hogged the limelight for quite a while now. Every time Biden makes a public appearance, his age and health concerns take the focus away from his accomplishments. Younger Democrats are also souring on Biden and are dragging down his approval ratings.

What should be even more concerning

to the Democrats is the recent poll suggesting that Trump is leading Biden in five of six key battleground states. Though the White House has rejected the polls and has urged caution in taking these polls at face value, the twin challenge of a weakening economy and multiple global crises is fuelling discontent against the incumbent. And these poll numbers have once again brought Donald Trump to the centre stage of the Republican Party. Those who once thought that Trump cannot defeat Biden in general elections are now changing their minds as they find Trump their best bet.

The entire galaxy of leaders in the Republican primary have made electability of Trump their main issue but now find that they cannot challenge Trump on this. Here's a once defeated US President who had to face two impeachment attempts during his time in office and since departing the White House has been engulfed in a plethora of legal cases. Yet today he is the best bet of the Republicans once again. Even as his court appearances have increased, his support among the Republicans has also been growing. The more he has been targeted by the Democrats, the more endearing he becomes to his base.

Trump has used his courtroom appearances to also burnish his brand by saying controversial things and taking on the judges and the opposing lawyers. He has framed his legal woes as part of a larger design against him - political vendetta to ensure that he doesn't return to politics. "All Democrats, all Trump haters, all cases that are not good," he said in the court while answering one of the questions. "Weaponisation, they call it." Still positioning himself as an anti-establishment candidate, he has leveraged his time in the court to his political advantage by crafting a political narrative that is lapped up by his supporters. He has not bothered to join the three Republican debates so far even as he continues to maintain a 44-point lead among Republicans from his nearest challenger, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis.

The US Presidential elections are still a year away and as these last few years have underlined, the "unknown unknowns" seem to be defining the political landscape more than ever before. With two conflicts raging and China breathing down the neck, strategic and economic challenges will define the trajectory of the Presidential elections. But it is the personalities of Biden and Trump that are going to play an equally important role.

China has a sweeping vision to reshape the world-and countries are listening

Xi Jinping has a plan for how the world should work, and one year into his norm-shattering third term as Chinese leader, he's escalating his push to challenge America's global leadership — and put his vision front and center.

That bid was in the spotlight like never before last month in Beijing, when Xi, flanked by Russian President Vladimir Putin, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres, and some two dozen top dignitaries from around the world, hailed China as the only country capable of navigating the challenges of the 21st century.

"Changes of the world, of our times, and of historical significance are unfolding like never before," Xi told his audience at the Belt and Road Forum. China, he said, would "make relentless efforts to achieve modernization for all countries" and work to build a "shared future for mankind."

Xi's vision — though cloaked in abstract language — encapsulates the Chinese Communist Party's emerging push to reshape an international system it sees as unfairly stacked in favor of the United States and its allies.

?Viewed as a rival by those countries as its grows increasingly assertive and authoritarian, Beijing has come to believe that now is the time to shift that system and the global balance of power to ensure China's rise — and reject efforts to counter it.

In recent months, Beijing has promoted its alternative model across hefty policy documents and new "global initiatives," as well as speeches, diplomatic meetings, forums and international gatherings large and small — as it aims to win support across the world.

For many observers, this campaign has raised concern that a world modeled on Beijing's rules is also one where features of its iron-fisted, autocratic rule — like heavy surveillance, censorship and political repression — could become globally accepted practices.

But China's push comes as American wars overseas, unstable foreign policy election-to-election, and deep political polarization have intensified questions about US global leadership. Meanwhile pressing issues like climate change, Russia's war in Ukraine and Israel's assault on Gaza have sharpened discussion over whether the West is taking the right approach to respond.

All this coincides with longstanding calls from countries across the developing world for an international system where they have more say.

Many of those countries have substantially enhanced their economic ties with Beijing during Xi's rule, including under a decade of his up to \$1 trillion global infrastructure building drive, which leaders gathered to celebrate last month in the Chinese capital. It remains to be seen how many would welcome a future that hews to China's worldview — but Xi's clear push to amplify his message amid a period of unrelenting tensions with the Washington elevates the stakes of the US-China rivalry.

And as the procession of world leaders who have visited Beijing in recent months, including for Xi's gathering last month, make clear: while many nations may be skeptical of a world order pitched by autocratic China — others are listening.

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American Imperialism is the Root of Major Conflicts in World, Israel-Palestine is the Hallmark

By: Prem Anand Mishra

If terrorism has any vocabulary, then all of it belongs to the US and its imperialist agendas. It has become a force of destruction than any force for good that American exceptionalism has been fanning over decades. The American dream has served many but it has been very costly for the larger humanity. Threaten North Korea and give security umbrella to South Korea, support Pakistan's military dictators, sell them arms but call India a natural and strategic ally. Keep threatening Russia and offer NATO membership to Ukraine. Target Iran and bulldoze them with sanctions to cripple their economy and also sell arms to Saudi to make them believe Iran is a threat. They have literally destroyed Latin America and the Middle East. From Guatemala to Iran, the CIA and US agendas have polluted all democratic spaces.

They have armed all dictators in the Middle East and across the world from Africa to South Asia and then declared war on them in the name of the so-called clash of civilisations and war on terror. Historical amnesia, unflinching greed and the military-industrial complex, all have been misused as strategic by the US in the name of liberal democracy and human rights. American imperialist design has been the worst form of colonialism. At least in the colonial structure, the oppressor and oppressed interacted and it forced their constituencies to introspect and at least bring them some form of accountability but American exceptionalism is beyond any trace of that possibility. It's truly a terrorist state all under the aegis

of liberal democracy. The 'end of history' and the 'clash of civilisations' were strategic and prescriptions for hate against non-Europeans in continuing that imperialist design and that oriental gaze has been the motherboard of all conflicts. The US is not a normal country, it has forgotten its responsibilities as a great power, rather it has become a pantheon of military-industrial complex rooted in a toxic form of capitalism. US greed is a limitless appetite and its doublespeak is the worst nightmare for the normal world. It's toxic and inhumane. The hundred-year war on Palestine since the Balfour declaration (1917) is a hallmark of the Zionist agenda and American regimes have been unconditionally supporting it.

American foreign policy in the region has a strategic and domestic underpinning attached to it. Since the inception of Israel, there has been unconditional support for Israel's settler colonial practices against poor Palestinians and each time, impunity has been awarded to Israel under the name of strategic compulsion, Judeo-Christian heritage and support to only democracy in otherwise vile Arabs who are still tribal and need to be civilised. Why US has been obsessively in love with Israel? It's quite understandable that both are satanically embraced. Both the American and modern history of Israel since its inception have an uncanny resemblance. Both are settler colonial in different times and spaces, both are overt believers of biblical prophecies like Armageddon and Promise Land and both are using a balance

of power and technology to fulfil god's will. But that's not the only item in their catalogues of propaganda. The Cold War compulsion, strategic choke points, the Mediterranean strategy and the pressure of the Israeli lobby in domestic matters have been the past but have persisted like amnesia and the present and future seem unknown to any bright spot.

Each time, the so-called peace accords from Camp David, Oslo and the recent Abraham Accords have only helped Israel to continue with its settlement and dehumanisation of Palestinians. This vile combination of medieval mindset and modern weaponry is quite abnormal and unacceptable to many learned Jews and American Christians. US' unconditional support of Israel has been the hallmark of American doublespeak and paradoxes of US foreign policy talk of liberal democracy but only as a weapon of imperialist superstructure. It should be spick and span that Hamas, Hezbollah and other militant and so-called Jihadist organisations are not the cause of the unresolved two-state solution. Rather, it is a product of 75 years of dehumanisation of Palestinians and each time the accord and international law are referred to, it only gives Israel more impunity to continue its settler practices and this impunity that the US has provided over seven decades to Israel is the worst form of collective violence against a community. The peace process can be achievable if it is acceptable to the parties involved, not according to the whims and fancies of the powerful

player. The US has vetoed more than 40 occasions in safeguarding Israel's nefarious act against Palestinians and each time, the accords and agreements and the ceasefire have been strategically used as a weapon and currency to continue killing Palestinians. Hamas' actions aren't acceptable by any means and qualifications but that can't give Israel and the US the right to continue their imperialist-colonial practices.

Israel's recent collective punishment on Gaza after the shocking and worst attack on Israel killing innocent citizens also explains a telling story that conflicts and war have a racial tone. The support to Ukraine and ignoring Palestinians, the same basic rights of international norms is a criminal act. Value, peace and humanity are not subject to the white race only, despite the US actions over seven decades that have been telling the world that infrastructure of imperialism is a new form of colonialism and is racist. The division of humanity on colours is the worst form of violence and the US support for Israel and similar actions across the world speak the case that the US has been ruling like a mafia that first creates monsters and then comes to the rescue of the world. Non-white race and non-European lives aren't Hollywood movies where only Americans can save the world from anarchy rather American policies and thinking and its imperialist design are the root of all anarchies.

There are only a few possibilities that could resolve the Israel-Palestine question. It should start by calling on the US to stop being

the saviour to the world and rather introspect towards falling into its imperialist design and churning military industry complex. By now, they should have been reflecting upon how the gun culture has taken more American lives than any number of terrorism combined. Peace can be only possible if it stops looking at ceasefires and accords, rather it should look deeper into the root of incompatibilities causing structural violence. Moral persuasion can't be the only force for stopping Israel but essentially reformed and equity-based international laws absent from the clutches of great powers. Until then, the war that has been continuing for over a hundred years would remain in some form or episode. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) veto has become a tool of mass destruction and the worst enemy to the rest of the world. If there could be any immediate response to resolve any conflict, the demand ought to be to disband the exclusive five-member security council and veto by irresponsible great powers. Veto power has been used as a potent weapon against the popular will that could give a different shape to the world. It's most undemocratic and the root of many evils. In the Palestinian case, Americans against India by Chinese and similarly Russian, all in the name of national interest. The US as a mediator is the root of the unresolved Palestinian question until it stops providing unconditional and vile support to Israel under the arms of selective norms and values. And thus, reforming the UNSC to become more democratic and without any veto power to exclusive clubs ought to be the most imperative tool. Second, the US should stop becoming a saviour to the world in the name of liberal democracy. It has caused a more unstable world order and the Palestinian tragedy is the hallmark of its imperialism. Its action in the Iranian nuclear deal with unilateral withdrawal from the UNSC resolution has questioned its seriousness. The US would eventually harm Israel, the Jews all over the world and its own responsibilities until it stops looking at the Palestinian question from an imperialist lens. The world can't work in binaries and double standards and till then, the matter will remain unresolved and there will be more Hamas' and Hezbollah's and thousands of innocent deaths.

It Is Delhi's Annual Pollution Season - Who Can Stop This?



Bharti Mishra Nath

Delhi is choking once again. Thick, toxic smog has engulfed the national capital and its surrounding areas, making Delhi the most polluted place in the world. The air quality crossed the '500' danger mark on November 3. The PM2.5 concentration exceeded the safe limit of 60 micrograms per cubic metre by seven to eight times at many spots. Schools have been shut (barring Class 10,12) and the odd-even rule for cars will return next week.

Government agencies have warned that pollution levels could worsen in Delhi-NCR over the next 15-20 days due to a surge in farm fires in neighbouring Punjab, along with the expected drop in temperature and air speed.

Over the past few years, the brown haze has almost been a new season in Delhi, punctually arriving every October as the air becomes cooler. Winter in Delhi is morphing into pollution season that lasts till February. For four months, the "air-pocalypse" inspires headlines, discussions and meetings.

After February, the subject of pollution is forgotten by people, the central and state governments, and political parties. The courts, too, get a break from petitions on it. Done and dusted, until the next "sepia season".

Reasons For Yearly Smog

The average resident of Delhi loses up to 12 years of their life to air pollution, a study suggested recently. According to official figures, in 2022, Delhi's air was

considered "good" or "satisfactory" on only 68 days. One of the biggest sources of air pollution in Delhi-NCR is paddy stubble burning in the neighbouring states of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Stubble (parali) burning accounts for about 25 per cent of the pollution in Delhi; satellite images captured more



than 1,000 such fires burning in Punjab alone.

The farmers find this a cheap and effective way of clearing mowed fields after harvest, in preparation for the next rabi crop. The governments of Punjab and Haryana have failed to sensitise farmers or create awareness about green methods like the Pusa bio-decomposer, a technology developed by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). This initiative was aimed at naturally decomposing paddy stubble, effectively converting it into valuable manure.

Vehicles are also a major

component of the toxic fume, along with dust from construction sites. The Delhi government hardly enforces dust control regulations. Landfill fires throughout the year exacerbate the crisis, because the build-up of methane generates toxic fumes.

Impact on health

The average concentration of

difficulties, which may require ventilator support sometimes. It may later lead to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer," says Vikas Chaudhary, paediatric consultant at Fortis Hospital, Shalimar Bagh, Delhi.

Politics over pollution

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government ruling Delhi for the

past nine years has not taken any bold steps to check pollution. Installing two expensive but ineffective smog towers; the odd-even rule for cars; and sprinkling water on roads are symbolic gestures to hoodwink citizens. Delhi and Punjab are both ruled by AAP, but that has not

helped reduce or control farm fires in Punjab. AAP leaders in Delhi are quick to point at Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, but their pollution mitigation plan has been in vain. Taking any action against farmers in Punjab by way of a ban on stubble burning or penalty would negatively impact AAP's vote bank in the state, which it certainly will not risk. This comes at a huge cost to millions of lives in Delhi. The opposition BJP in Delhi has hardly helped, other than add to the political noise. The Centre has offered no solution to this yearly menace.

What Courts Say

The Delhi High Court recently pulled up the forest department for recklessly allowing the cutting of trees without any reason, and held it responsible "for the mess that the Capital is in because of pollution".

On October 31, the Supreme Court directed Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan to file affidavits listing their steps to control air pollution after noting that efforts so far in the national capital were not reflecting on the ground.

"Air pollution in Delhi and NCR has become an annual ritual. Despite the directions of the Supreme Court, the appropriate governments, both central and states, have failed to coordinate and comply, thus making the problem a recurring nightmare for the citizens. Continued failure of executive to effectively discharge its responsibilities have put the onus on judiciary which has continuously been expressing its displeasure at the ineffectiveness of the governments in question," says Suraj Kumar, advocate, Delhi High Court.

Despite the Supreme Court's efforts in the past to devise an action plan, nothing seems to be moving on the ground. A three-judge Supreme Court bench shared the sentiment and observed, "Statistics at times can be deceptive...All these steps are only on paper. We have to see what the ground reality is. What is the impact of these steps if the air quality does not improve?"

Lessons from losses? BJP changes tack to bring local candidates back into focus

The BJP, realising a lesser role of leadership in the Vidhan Sabha polls, has placed the focus back on local candidates announcing early tickets across states

The election season for the semi-finals before the finale in 2024 begins on November 7, with Mizoram and Chhattisgarh voting, the latter for its first phase. The month-long election schedule will culminate on December 3, when the results for Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, and Mizoram will be declared.

These elections have witnessed a peculiar phenomenon. The Bharatiya Janata Party, which has, in the past, prided itself on seeking votes in the name of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and even exhorting voters to ignore local candidates, distributed tickets three months prior to the polling dates. Why this sudden change of strategy for a party which has been following a Presidential style of elections in the Modi era, right from municipal to state to national?

State elections are a lot about local candidates. Narendra Modi could not deliver Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka to the BJP earlier this year. While one could argue poor delivery/governance by BJP Chief Ministers



37 per cent of voters, the PM candidate was the most important voting consideration as per the India Today-Axis My India exit polls. For 25 per cent, it was the party, for 22 per cent, local candidates, and for 16 per cent, other reasons, including manifesto

it was Narendra Modi, and for 1.7 per cent, it was Rahul Gandhi. This shows how the most preferred CM question, a favourite in surveys, has a very limited role in determining the results.

For these four states, the averages in 2019 were: 40 per cent voted on

important voting consideration for 45.9 per cent of voters, followed by the party at 31.8 per cent, leadership at 18.1 per cent, and other reasons at 4.2 per cent.

In Chhattisgarh, local candidates were the most important voting consideration for 43.6 per cent of voters, followed by the party at 34.8 per cent, leadership at 12.4 per cent, and other reasons at 9.2 per cent.

In Telangana, local candidates were the most important voting consideration for 42.3 per cent of voters, followed by the party at 26.2 per cent, leadership at 22.7 per cent, and other reasons at 8.8 per cent.

BJP fine-tunes strategy

The above facts and upsets in states seem to have led the BJP to change tack in these state polls. It has taken two

broad steps to bring back the focus on the local candidates: One, early ticket distribution, and two, the denial of tickets to sitting MLAs to negate local anti-incumbency (to be fair, BJP has been using this tactic for a while, but in the context of the above, this factor assumes new significance). In 2018, in MP, the BJP released its first list on November 2, just 26 days before polling. In the same year, in Chhattisgarh, the party announced its first list on October

21, just 22 days before the voting day.

Contrast this to 2023, in MP, its first list was out on August 17, more than 90 days before polling day, even before the election schedule was announced. On the same day, the Chhattisgarh first list was also announced, 82 days before the polling for the first phase.

For Rajasthan this year, its first list was released on the date the election schedule was announced, 47 days before polling day. In 2018, the list was announced just 22 days before polling. In Telangana, where the party is not in contention to win and lacks winnable candidates in each seat, its first list was announced on October 23, just shy of 40 days before polling, compared to 45 days in 2018. The big role of the local candidate - their image, work done, achievements, performance in the Assembly, vision for the future, and corruption allegations -

highlights the need for tight ticket distribution and denial of tickets to non-performing sitting MLAs. This is very important to neutralise local anti-incumbency, and more relevant for ruling parties. The BJP has denied tickets to 33 MLAs in MP as per new reports (26 per cent of its current strength). Similarly, the Congress has replaced 22 sitting MLAs in Chhattisgarh (31 per cent of its current strength).

However, due to factionalism in the Congress unit in Rajasthan, the party has denied tickets to only 18 sitting MLAs. In Telangana, the Bharat Rashtra Samithi, too, has denied tickets to nine MLAs. This could play a key role in the election results.

To sum up, as a party, the BJP is in election mode full-time and takes all elections seriously. It fights to win and not merely contests for the sake of it. It takes lessons from its past losses because that's the first step to building any strategy to win future elections. It has, for the first time in the Modi era, brought the focus back on local candidates. It remains to be seen whether this works or not for the party used to Presidential style campaigns.



in these states led to the loss for the party, the central leadership, which has its eyes and ears on the ground, seems to have realised the over-reliance on its model. The Vidhan Sabha elections are a lot about the local candidates, despite the hype of Presidential-style polls. In terms of hierarchy, as one goes down the ladder from general to state to municipal/panchayat elections, the role of the candidate keeps on increasing.

In the 2019 general elections, for

promises for about three per cent. In Telangana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, for an average of 42 per cent of voters, the local candidate was the most important voting consideration in the 2018 state elections. For 36 per cent, it was the party, for 16 per cent, it was the leadership (the CM and PM), and for six per cent, other reasons.

In terms of leadership, for 11.7 per cent of voters, it was the CM candidate, for just 2.6 per cent,

the basis of the PM face, 27 per cent for the party, and 21 per cent for local candidates — the hierarchy/order of preference exactly the opposite of the state elections. In Rajasthan, local candidates were the most important voting consideration for 50.2 per cent of voters, followed by the party at 36.5 per cent, leadership at 9.6 per cent, and other reasons at 3.7 per cent.

In Madhya Pradesh, local candidates were the most

Does the Modi factor work in state polls?

The boost the BJP gets from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's personal political capital — which took the party past the finish line in elections over the last few years — has often been referred to as the Modi factor.

By Amitabh Tiwari

Poll fever has begun with Mizoram and Chhattisgarh (Phase 1) having gone to the polls. Of the five election states, the Bharatiya Janata Party is in power in just one, Madhya Pradesh. The party has not yet declared a Chief Ministerial face in any of the states, instead seeking votes in the name of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The "Modi factor" has often been discussed in the context of myriad elections, from Lok Sabha to Vidhan Sabha. But what is it? How effective has it been? Does it work for state Assembly elections, and will it have any bearing on the ongoing polls? Let's examine these questions one at a time. What is the Modi factor?

The boost the BJP gets from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's personal political capital — which took the party past the finish line in elections over the last few years — has often been referred to as the Modi factor. It is, in a way, his ability to attract voters outside the BJP's core vote bank. Quantifying the Modi factor in Lok Sabha polls

Around one-fourth (27 per cent) of BJP voters in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections and about a third (31 per cent) in 2019 said "they would not have voted for the BJP if Modi was not the PM candidate" according to the CSDS National Election Studies. Not only did Modi get additional votes for the BJP but also for its allies in the National Democratic Alliance. Around a fifth of its allies' vote shares can be accounted for by the Modi factor in 2014, which increased to a quarter in 2019. The Modi factor in Assembly elections

It is commonly accepted that the Modi factor works for BJP in general elections and we have established it in the form of numbers above. However, whether this works in state elections or not is hotly debated. Supporters argue it does, citing many states where BJP formed governments since 2014, while naysayers give recent examples of Himachal Pradesh and



Karnataka. CSDS and Axis My India pre/post/exit poll studies show how many people voted in the name of Modi in states, or for how many voters, Modi mattered the most while voting. The data shows that the number ranges from one per cent to 10 per cent. The average is 5.4 per cent for states where the BJP was the Opposition and 4.3 per cent for states where it was the ruling party. It was the lowest in Telangana in 2018 and the highest in UP in 2017. State elections held since 2014 can be divided broadly into two categories: One, where the BJP was in opposition, and two, where the BJP was in power. In these two categories, different

strategies have been adopted by the BJP. Simultaneous elections held in five states in 2014 — Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim, Arunachal and Odisha — have not been considered in this analysis as Modi had not become the Prime Minister at that point. Northeastern states and Goa have been excluded from this analysis as these are small states with fewer voters per constituency and low victory margins.

When in the Opposition and the leading partner of the alliance, the BJP rarely projected chief ministerial candidates and fought in the name of Modi, except in Delhi in 2015 and Assam in 2016. There, the BJP promised a CM who would run the "double-engine ki sarkar" under the direction of the

PM. From 2014 to 2023, the BJP contested 23 state elections in the Opposition, out of which it won eight, including Assam (2016) where a CM face was already declared. The other states it won were Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Haryana (2014), Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh (2017), and Karnataka (2018). In all of these polls, barring Assam, no CM face was declared. So with Modi at the helm, a sort of, a super super-CM, the strike rate of success is around 35 per cent. Excluding states like Tamil Nadu (2016, 2021), Kerala (2016, 2021), West Bengal (2016), Jammu & Kashmir (2014), Telangana

(2018), Andhra Pradesh (2018) and Punjab (2022), where the BJP was not in contention, the strike rate increased to 57 per cent as the party won or emerged as the single largest party in eight of the 14 states. Of the eight states where BJP was in the Opposition and won, six were ruled by the Congress — Maharashtra, Haryana, Assam, Himachal, Uttarakhand, and Karnataka. Of these, three Congress governments ruled for 10-15 years and Modi was able to exploit the anti-incumbency against them. Of the six states where the BJP was in contention as the Opposition and lost, the PM was up against powerful regional leaders like Arvind Kejriwal, Naveen Patnaik, Mamata Banerjee, Nitish Kumar, and the Modi factor failed. So, in effect, as the Opposition, it has largely worked against the Congress party. Now, in states where the BJP was in power in the last nine years, it has contested 14 elections. In these states, while the party sought votes in the name of PM Modi, voters gave due weightage to the performance of chief ministers and their governments.

Time to rein in man's best friend on streets

India is sitting on a landmine of its huge stray canine population, and there are no easy solutions to manage them in the absence of a systematic approach. According to World Health Organization estimates, there are about six crore strays in India, a country which accounts for 36 percent of global rabies deaths. Worryingly, 30-60 percent of reported cases and deaths occur in children under 15 years. The haunting video of a five-year-old being mauled to death by strays in Hyderabad cannot be erased from memory. The growing population of stray dog carers, coupled with people's preference to adopt exotic, imported breeds over endemic ones, has put pressure on civic authorities, for whom sterilisation is the only way to reduce the stray population. It has not been uniformly successful across India. For instance, while Mumbai has 1.64 lakh strays, up 72 percent from 2014, Bengaluru showed a decline from 3.10 lakh in 2019 to 2.79 lakh

in July 2023—still much higher than Mumbai's count. A recent Wildlife Institute of India study showed that more than in urban areas, a scenario of serious concern may be emerging



in the country's vast rural outback. A major part of the stray canines' diet in rural areas comprised livestock (74.29 percent) and wild species (13.06 percent), which consisted of birds (4.49 percent), lagomorphs such as hares, rabbits and pikas (3.67 percent), rodents

(2.45 percent), and Tibetan wild ass (1.63 percent), besides marmots, blue sheep and several species of ducks, cranes and pelicans. This spells disaster for India's biodiversity.

More worryingly, wildlife genetic researchers who studied canine fur samples found emerging wolf-dog hybrids through interspecies mating near Pune and in central India. This is considered detrimental to the understudied Indian wolf population and points to the possible emergence of a more aggressive canine hybrid which can threaten pastoral communities and their livestock. All this is in the absence of an accurate census of stray dogs across India. Animal rights activists, dog lovers, veterinarians and the concerned government departments need to put their heads together to usher in a mindset change and solve the problem, the seriousness of which is underplayed. Failure on that front could be far more disastrous than ever imagined.

The Truth Behind Claims India Is World's Third-Largest Polluter

BY Shantanu Guha Ray

The big, global push to paint India as a climate bugbear has started taking shape. All fingers are pointing at India, criticisms are growing on New Delhi's energy policy and how it is apparently not in sync with global standards. Surprisingly, these experts - activists and policymakers - are asking India to follow standards they would never follow for life.

Isn't it strange?

No wonder the debate is terribly lopsided. And all those clamouring that India is the world's third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases are missing the forest for the trees. New Delhi is aware that burning coal is bad for the environment, but it is evident that India cannot bear the humongous human costs of exiting from a carbon-based economy. The big issue which needs to be highlighted is about the developed nations and whether they have made significant emission reductions? So why push India to wean off coal? Let me further the argument with some interesting statistics. India needs power to lift an estimated 75 million pushed into poverty due to the pandemic. These 75 million continue to live on less than \$2 per day. Power is crucial to lift these people out of poverty, and the rest of the population. Power is crucial to



end malnutrition, improve health, education, and raise industrial and agricultural productivity. And coal is super important in India to generate power, ostensibly because the alternatives are just not there. And then look at India's consumption of electricity. India's annual per capita electricity consumption is 972 kilowatt-hours, which is a mere 8 per cent of what Americans and 14 per cent of what Germans consume. There's the electricity grid, and - of late - Indians have started vigorously using bottled cooking gas that is considered a cleaner fuel. More importantly, it checks indoor air pollution. Bottled cooking gas is widely used across the developing world. If you look at India's demand, you will realise India will need loads and loads of energy; by 2040 India

will have the largest growth in energy demand across the world. It is a figure certified by the Paris-based International Energy Agency. In short, India will need a variety of conventional and renewable energy sources. And it is here the need for coal is felt uppermost because it powers 75 per cent of India's electricity generation. The rest is wind and solar power, still in the developing stage.

India has an estimated 100 billion tonnes of coal reserves and just one company, the state-owned Coal India - the world's largest miner - produces approximately 600 million tonnes of coal a year. And coal is a vital source for jobs and economic growth; it is a big driver of India's industrialisation programme. Over four million people are linked with the coal

sector in India. Apart from generating electricity, coal contributes to several non-power sectors such as cement, brick, fertilisers, steel, sponge iron and various other industries. Almost half of India - over 800 districts - have coal dependency. The situation is exactly the one the developed nations experienced around the time they pushed their economies to greater heights.

But now these very nations are hating India's coal policy. They do not want to know how costly it can be to transition to green power. For the records, closed coal mines have created mass unemployment and devastated local communities in the US. The experts lecturing India do not know it is not easy to transfer millions to green jobs. These experts do not want to remember

that the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has asked the developed nations to be the first to phase out coal, not countries like India. Has that happened? No, it has not. Worse, countries in the West have set their own times to exit from fossil fuels and given themselves maximum flexibility when transitioning to renewables. But they are hyperventilating about India. Why? This is nothing but total hypocrisy. Consider the case of Germany, considered by many as the West's green poster child. It will record its biggest jump in emissions in three decades this year. And this will happen mainly due to a sharp rise in coal use. Germany will not tell the world that it generates 27 per cent of its electricity from coal. And this figure will increase once it shuts down all its nuclear plants. Once that happens, an additional 60 million tonnes of carbon emissions will happen annually as more coal and gas will be needed to meet the demand for electricity.

The world must know India - a billion plus nation and the world's third-largest emitter - is trying hard to decarbonise its power sector. It aims to build 450 gigawatt (GW) of renewable energy capacity by 2030. It has plans to use technologies like improved battery storage to make renewables more dependable.

Will Demand Pick Up This Season?

By Madan Sabnavis

Consumer demand has been one of the missing links in the India growth story and it is not surprising that the progress on this front in the period - October-December merits interest. There is a lot of buzz in the market of things looking up and there are several indicators to vindicate this optimism. At the same time there are some other factors working in the background that can blunt the story line and cannot be ignored. What is one to make of this?

To begin with one cannot miss the positive signs. The newspapers are overflowing with advertisements of festival sales which range from the lower end groceries to high priced jewelry and hence covers all income groups. The high number of pages devoted to such advertisements is testimony to the optimism of India Inc., in both manufacturing and services which gives a feeling that all is well. Second, this sentiment is echoed by the GST collections which are rising at a steady

rate. GST is a consumption based tax and steady increase indicates that consumption must be increasing.

Third, the PMIs for both manufacturing and services have been elevated at above 55 in all the months of this year. There has been a drop in October to 55.5 and 58.4 respectively but is not really significant in the larger scheme of things. Fourth, industrial growth as per the IIP has increased by around 6% for the first 5 months of the year with consumer durables registering growth of 5.7% for the first time in August after very low or negative growth rates in the first 4 months. Fifth, the growth in air passengers flown has been 20.4% on the domestic segment and 31.4% on the international routes for April-August. These high growth numbers come over very high base numbers of 134% and 347% respectively. All these pictures do indicate that demand is on the right track and that there are good times ahead.

This is the good part of the story. There

are however some concerns on how the plot may develop in the next two months. First, the commentary posted by several companies in the consumer space while announcing the second quarter results borders on being cautious. The general drift of the companies is that they would be keen to see how rural demand plays out in the third quarter as this has been the Achilles heel even in the past. Also they have pointed out that there has been buoyancy in the premium segment while the demand in the general category remains subdued. Second, the phenomenon of pent up demand has ebbed to a large extent after two years of ebullient growth. Post the lockdown there was a tendency for a lot of revenge spending to take place where consumers spent money to make up for what was not accessible in 2020 and 2021. This led to a phenomenal growth rates in sales in 2022. The question is whether or not it will be sustained. On the services side it has still be seen in travel and leisure

spending with the World Cup cricket contributing to the acceleration. But the question being asked is how long it will last? On the manufacturing side there has been a slowdown in most consumer products and in the auto segment for instance, two wheelers and entry level vehicles have shown subdued momentum.

Third, the first advance estimate for kharif production indicates shortfalls in almost all crops relative to last year. This means that rural income will be affected for sure that can come in the way of revival of demand this time. Last, inflation has been a nagging problem all this while. For the past 3 and a half years, it has cumulated to 25%. In the past, inflation has been overwhelmed by the pent up demand phenomenon which kept consumption ticking. There is hence question mark on whether households will continue to spend with such high levels of inflation.

There Is A Constituency in India for A Pro-Hamas Stance. This Should Worry Us

By: *Rahul Shivshankar*

Who in a secular democracy would be prepared to risk a backlash by describing a militia of xenophobes as freedom fighters? Very few, one imagines, aside from the odd xenophobic degenerate attention seeker.

But this is apparently not the case in India. Here, the dissolute Judeophobic Hamas gets a certificate from mainstream players in the polity. For Uttar Pradesh-based Arshad Madani, the president of the Jamiat-Ulama-e-Hind, Hamas is a group of "freedom fighters". And Israel, well, that is to be subjugated under the flag of Islam. Clearly, no question of a two-state solution, no question of two sets of people living side-by-side where Mr Madani is concerned.

In south India, Kerala to be precise, the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind gave a platform to former Hamas chief Khaled Meshaal in a rally called to dismantle



Hindutva and Zionism. Meshaal was once famously called the "Man Who Haunts Israel" by TIME magazine. In Kerala, speaking on a video link, he blathered on and on about the divinely ordained need to reportedly decapitate every "Zionist" who dared to lift his or her head to eye Muslim land. These two Indian organisations in question have a huge following among Indian Muslims.

That the leaders of these groups

believe that their constituencies would be receptive to the mendacious propaganda about the so-called Hamas brand of courage is by itself a myth-shattering development.

For very long, we've been told that Indian Muslims would never support religious violence. That we, in India, should be proud that Indian Muslims have thus far not joined any global Jihadist organisation like al-Qaeda.

That they don't subscribe to the idea of a larger holy war that

must be waged for the creation of a global caliphate.

But by lapping up without protest the praise of Hamas by their leaders or by cheering the hate-mongering of the likes of Meshaal, Indian Muslims have signalled that they are susceptible to the call of a pan-Islamic state.

For the uninitiated, it is conceived as a veritable green crescent anchored in the Middle East and arching across South Asia sweeping all the way down to Indonesia. As some know, this project is a widely declared ambition of Islamist groups that subscribe to a hardline ideology. An ideology that was in fact conceived in India's premier Islamic seminary Darul Uloom Deoband in Uttar Pradesh. Incidentally, Arshad Madani is the principal of this crucible of exclusivist ideas that have powered the thinking of such lamentable

types as the SIMI, and the banned Popular Front of India.

A little further from home, the Deoband school of thought has also powered the mean-spiritedness of the Taliban and the Jaish-e-Mohammed.

Many venerable jihadis in al-Qaeda and ISIS have also been known to look to the Deoband school for that little extra ideological zing when justifying their deprivations.

That there are takers among ordinary Muslims for the bigoted revanchism of global jihad is a cause for concern. In a secular state, the citizen's primary reference is the Constitution. There is no other written word holier than the law revealed in the Constitution. There is no greater cause than to serve the interest of the country.

An undeclared fifth column that subscribes to a pan-national identity ought to be taken seriously by all those who swear by a plural and inclusive "akhand" Bharat.

CBI files FIRs to trace people from Punjab, Haryana who went missing while working abroad

The CBI action resulted from a Punjab and Haryana High Court order directing the central agency to take over the probe in the cases of five petitioners who had approached it.

The CBI has registered four separate cases of human trafficking related to people from Punjab and Haryana who had gone abroad for work but went missing, officials said.

The CBI action resulted from a Punjab and Haryana High Court order directing the central agency to take over the probe in the cases of five petitioners who had approached it, they said.

The petitioners alleged that their kin were "allured to travel abroad" by travel agents either on fake documents or by trafficking routes and are missing or unheard.

The CBI has booked Haryana-based Neeta, Banti, Yudveer Bhati and Punjab-based Avtar Singh and Pradeep Kumar in separate cases filed by Daljit Singh, October Singh,



Jaswant Singh and Maha Singh.

Maha Singh alleged that his son Sombir went to work at Overseas Shipping Company in Yemen through Yudveer Rathi Defence Academy in Rohtak along with two other individuals. After a year, only two accompanying persons returned but there was no trace of his son.

Jaswant Singh alleged his son is missing since 2010.

The counsel for the petitioners claimed that 105 people in Punjab are missing and their whereabouts are not known.

She said the petitioners have made "repeated attempts" to approach the police for registering cases and trace their missing children but the

'state instrumentalities have not taken any effective steps to locate them'.

Since the cases pertain to students and persons illegally moving out of the country, the jurisdiction of the state police is further restricted and there is a lot of inter dependence on central agencies, the counsel said. The Punjab and Haryana governments and the Centre

did not oppose to the prayer that the cases may be handed over to the Anti-Human Trafficking unit of the CBI.

"The facts in these cases have reached a deadlock. The state agencies have expressed their inabilities and restrictions on their authority since there is a heavy inter dependence on central agencies for seeking details from the Ministry of External Affairs, Immigration and Emigration Department, the Passport Office as well as Interpol. The cases have remained pending in this court for nearly 10 years and not much headway could be made," Justice Vinod Bhardwaj said.

He said the gravity arises from a large number of young people who have gone missing and there seems to be no clue.

India Maintaining a Fine Balance in West Asia

By: Kanwal Sibal

A country's foreign policy has to reflect the change in its external relations and international developments. If it is true that in international relations, there are no permanent friends or permanent enemies, only permanent interests, then a country's foreign policy cannot be static. That does not mean that trust or principles have to be altogether absent in foreign policymaking and that it should be based only on pure pragmatism. A blend of consistency and adapting to changing circumstances, the ability to take advantage of new opportunities and redefine the national interest as required should ideally be the basis of foreign policy formulation.

Our own foreign policy has undergone many changes in the course of years. China was a "brother" at one time, but is now an adversary. We have suffered at the hands of the US for decades, but it is today our close strategic partner. Our relations with Egypt under Nasser and Sadat were very different. Our ties with the Gulf monarchies have been totally transformed. We were amongst the founders of the non-aligned movement, but now nonalignment has disappeared from our diplomatic lexicon. Nearer home, the changes that have occurred in

our ties with Bangladesh show how conducive circumstances can reshape policies. There are many such examples of evolution in our foreign policy as contexts change. All this is relevant to the needless domestic political controversy that has arisen over the government's position on the Israel-Hamas conflict and, in



particular, our abstention on the resolution moved by Jordan in the UN General Assembly seeking a ceasefire in Gaza and the provision of humanitarian assistance to its beleaguered civilian population. In the absence of any reference in the resolution to the October 7 horrific terrorist attacks on Israel which India did not want to be glossed over, India chose to abstain.

The terrorism issue is one of vital

concern for India. We have suffered from jihadi terrorism for years, and this continues at a relatively low level even today, largely because Pakistan is in a dire economic situation, needs external bailouts, and extracted itself from the FATF grey list with difficulty, besides being in a mess politically. Its "strategic depth in Afghanistan"

ambitions centred on the installation of the Taliban regime in Kabul have backfired, with the Pakistani Taliban now conducting terrorist activity from Afghan soil against its earlier sponsor. Pakistan is hardly in a position therefore to re-open the terrorist front against India anew. But India is not letting up its guard. It is active on all forums to gain acceptance for the proposition that the

international community must combat terrorism unitedly and that no cause justifies the recourse to terrorism. In that background, Prime Minister Modi wanted to extend India's solidarity with Israel following the horrific terrorist attacks against its civilian population on October 7. This solidarity was unrelated to the larger political issue of the rights of the Palestinians to a separate sovereign state of their own, on which the External Affairs Ministry subsequently issued a detailed statement in favour of Palestine. India has been traditionally a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause, to the point that in 1974 it became the first non-Arab country to recognise the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and in 1988, India became one of the first countries to recognise the State of Palestine. Ties between Indira Gandhi and Yasser Arafat within the non-aligned movement were personally very close. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Palestine in February 2018, in the first-ever visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Palestine. President Mahmoud Abbas, in turn, has visited India five times—in 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012 and in 2017. The geopolitical context of India's deep support for Palestine was the Cold

War, the nonaligned movement, India's difficult ties with the US, close ties with the Soviet Union, the insecurities the developing world felt within the West-dominated international system, and anti-colonial sentiments. The anti-Israel sentiments of India's Muslim community also influenced India's approach to Israel.

India had shunned Israel diplomatically since its creation and took positions against it in the UN. We established diplomatic ties with it only in 1992 after the launch of the Madrid Peace Conference in December 1991. Since then India-Israel ties have progressed rapidly in many areas. In defence, India is Israel's largest partner for military sales. In trade, India is the third largest partner of Israel in Asia. Counter-terrorism is an important feature of bilateral cooperation, as is cooperation in agriculture and industrial and technological sectors.

Just as India's ties with Israel have expanded, Islamic countries like the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan have normalised ties with Israel too.

They have not held these ties hostage to the settlement of the Palestinian question. Far from it, they have ignored Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's

Narayana Murthy Is Wrong: Problem Is Productivity, Not Working Hours

By: Ravi Shanker Kapoor

What is worse than moralising by politicians? Cant and harangue by business tycoons. Infosys co-founder NR Narayana Murthy's gratuitous sermon to India's youngsters to work 70 hours a week (14 hours a day in a five-day week) falls in that category.

In a podcast, Murthy recommended that India should emulate the work ethics of countries like China and Japan to bolster productivity: "If we want to compete with the fastest growing countries like China and Japan, we need to boost up our work productivity. At the moment, India's work productivity is very low. The government also must reduce the time it takes for decision-making and curb corruption in bureaucracy."

This is exactly what the Germans and Japanese did after the Second World War, he said. "They made sure that every German worked extra hours for a certain number of years."

Supporting him are many business magnates, including a young tech entrepreneur who is reportedly rude and abusive to his employees. Unperturbed by the expose of his misbehaviour by



the media, he brazened it out in a public function. He justified his own insolence, saying, "My own personal style is aggressive." Evidently, Murthy would like youngsters to suffer uncouth bosses too—for the greater glory of the nation! "Theirs not to make reply, Theirs not to reason why, Theirs but to do and die." Murthy's statement reminds one of former US President John F Kennedy's famous quote, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." In Capitalism and Freedom, the legendary economist

Milton Friedman analysed the quote: "Neither half of the statement expresses a relation between the citizen and his government that is worthy of the ideals of free men in a free society. The paternalistic 'what your country can do for you' implies that the government is the patron, the citizen the ward, a view that is at odds with the free man's belief in his own responsibility for his own destiny."

Apart from the implicit paternalism, there is a fake binary involved in both cases: the citizen and the country in Kennedy's quote; the youngster and the nation in Murthy's statement. But the truth is that citizens, including youngsters, are not apart from and other than the country or nation; they are the country. Similarly, government is not apart from and other than citizens; it is the expression of citizens. Especially in a liberal democracy. Now, there can be questions about the genuineness or even the representativeness of democracy in India and many other countries, but no one can deny the fact that the relationship between the individual and the State in a democracy is organic and symbiotic, not

organismic and symbolic.

Murthy, perhaps unbeknownst to himself, expounds the organismic view when he exhorts young men and women to sacrifice their joys and pleasures for the future of the country.

Quite apart from being dangerously close to collectivist ideologies like fascism and communism, this view is at odds with facts and the imperatives of practicality. Murthy laments that "India's work productivity is very low," which is true, but this has nothing to do with the number of hours Indians work.

As per the International Labour Organization (ILO) 2023 data, on average Indians work 47.7 hours per week per employed person, the highest in the 10 biggest economies. And yet, India's productivity is just \$8.47, as compared to \$70.68 of the US where working hours are 34.4. In a more comparable Brazil, productivity is \$17.4, whereas working hours have ranged between 38.1 and 39.4 since the last quarter of 2018. There is little, if any, correlation between working hours and productivity, as per available data.

From Ukraine to Gaza: Are We on the Brink of World War III?

In *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, Israeli novelist and essayist Amos Oz highlights a typical Jewish dilemma, despair and desperation for survival. In Jerusalem, he writes, “people always walked rather like mourners at a funeral, or latecomers at a concert”. He explains, “First they put down the tip of their shoe and tested the ground. Then, once they had lowered their foot they were in no hurry to move it: we had waited two thousand years to gain a foothold in Jerusalem, and were unwilling to give it up. If we picked up our foot someone else might come along and snatch our little strip of land. On the other hand, once you have lifted your foot, do not be in a hurry to put it down again: who can tell what menacing nest of vipers you might step on.”

This innate sense of insecurity, the fear of getting uprooted again, and the anxiety of being persecuted and killed selectively remain deeply etched in a Jewish psyche, which explains why Israel tends to pursue a maximalist approach while dealing with its enemies. In its



were not facing a jhatka-style of execution, they would be in for a halal-type of treatment, facing Shylock-ian discrimination for being rich, educated and successful.

Israelis believe, and not without reasons, that they not just need to fight the enemy but also make an example of it. (Remember how they ‘curated’ the killings of those involved in the murder of the Israeli

blocs—one led by the US mostly comprising the democracies of the West and the East, and the other being spearheaded by China, with Russia, Iran and others being an important component of the grouping.

The phenomenon, which took shape during the Ukraine war, when the US-led NATO’s Eastward expansion, which George F Kennan, who had formulated the tenets that guided US policy toward the Soviet Union for a half-century, called the “most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold War era”, pushed Russia deep into the Chinese orbit.

In the process, the Americans—of course, at the Western European prodding—made an enemy out of Vladimir Putin, who, as per former US President Bill Clinton, was initially keen to join the Western bloc before he was repeatedly rebuffed and humiliated to shake hands with Xi Jinping. Israel, to its credit, just like India, could see the fallacy of the Ukraine misadventure. It avoided joining the West’s sanctions against Russia, and rejected repeated Ukrainian pleas to sell Kiev military goods. The Israeli government was also careful enough to maintain a fine balance between the West and Russia. In fact, all through the Ukraine war, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made multiple visits to the Kremlin. Moscow, too,

appreciated Tel Aviv’s departure from the Western fold.

All this could have worked well had the Ukraine war gone as per the Russian plan. Putin, originally, saw it a sharp, swift operation. But he has, instead, landed himself into a stalemate-kind of situation. That makes his position a bit precarious, though Putin isn’t as weak as the West wants to make him appear. Further, what the West is yet to appreciate is that a weakened Putin is good news for Xi Jinping. As the Ukraine war gets dragged on, Putin is getting uneasy, desperate and angry. Now that’s where comes the Russian move to host a high-level Hamas delegation, ostensibly to discuss the violence that the Islamist outfit itself had orchestrated in the first place. Officially, the move was aimed at delivering the release of Russian nationals held hostage by Hamas. But in reality, this was Putin’s way of sending Washington a stern message, though Tel Aviv might be feeling the pinch the most.

Anyone who has tracked the life of Putin would know he isn’t anti-Semitic by any stretch of imagination. In fact, in his early days as President, he often emphasised upon the need for Russia to have close relations with Israel. Even today, for all his Hamas optics, Putin has ensured anti-Semitism doesn’t get any footholds in Russia. Following the storming of an airport in Dagestan by an Islamist mob baying for Jewish blood, the Russian authorities have acted resolutely against them, arresting scores of

the rioters.

China, Iran and Russia are the three countries that must be most gleefully watching the Israel-Hamas war. China must be most satisfied because it not just places Israel, the most steadfast of the American allies, in a state of bother, but also quite literally puts a full-stop to the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor, which many believed was an antidote to the toxic Belt and Road Initiative led by China. The US has in recent years put a lot of stakes on the Abraham Accords. The Hamas’ October 7 act has literally killed it, giving China a window to make a backdoor entry into the region it has been eyeing for so long.

Iran must be happy because it has brought the nation back in the Middle Eastern scheme of things, besides pushing Israel and Saudi Arabia—and thus America—into a corner. As for Russia, the war in the Middle East means the US-led West is no longer looking at Ukraine—a best-case scenario for Putin.

Hamas’ act of terrorism in Israel has pushed the polarising Ukraine discourse forward. The world today is far more divided between the American and Chinese camps than it was before Ukraine. Worse, things have, of late, gone more in China’s favour—though it’s primarily because of the blunders and of the misplaced priorities of the US-led West. In this scheme of things, countries that could see the fallacy of Ukraine stand to lose the most. Today, it’s Israel. Tomorrow it can be India. Pakistan, after all, is more than willing to piggy-ride the Dragon to unleash jihadi terror on India even at the cost of self-annihilation. Any such endeavour, however, will only push the world on the brink of global war.

Just before the two World Wars, no one thought we were so close to such cataclysmic events. But then Archduke Franz Ferdinand was suddenly assassinated on June 28, 1914. And on September 1, 1939, Germany launched a surprise attack on Poland. Are we, thus, moving towards the third? We don’t know it yet. What we know for sure is that this time too we would be as surprised and startled as we were in 1914 and 1939 if and when the big war starts. And, worse, this time too, we might do absolutely nothing to stop it.



ongoing war against Hamas too, it has taken the same path of complete decimation of its adversary. But as Israel goes for an all-out war in Gaza, the murmurs are already being heard about large and ever-increasing civilian casualties there. It is being accused of not caring enough for civilian lives caught in the crossfire between the Israeli forces and Hamas. What these critics, most of them well-meaning, don’t realise is that Israel has been facing an existential war since its inception, and its inhabitants, Jews, have been persecuted for millennia almost everywhere in the world, with India being an exception where they were given both refuge and respect. Such was their plight that when they

athletes in the 1972 Munich Olympics!) For, if they don’t fight, and fight resolutely and spectacularly, they stare at being brutally exterminated. Howsoever hard the Left-‘liberal’ commentariat would want to connect the Middle Eastern crisis to the Palestinian plight, the fact is the enemies of Israel would not bargain for anything less than the complete destruction of the Jewish State and the total annihilation of the Jews. Everything else is just a vacuous play of words. However, to see the ongoing Israel-Hamas war from the prism of the Middle East alone would be shortsighted. In fact, the latest conflict has all the indications of being an extension of the Ukraine war. Worse, the global arena is slowly but surely getting consolidated into two large

What are electoral bonds and what is the controversy?



A five-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court on Tuesday starts hearing petitions challenging the validity of electoral bonds used to fund political parties. Electoral bonds provide anonymity to the donors and were introduced to curb the influence of black money in politics. But the bonds have been targeted for infusing opacity in the political-funding system.

The central government told the Supreme Court on Monday that voters do not have the right to know about the funding of political parties as per the Constitution. To understand the entire debate we need to get clarity on some basic questions. Why and how are electoral bonds issued? Who can buy them? What part of funds do political parties get from these electoral bonds? And finally, did electoral bonds end up making the system of funding the political parties more transparent?

WHAT ARE ELECTORAL BONDS?

The government implemented the electoral bonds in 2018. A press release by the Ministry of Finance in January 2018 said the government had notified the scheme to cleanse the system of political funding. The concept behind these bonds was to reduce the influence of black money in politics and to provide a legal and transparent mechanism for individuals and corporations to contribute to political parties.

The Finance Ministry said in 2018 that electoral bonds would be a bearer instrument. In case of bearer instruments, generally, no ownership information is recorded and the holder of the document is assumed to be the owner. Who can buy these bonds and from where? The electoral bonds are interest-free banking instruments and a citizen of India or a body incorporated in the country is eligible to purchase them.

These bonds are available in multiple denominations, ranging from Rs 1,000 rupees to Rs 1 crore in specified branches of the State Bank of India (SBI).

Electoral bonds can only be bought by making payment from a bank account. The bond, the finance ministry press release said, would not carry the name of the payee and have a life of only 15 days, during which it can be used for making donations to political parties meeting certain criteria.

The electoral bonds, handed over to political parties, can be encashed only through designated bank accounts by the

parties.

Electoral bonds shall be available for purchase for a period of 10 days each in January, April, July and October, as may be specified by the central government, the finance ministry said in 2018. An additional 30-day period shall be specified by the Centre in a general election year. DID ELECTORAL BONDS BRING OPACITY IN FUNDING SYSTEM?

The proponents of electoral bonds argue that they promote transparency by ensuring that political parties receive donations through formal banking channels, which can be audited by government authorities. Furthermore, the identity of the donors remains confidential, reducing the risk of retaliation or intimidation for their political affiliations. However, since their inception, electoral bonds have been a subject of significant controversy, with many questioning whether they have achieved their intended goals or have instead facilitated opacity in political financing.

One of the main criticisms of electoral bonds is the lack of transparency regarding the source of funds.

The donor's identity is not disclosed to

the public or the Election Commission, which makes it difficult to track the origin of political contributions. This opacity has led to concerns that electoral bonds could be used to launder illicit money into the political system.

In 2017, then Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Urjit Patel spoke about the possibility of misuse of electoral bonds, especially through the use of shell companies. He suggested that the electoral bonds be in digital form, instead of being in physical form.

It has also been seen that the party in power gets most of the funding and this uneven funding hasn't been rectified even with the introduction of the electoral bond system. Critics argue that this undermines the principle of a level playing field in democratic elections. According to reports, Rs 13,000 crore has been transferred to several political parties between March 2018 and July 2023.

Electoral bonds worth Rs 9,208 crore were sold between 2018 and 2022, and the BJP secured 58 per cent of the total money, say reports. Data released by the Election Commission in January 2023 showed that four of the national political

parties -- BJP, Trinamool Congress (TMC), Congress and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) -- collected 55.09 per cent (Rs 1811.94 crore) of their total income through electoral bonds in 2021-22. The BJP received the lion's share of the donations through electoral bonds in 2021-22, followed by the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the Congress.

According to a report released by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) in March 2023, over 66 per cent of the total income of the seven national parties came from electoral bonds and unknown sources.

The seven national parties were BJP, Congress, Trinamool Congress (TMC), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), CPI, CPI(M) and the Meghalaya-based National People's Party. The seven parties collected Rs 2,172 crore from unknown sources in 2021-22 and 83 per cent of that income (Rs 1,811.94 crore) came through electoral bonds.

An unknown source is income declared in the annual audit report by political parties but without giving the source of income, said ADR, an NGO working for electoral reforms. Electoral bonds were introduced with the intention of bringing transparency to political funding in India. However, the controversy surrounding them persists. While electoral bonds have made it possible for political parties to receive funding through formal channels, concerns about their impact on transparency and accountability have yet to be adequately addressed. The first court case against the electoral bonds scheme was filed way back in 2017. The issue of electoral bonds is now being taken up by a five-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud. The matter was referred to a 5-judge bench on October 16 by a 3-judge bench "in view of the importance of the issue raised".

Google Will Delete Millions Of Gmail Accounts Next Month

For Gmail users who don't regularly utilize their accounts, there is a possibility that they might lose access to their Gmail accounts in the upcoming month. In December 2023, millions of Gmail accounts are at risk of being deleted as part of a process that specifically aims to deactivate accounts that have remained inactive for a minimum of two years.

In a blog post written by Google Vice President of Product Management Ruth Kricheli in May, the company said it is taking steps to reduce the risk. Google is updating our inactivity policy for Google Accounts to 2 years across our products. Starting in December, if a Google account has not been used or signed into for at least 2 years, we may delete the account and its contents, including content within Google Workspace (Gmail, Docs, Drive, Meet, Calendar), and Google Photos.

"This is because forgotten or unattended accounts often rely on old or re-used passwords that may have been compromised, haven't had two-factor authentication set up, and receive fewer security checks by the user," the post read. Our internal analysis shows abandoned accounts are at least 10x less likely than active accounts to have two-step verification set up. These accounts are often vulnerable, and once an account is compromised, it can be used for

anything from identity theft to a vector for unwanted or even malicious content, like spam. **Who is at risk?**

The policy only applies to personal Google accounts that haven't opened their Gmail account in two years and will not affect accounts for organizations like schools or businesses.

How to keep your account active According to the Google blog post, the simplest way to keep a Google account active is to sign in at least once every two years. If you have signed into your Google Account or any of our services recently, your account is considered active and will not be deleted. Activity might include these types of actions you take when you sign in or while you're signed in to your Google Account: Reading or sending an email Using Google Drive Watching a YouTube video Downloading an app on the Google Play Store Using Google Search

Using Google Sign-in to sign in to a third-party app or service If you have an active subscription linked to your Google Account, such as Google One, a news publication, or an app, Google will take into account this ongoing account activity, and your account will remain unaffected. Furthermore, Google has no current intentions to delete accounts associated with YouTube videos.

Twitter account was creating and sharing nude Deepfake videos of Bollywood actors, now deleted

The video of actress Rashmika Mandana that went viral was actually made using Deepfake technology. This incident brought to light many other pictures and videos created with this technology that had slipped under the radar. It also drew attention to a Twitter account known for making fake videos and images of Bollywood actresses such as Alia Bhatt, Kiara Advani, Kajol, Deepika Padukone, and more. The user has since deleted that account.

As per the Boom Live report, a Twitter account, formerly known as @crazyashfan identified as a 'photo and video manipulation artist.' However, the content produced by this account is far from art. This individual seeks out explicit material and uses AI technology to replace the original adult performers' faces with those of Indian actresses. The X account has shared a total of 39 posts, featuring manipulated AI-generated videos of Bollywood stars like Alia Bhatt, Kiara Advani, Kajol, Deepika Padukone, and several others, engaging in explicit sexual activities. Furthermore, the account was found to be following four other accounts on Twitter that share a similar nature in creating deepfake content involving Indian

actresses. Not only the prominent figures of Bollywood have been affected by the new deepfake trend, Hollywood superstar Scarlett Johansen filed a case against AI second ad for an AI app called Lisa AI: 90s Yearbook & Avatar on a platform called X. In the ad, they used a clip of Scarlett Johansson from her



Johansen filed a case against AI clone app for cloning her voice in an ad. The ad featured AI-generated photos and voice imitating Johansson. Johansson's team has said that she will be taking legal action against the app. Microsoft president Brad Smith has also commented on the need for AI regulation. He said that we need to take steps to protect people from AI-manipulated content. According to a report in Variety, the actress from Marvel movies appeared in a short 22-

movie "Black Widow." In the clip, Scarlett says, "Hello, everyone! It's Scarlett, and I want you to join me." Then, the screen changes, and you see pictures that the AI app created to look like Scarlett, along with a voice that sounds like her but was generated by the AI. This AI voice talks about the app and says, "It's not just for making avatars. You can also create pictures with words and even videos with AI. I think you should give it a try." So, basically, Scarlett Johansson appeared in a short ad where they used

AI to make her look and sound like she was promoting this AI app that can do more than just make avatars. It's important to understand that Deepfake technology, which isn't new and has been around for a few years, is now increasingly being exploited by scammers and cybercriminals. They use it to alter videos and images, often making them explicit. This technology relies on powerful graphics cards to change and recreate parts of pictures and videos. People also use it to spread false information. It's essential to know that altering images and videos, whether using tools like Photoshop or Deepfake software, can be illegal. Deepfake technology employs advanced artificial intelligence to produce extremely lifelike yet misleading digital content. It can change how someone looks and sounds in videos or audio recordings, making it hard to tell what's real from what's fake. Commenting on the rising crimes related to Deepfake, Mishi Choudhary, the founder of SFLC, told Decode, "Some resources are being worked upon to give help to individuals as law has not kept up with it. Our police forces are not trained nor are our judges or courts."

Right To Information Act will become a dead letter if...: Supreme Court to Centre

defeated and the Act would become a "dead letter".

"The failure of the state governments to fill the posts of Information Commissioners defeats the purpose of the RTI Act and affects the right of information, which becomes a dead letter if vacancies are not filled up," a three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud said. The bench was hearing a petition concerning the large number of vacancies in the information commissions set up under the RTI Act. The court directed the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) to prepare a chart of the number of vacancies and number of appeals and complaints in all the



commissions. Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the petitioner RTI activist Anjali Bhardwaj, told the bench that several State Information Commissions (SICs) and Central information commission had not been

filled, which led to pending cases.

As per the data submitted by Bhushan, CIC is currently functioning without a chief and has seven vacancies with only four commissioners working and these four commissioners will retire by November 6. On the issue raised by one of the counsel highlighting that the State of Jharkhand was in a bad state, the bench said, "All states shall take steps forthwith to issue notifications to commence steps to fill vacancies."

The bench, while directing the Department of Personnel and Training to do the needful, said, "Department of Personnel and Training is directed to prepare a chart of vacancies and pending appeals. We direct all states to fill up vacancies. We will take up the case after three weeks."

Hero MotoCorp Chairman Pawan Munjal's Delhi Properties Worth Over Rs 24 Cr Attached by ED

Hero MotoCorp chairman Pawan Munjal's three properties in New Delhi, worth Rs 24.95 crore, has been attached by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) under the provisions of Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002. The total value of seizure and attachment stands at approximately Rs 50 crore, the investigating agency said.

This comes a day after the Delhi High Court had put a stay on proceedings related to undisclosed foreign currency

against Munjal.

The Court had said that the stay will apply to all cases emanating from the matter till the next date of hearing in February next year.

The matter dates back to 2018 when Amit Bali, an alleged close aide of Pawan Munjal was detained at the airport for carrying Rs 81 lakh in undisclosed foreign exchange.

Directorate of Revenue Intelligence had launched a probe which, according to

reports, revealed that between 2014-2019 Amit Bali and Salt Experience and Management Private Limited had illegally sent Rs 54 crores in foreign currency to different countries for the personal use of Pawan Munjal. The Enforcement Directorate, the IT department and the Ministry of Corporate Affairs had launched separate probes on the basis of the DRI case. During searches carried out, the ED had seized assets worth Rs 25 crores belonging to Pawan Munjal.



Harris outperforms Biden in 3 swing states ahead of 2024 presidential race

(News Agency)-New York- US Vice President Kamala Harris has fared better than her boss, President Joe Biden, in three key swing states when pitched against former president Donald Trump, the GOP's front-runner, ahead of the 2024 presidential election, according to various polls. It is a tight race between Trump and Biden but most voters feel Biden (81) and Trump (77) are too old to run for presidency.

Biden will likely become the Democratic nominee as the incumbent, he is currently up against Marianne Williamson, best known for her work as a spiritual leader of the Church of Today, host of The Young Turks Cenk Uygur, and Representative Dean Phillips of Minnesota, media reports said. Although Harris had made it clear that she is only up for a 2nd term as Biden's running mate in 2024, she was included hypothetically for president as some Democrats say they do not want Biden to



run for a second term. According to a CNN poll conducted from August 25 to August 31, two-thirds of Democrat-leaning voters said the party should not nominate Biden in 2024. In a New York Times/Siena College poll that was conducted from October 22 to November 3, voters were asked to choose for president between Harris and Trump, 47 per cent in Michigan said Trump and 45 per cent said Harris. Meanwhile, in a matchup between Biden and Trump, 48

per cent of voters in Michigan chose the former president and 43 per cent chose Biden. In Georgia, Trump received 45 per cent of the vote while the vice president nabbed 44 per cent. However, when Trump is up against Biden, he received 49 per cent of the vote compared to Biden's 43 per cent, the Newsweek said. Harris secured more support in Nevada than Biden when either of them were pitched against Trump. Approximately 48 per cent of voters in Nevada picked

Trump over Harris, while Harris received 42 per cent of voter support. However, when Biden is on the ballot with Trump, the former president has an 11-point lead, 52 to 41 per cent. Biden is better than Harris on the ballot with Trump in Wisconsin and Arizona. In Wisconsin, the former president grabbed 47 per cent of the vote while Harris received 46 per cent. Biden had the lead over Trump in Wisconsin, 47 to 45 per cent.

In Arizona, the former president beats Harris, 48 to 43 per cent. And while Trump still wins over Biden in Arizona, 49 to 44 per cent, the President still fared better than Harris in the state. Biden and Harris got the same verdict in Pennsylvania. Trump received 47 per cent of the vote when up against the vice president who received 44 per cent. Biden also nabbed 44 per cent against Trump, who received 48 per cent.

Donald Trump gets great news

in 5 key swing states -- the poll's sample size was 3,662 registered voters and the margin of error for all swing states combined was plus or minus 1.8 percentage points for all registered voters and plus or minus 2 percentage points for the likely electorate.

Kevin Wagner, a pollster and professor at Florida Atlantic University, previously told Newsweek via email that "it is important to remember that this is one poll, and it is over a year before the general election".

"This often means that voters are not concentrating on the race and answers that they give can be highly changeable this far out. In a year, many things can change in the political environment as well causing voters to shift," Wagner added. Newsweek reached out to the White House via email for comment. One critique that Biden has been receiving is about his age and mental capacity to run for a second term as he turns 81 later this month.

Trump to testify today in tax fraud case, terms earlier rulings as 'corporate death penalty'

(News Agency)- Former US President Donald Trump is scheduled to testify in a Manhattan court stoutly defending and denying charges of tax fraud to avoid massive fines and his business enterprises from being shut down in the \$250 million civil fraud trial brought by the District Attorney (DA), Letitia James. Trump says he is defending himself against what he calls a "corporate death penalty" for his namesake real-estate company that could potentially result in \$250 million in damages and close his business enterprises in the New York state for at least five years, media reports said. All eyes are now on New York's Manhattan district court, as Judge Arthur Engoron has already ruled that Trump, his sons Eric and Donald Trump Jr., a couple of executives and the umbrella Trump Organization have orchestrated years of fraud by inflating their real estate assets to obtain better terms on loans and insurance premium. After Trump's sons -- Eric and Donald Trump Jr -

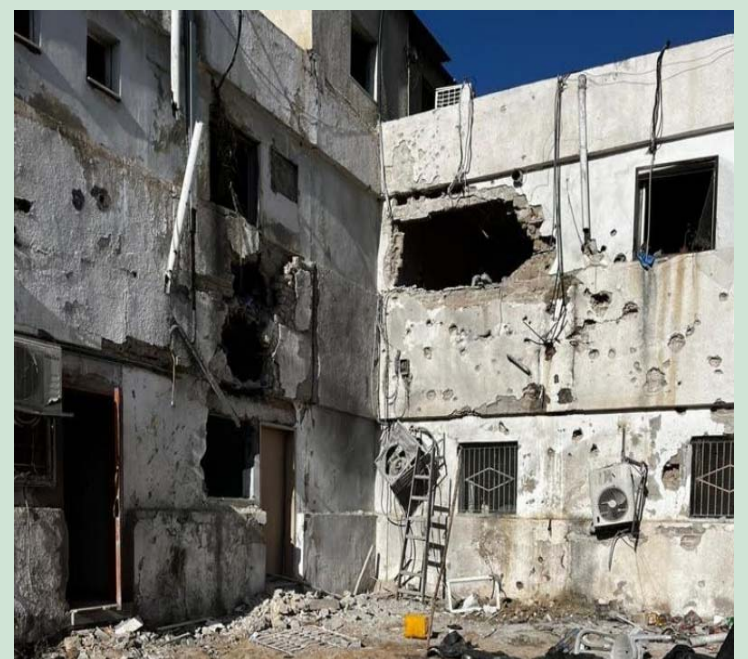


- testified last week, the ex-President takes the witness stand making an all-out effort to save his iconic company going bust in New York city. Both the sons denied any knowledge of the financial matters of the company in their testimonies last week, despite being board members and holding VP-level positions. The 2024 Republican frontrunner has described his fraud trial as a "witch hunt" by New York Attorney General Letitia James and Engoron, both of whom are elected Democrats. Making public

statements, Trump has sought to create public sympathy for himself, saying his financial statements are "phenomenal" and that his actual net worth is "substantially more" than what the statements indicated. Here's what to expect as Monday's testimony unfolds, as per USA TODAY.

The former President's motorcade arrived at the New York courthouse at around 9:25 a.m., 20 minutes ahead of schedule. Trump isn't the only one attacking the New York DA through his social media platforms.

8 Palestinians killed in hospital attacks in Gaza



(News Agency)- The Ministry of Health in Gaza alleged on Monday that eight Palestinians were killed in Israel air strikes on Sunday night. The Health Ministry said in a statement that of the dead, four were in the Eyes Hospital while the remaining four were in the Pediatric Rantisi Hospital. The statement said that the Israeli

air strike also destroyed the only Psychiatric Hospital in Gaza city. The health ministry said the Psychiatric Hospital, the Eyes Hospital and the Rantisi Hospital are located nearby. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has been alleging that the hospitals in Gaza were serving as terror centres of Hamas with many underground tunnels having entry into the hospitals.

Sole Palestinian American in US Congress censured over Israel-Hamas war remarks

(News Agency)-The US House of Representatives has voted to censure a lone Palestinian-American lawmaker, Rashida Tlaib, for comments she made about Israel.

The censure resolution, which was approved by a vote of 234-188, accuses Rep. Tlaib of "using her position to advance a discriminatory agenda" and of making "anti-Israel statements" that are "harmful to the Jewish community."

It also accused Tlaib of "promoting false narratives" about Hamas' October 7 gun rampage in Israel and "calling for the destruction of the state of Israel." The motion specifically cited a video Tlaib published on social media containing the phrase "from the river to the sea," a pro-Palestinian rallying cry that is viewed by many Jews as



antisemitic and calling for Israel's eradication. Besides, the motion also highlighted Tlaib's use of the word "intifada" in a tweet about the Israeli government. Tlaib has said that she was using the word in its literal sense, to mean "uprising," but critics have accused her of using it in a way that is inflammatory and anti-Semitic. The resolution also cites Tlaib's support for the

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which calls for a boycott of Israel. Tlaib has said that she supports BDS as a way to pressure Israel to end its occupation of the Palestinian territories. Tlaib has defended her comments, saying that she is simply standing up for the rights of Palestinians. She has also accused the House of Representatives of "silencing

her voice" and of "engaging in a pattern of Islamophobia." The censure motion, sponsored by Republican Representative Richard McCormick, is a symbolic rebuke which carries no specific punishment.

During the discussion over the resolution, McCormick alleged Tlaib has "levied unbelievable falsehoods about our greatest ally, Israel, and the attack on October 7."

Rep. Brad Schneider, D-Ill., the Democrat to vote with Republicans to advance the censure resolution, said it was important to debate the slogan "from the river to the sea."

"It is nothing else but the call for the destruction of Israel and murder of Jews," the Jewish Democrat said. "I will always defend the right to free speech. Tlaib has the right to say

whatever she wants," he said. However, Tlaib rejected the accusations. She said, "I am the only Palestinian-American in Congress, and my perspective is needed more than ever".

"My criticism has always been of the Israeli government and (Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu's actions... The idea that criticising the government of Israel is antisemitic sets a very dangerous precedent," Tlaib said.

With the censure resolution, Tlaib became the second Muslim-American woman in Congress to face action over criticism of Israel. In February, Rep. Ilhan Omar, R-Minn., was removed in February from the House Foreign Affairs Committee for similar comments she made about Israel.

Billionaire CEO Of Chinese Livestreaming Platform DouYu Goes Missing: Report

(News Agency)-Chen Shaojie, the founder and CEO of leading gaming live-streaming platform DouYu, has disappeared and has been incommunicado for nearly three weeks. According to the South China Morning Post, the 39-year-old CEO has not been seen in public since October. Meanwhile, his colleagues are unaware of his whereabouts and are not able to get in contact with him.

His disappearance comes after authorities discovered pornography and gambling content on the platform. Local media reports say that Mr

Shaojie was being investigated and has been held "incommunicado" by Chinese authorities. There has been no official confirmation of his detention but lengthy disappearances by senior executives in China are often followed by announcements they are under investigation. A

company spokesperson told CNN that its "business operations remain normal," adding that it would announce "any significant news or material activities" in a "timely manner." The CEO made his last

public appearance in August



when he spoke on the company's quarterly earnings conference call with financial analysts. The Chinese live-streaming service was listed on the Nasdaq in 2019, where it raised about USD

775 million in one of the largest share offerings by a Chinese company on Wall Street that year. DouYu, often compared to Amazon's Twitch service, hosts interactive live streams of video games on its desktop and mobile apps while letting users chat in real-time, as per CNN. DouYu is backed by Tencent, a Chinese multinational technology and entertainment conglomerate. Notably, the

CEO's unexplained absence comes as China has sought to crack down on perceived immoral content in the booming industry, launching probes into several top social media platforms and targeting prominent influencers. Several of China's leading financiers and businesspeople have fallen from grace in recent years. In February this year, Bao Fan, the Chinese billionaire chairman of the investment bank China Renaissance went missing. Later in May, Chinese state media reported that Bao had been in the custody of the anti-graft agency since his disappearance.

IDF splits Gaza into two, capture of enclave looks imminent

(News Agency)-- The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) has virtually split the Gaza Strip into two, cutting off the northern part of the besieged enclave from the south, as it sustained its large-scale ground invasion in the territory, hoping to capture the city by Monday or Tuesday even as the total death toll in the war with Hamas mounted to 10,000. The Israeli military announced late on Sunday that it had surrounded Gaza City, effectively cutting off the northern half of the besieged



enclave from the south, and carried out a "large attack" across the region on Hamas targets,

media reports said. "Today there is north Gaza and south Gaza," IDF spokesman Daniel Hagari said,

describing it as a significant milestone in the ongoing war to flee to as Israeli forces have sustained their aerial strikes against Hamas, triggered by the on the southern half of militants' brutal attack on Israel Gaza. The IDF said on Monday that a one-way corridor was 7. Israeli media reported that troops are expected to enter escape south. On Sunday, Gaza City either Monday or large explosions in two central Tuesday. Israel has repeatedly Gaza refugee camps killed asked the residents of Gaza to scores of Palestinians. The leave the north, where Hamas Hamas-run Health Ministry in infrastructure and weaponry are Gaza claimed that at least 40 suspected to be located, and people died while dozens were seek refuge in the south. But wounded in an Israeli airstrike on the south is not a safe zone the Al Maghazi camp.

Israel 'encircles' Gaza City, kills Hamas commander, targets terror group's tunnels | Top points

(News Agency)-Israel said it began to locate and destroy the vast tunnel network of Hamas after ground troops encircled Gaza City. In Tokyo, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken sought consensus from his G7 counterparts on how to deal with the Israel-Hamas war, which completed one month.

The Israeli military was operating "in the heart" of Gaza City and "tightening the noose" around Hamas, the Palestinian terror outfit, which rules the Strip, the country's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said on Tuesday (local time). He made the comments as the Israeli military said its forces in Gaza began to locate and disable Hamas's vast tunnel network underneath the besieged Palestinian enclave. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the Israel-Hamas war, which completed one month, was moving with "great force that Hamas had not ever seen". He said the Israeli ground troops had been "deepening the pressure" on the terror group "every hour, every day". A Hamas commander, who was the head of the group's industries and weaponry was killed in an operation by Israeli forces. Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who made a whirlwind trip to the Middle East, sought a consensus from his G7 counterparts in Tokyo on how to deal with the Israel-Hamas war, including the option of pushing forward a 'humanitarian pause' to allow aid to get into Gaza for the affected civilians.

Here are the latest developments of the Israel-Hamas war:

Yoav Gallant, the Defence Minister, said the ground troops in Gaza and armoured vehicles had only one target, which was



Hamas and "their infrastructure, their commanders, bunkers, communications rooms". On the other hand, Hamas claimed their fighters inflicted heavy losses to the Israeli ground forces.

Gallant spoke of Yahya Sinwar, Hamas's Gaza chief, saying he was isolated from his bunker and that his "chain of command was weakening". He also said there were kilometres of tunnels that ran below schools and hospitals and housed weapons depots, communication rooms and hideouts for terrorists.

Israeli military spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said the country's engineering corps were deploying explosive devices to dismantle Hamas's extensive tunnel network.

Since Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, Israeli forces responded with deadly aerial bombardments and expanded its ground operations in the Gaza Strip. The war has claimed over 10,000 lives in Gaza alone and more than 1,400 in Israel. Several Israelis staged a candlelight vigil in Tel Aviv with

photographs of hostages taken away by Hamas following their unprecedented assault on the Jewish nation.

"I came to look at the faces of the hostages, to feel part of it. ... I want to be by the sides of the families whose loved ones are in Gaza," 24-year-old Valeria Nesterov, a make-up artist, was quoted as saying by news agency Reuters.

In an interview with Al Jazeera television, Hamas spokesperson Ghazi Hamad "challenged" Israel to produce proof of "any military achievement on the ground other than killing civilians".

The terror group's armed wing said it fired missiles towards Tel Aviv, which led to the triggering of air sirens in the Israeli city and other cities in central Israel.

On Tuesday, the IDF said it found more tunnels of Hamas in northern Gaza near a Ferris wheel and a university. Both tunnels were later destroyed, The Times of Israel reported. The IDF also said it eliminated head of Hamas' "industries and weaponry" Mohsen Abu Zina, who played a central role in manufacturing weapons

for the terror group.

Abu Zina served as one of Hamas' leading weapons developers and was an expert in developing strategic weapons and rockets used by the outfit.

Netanyahu warned against Hezbollah's entry into the ongoing war against Hamas, saying "it would be the greatest mistake of its life". He also stated Israel would retaliate if Hezbollah or Hamas in Lebanon was found harming its people.

"We will respond with heavy fire to any of their attacks against us," he asserted.

Meanwhile, White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said that President Joe Biden did not support an Israeli military occupation of the Gaza Strip after the war ends.

The response came after Netanyahu told ABC News on Monday that Israel would take responsibility for security for an "indefinite period", fuelling speculation that the Jewish nation would establish its rule on the Palestinian enclave.

US President Joe Biden confirmed to reporters he asked Netanyahu over the phone to "pause" the war against Hamas in Gaza. Israel has rejected calls for a ceasefire in the fighting, asserting it would allow Hamas to regroup and launch deadly attacks on it.

Israeli fighter jets struck Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon in response to a rocket fire on northern Israel.

According to the IDF, the targets included a weapons depot, rocket launching positions, infrastructure and sites where "technological means" are stored. A Hezbollah anti-tank guided missile cell preparing an attack on Israel was also struck, the IDF said.

US nurse, rescued from Gaza, describes relief camp horrors in viral interview

(News Agency)-An American nurse who was evacuated from Gaza last week recounted her chilling experiences in war-torn Gaza, saying she and her team nearly starved to death due to lack of food and water. She said she also saw children with severe burns on their bodies amid constant bombardment by Israel on the besieged Palestinian enclave. Speaking to CNN news anchor Anderson Cooper, Emily Callahan, a nurse activity manager with aid group Doctors Without Borders, said she and her team saw "children with just massive burns down their faces, down their necks, all over their limbs".

Callahan said the children were being sent to refugee camps with no access to running water. "They are given two hours of water every 12 hours," she said while adding that "there were only four toilets" at the UN-run Khan Younis

Training Centre in southern Gaza.

"Because the hospitals are so overwhelmed, they [children] are being



discharged immediately after," she said.

More than 20,000 people are staying at the Khan Younis facility and the space per person is less than two

square metres (about 21 square feet), according to the UN relief agency, CNN reported.

Callahan said there were children with "fresh open burns and wounds and partial amputations that are just walking around [in] these conditions".

"Parents are bringing their children to us, going, 'please can you help? please can you help?' and we have no supplies," she said. According to UNRWA, the agency aiding Palestinian refugees, 70 per cent of Gaza's total population of over two million people were living in deplorable conditions in UN shelters. Such conditions have raised the risk of a public health crisis due to damage caused to water and sanitation infrastructure.

Meanwhile, Callahan said she and her team had to "call in favours and call their friends" for food and water and believed

they were also at risk of starvation, CNN reported.

"When I say we would have starved to death without them, I am not exaggerating," she was quoted as saying.

"And in the moments of absolute desperation of civilians, they were steadfast and calm and just talked to them and said these people are also in the same boat that you are, they have no supplies, they also have no food and water, they are also sleeping outside on the concrete," she further said.

More than 10,000 people have been killed in Gaza while over 1,400 have died in Israel since Hamas launched an assault on Israel on October 7. Israel responded with a deadly counteroffensive, including aerial bombardments and ground operations on the terror group in Gaza.

Amazon employees were offered up to Rs 4 lakh by Jeff Bezos to resign, here is why

Amazon employees were offered up to Rs 4 lakh by Jeff Bezos to quit their jobs. This was a loyalty test of sorts, as Bezos wanted to see how many people really wanted to stay at the company.

Last year, Amazon made headlines for showing the exit door to 18,000 employees across various departments. In January this year, news surfaced that the tech giant was selling some of its office spaces to cut down on costs and in March this year, the company laid off another 9,000 employees.

But did you know that there was once a time when the Jeff Bezos-led company offered up to Rs 4 lakh to employees for leaving their jobs? The reason behind this was that Bezos wanted to check how many employees really wanted to stay at the company and how many would rather take the extra cash and leave. Intrigued? Read on to know more. Amazon employees offered Rs 4 lakh for quitting jobs

As per a report by



Moneycontrol, Amazon's co-founder Jeff Bezos had initiated a program in 2014 wherein he offered up to USD 5,000 (roughly Rs 4.1 lakh). The option, called "Pay to quit", was offered to employees with the aim of only keeping people who were committed and motivated to stay at the company.

In his letter to shareholders, Bezos wrote, "Once a year, we offer to pay our associates to quit." The letter added, "The first

year the offer is made, it's for \$2,000. Then it goes up one thousand dollars a year until it reaches \$5,000. The headline on the offer is 'Please Don't Take This Offer.' We hope they don't take the offer; we want them to stay." Talking about why he made such an offer to employees, the Amazon co-founder said that the goal was to encourage people to think about what they really want in a minute. "In the long run, an

employee staying somewhere they don't want to be isn't healthy for the employee or the company," he added. Recently, an Amazon employee who chose to quit the company instead of moving across the country to keep his job was making headlines. The man, in an authored piece for Business Insider, described his experience and shared how he is happier, even after taking a huge pay cut.

Based out of New York, the ex-Amazonian wrote that he was asked to work from Seattle from June 1. However, he and his wife had just bought their "dream property" and moving across the country to keep a job wasn't something that he wanted to do. He added how his role was originally designed to be a remote role.

He then added how he tried

explaining his position to the company and asked what a relocation package would be. However, he never got an answer.

He also revealed that he eventually quit his job, which meant letting go of \$203,000 (Around Rs 1.6 crore) worth of unvested stocks. Presently, the ex-Amazonian is working with another former Amazon employee at a startup. He added that his new job offers around the same base salary as his previous one, but they obviously can't match Amazon's stock options.

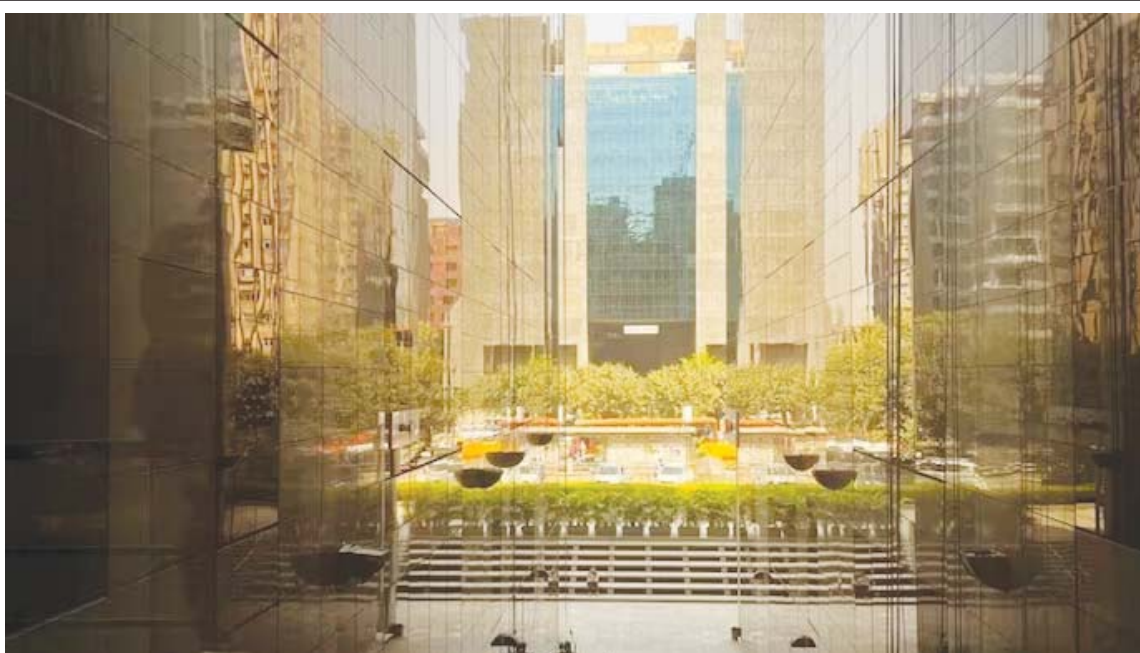
On the other hand, Amazon spokesperson Brad Glasser, said in an email statement to Insider that they couldn't verify the employee's story. He added that a "single anecdote could not characterize a company of Amazon's size."

China's FDI slumps as global firms eye India investments: Report

India is attracting fresh global capacity expansion as part of supply chain diversification, potentially leading to higher investment flows by 2024.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India is poised to grow as the country witnesses increasing interest in greenfield investments amid China's first-ever FDI decline, reported The Economic Times. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) recently presented data to India's finance ministry, highlighting the country's position among the top three in greenfield FDI announcements, according to people quoted in the ET report. A senior finance ministry official told the business daily that India is attracting fresh global capacity expansion as part of supply chain diversification, potentially leading to higher investment flows by 2024.

China, on the other hand, reported its first-ever quarterly FDI deficit in the July-September period, signaling a



shift in global supply chain dynamics away from China's dominant role. Bibek Debroy, Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, told ET that India has been actively working to create an FDI-friendly environment and reduce its reliance on

China, especially after the impact of Covid-19. Additionally, countries worldwide are exploring ways to decrease their dependence on China.

Meanwhile, KV Subramanian, former Chief Economic Adviser and International Monetary

Fund Executive Director, told that India holds an advantage amid challenges faced by China. The negative FDI trends in China provide an opportunity for India to attract investment, provided the country continues its structural reforms initiated in response to the

pandemic. China's FDI outflow is attributed to demographic challenges and problems in its financial and real estate sectors.

At the same time, India has taken steps to attract investment, including reducing the corporate tax rate to 15 per cent for manufacturing and launching production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes across various sectors.

While India's FDI equity inflows dropped by 34 per cent to \$10.9 billion in the June quarter, economists believe that the decline is due to high interest rates and global economic uncertainty impacting merger and acquisition activities globally. The outlook for India's FDI remains positive, with experts distinguishing between short-term challenges and a more optimistic view over the next three years.

Ten things to keep in mind during a cold wave

With the mercury plunging, influenza and Covid-19 aren't the only health concerns. Cold temperatures that keep people indoors can lead to a lack of exercise, thereby leaving people more susceptible to illnesses. Being indoors more also leads to sedentary habits and this may lead to fluctuation in nutrition levels causing ailments like diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Dr Sandeep Patil, chief intensivist at Fortis Hospital in Kalyan, Mumbai, tells us what to do.



Exercise Regularly: Physical activity is important to keep fit throughout the winter. Daily routine of yoga or any form of physical activity will help keep you warm and boost the immune system, improving defense against seasonal ailments.

A Healthy Diet: Eating a well-balanced diet, including whole grains, lean meats, fish, poultry, legumes, nuts and seeds, herbs and spices, as well as plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables are essential to boost the immune system. We can also have an optimum intake of foods rich in Vitamin C, as it helps to strengthen our immune system and to keep your body fit. Moreover, abstain from consuming high-calorie

winter delights.

Manage Stress: When you feel stressed out, take a break and do something that gets your mind off stress. This gives your stress response system a chance to rest and reboot.

Regular Health Checks: During winters, people prefer to stay cozy and indoors where they are in contact with several other people; thus, facilitating the speedy and easy transmission of diseases. Moreover, the foggy climate and less sunlight help promote

bacterial growth. Thus, health check-ups in winter are very important as a preventive step.

Monitor your vitals: It is essential to keep a note of one's blood pressure, heart rate and blood sugar level as well as consult a doctor in case major fluctuations are recorded.

Abstain from Smoking and Drinking Alcohol: Smoking and alcohol consumption in excess should be avoided. Alcohol has a toxic effect on the heart muscles. It can lead to

atrial fibrillation--an abnormal heart rhythm. Smoking can aggravate heart problems, respiratory ailments and cause high blood pressure.

Getting Enough Sleep: Sleep is crucial because it helps regenerate the body while stabilising energy and appetite levels the next day. As per data released by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), it is recommended that an individual should get at least 7-8 hours of sleep daily.

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Why Delta Strain Is Dangerous, Will Vaccines Work On It, And Other FAQs



As nations race to roll out vaccines in the global effort to contain Covid-19 and allow for a return to normal, the rise of dangerous virus variants threatens to prolong the pandemic. In the U.K., the spread of the so-called delta variant, first identified in India, has led officials to send military personnel to hotspots and prompted the government to reconsider easing Covid restrictions on June 21 as planned. Here, Sam Fazeli, a Bloomberg Opinion contributor who covers the pharmaceutical industry for Bloomberg Intelligence, answers questions about the risks stemming from this variant and more. The conversation has been edited and condensed.

What sets the delta variant apart from other variants and what makes it so concerning?

The Sars-Cov-2 delta variant, also known as B.1.617.2, is a so-called variant of concern like others we have seen before including "alpha" (first found in the U.K.), "beta" (first identified in South Africa) and "gamma" (discovered in Brazil). Two factors set delta apart and make it potentially the most dangerous to date: First, it has about a 40% higher transmission rate compared with alpha, which already had a 50% higher transmissibility than the original strain of the virus. This is clearly visible in the data coming out of the U.K., which shows that the delta variant went from accounting for 1% of all cases in early April to 70% by mid-May. It

will likely almost completely replace the alpha variant by the end of June. The higher transmissibility is also clear from the increase in the number of cases across the U.K. Second, it is also believed to cause more severe disease than alpha, translating to a further rise in the percentage of positive cases that require hospitalization, despite the fact that the infections are in younger people. This second problem of increased severity had not been confirmed with any other variant to date.

Does the delta variant respond to vaccines? Is there any data about which vaccines may work better against it?

What is rather surprising about delta is that it has lost the key mutation that had people worried about the beta and gamma variants (to get technical, it's the one in position 484 of the amino acid chain of the spike protein of the virus). This is one of the mutations that contributed to the loss of response to some antibodies, including those produced by the vaccines. We do know that delta is less sensitive than alpha to antibodies generated by the vaccines, and at about the same level as beta. Also, data from Public Health

England shows that the first dose of the Pfizer Inc.-BioNTech SE and AstraZeneca Plc vaccines provide only about a 30% protection against delta, though this rises to at least 88% after the second dose of the Pfizer vaccine and 60% after the second dose of the Astra vaccine (this is likely to rise with more time for second doses to take effect in Britain). These levels of protection are lower than what has been seen against the older variants such as alpha, but they still show that two doses of vaccines work pretty well against the delta variant. The real risk is when you consider the broader population, where many people are either unvaccinated or only have one dose of the vaccine, combined with delta's higher transmissibility and disease severity.

Where is it in the world?

This is not an easy question to answer because the level of genomic surveillance is low in so many countries. Based on data from GISAID, a global effort for sharing and tracking information on viruses, the U.K. has the highest proportion of the delta variant outside of India, at 70% of its cases. The U.S. is showing about 5% (and growing) and

Germany is at about 2%. Italy and Spain are each at about 3% to 5%. The issue is that many of these countries are going down the road of opening their economies while their full vaccination levels have yet to hit the critical 50% to 70% required for controlling virus spread.

Should the U.S. or countries in the European Union worry about it as much as the U.K.?

The spread of delta is already out of control in the U.K. But other countries appear to only be at the early stages. I think the best any country can do, where the virus variant is already present, is to vaccinate as fast as possible, while increasing testing and genomic surveillance. Otherwise, the first indication of a problem will be an increased rate of positive cases. The U.K.'s situation compared with Israel throws a spotlight on why the delta variant is such a problem. Israel managed to get its cases under control when it reached about a 50% vaccination rate among its entire population. Despite the fact that the U.K. achieved a 42.3% a vaccination rate, its case counts have started to rise rapidly in the past two weeks because of a combination of early reopening and the spread of delta.

New York reaches vaccine milestone and joins California in reopening

Tuesday brought reopenings in two of the largest states, with New York reaching an important vaccine milestone and joining California in dropping most of its Covid-19 restrictions. "This is a momentous day, and we deserve it because it has been a long, long road," New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said. "We can now return to life as we know it." At least 70% of New Yorkers have received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine dose, prompting the lifting of pandemic mitigation measures.

On the other side of the country, California, the first state to shut down last year, ended limits on capacity at most venues and stopped requiring physical distancing and masks for people who have been vaccinated.

"I'm very happy about it. I think as long as we're safe, it's great," San Francisco resident Jim Bloedau told CNN. "Go out and get vaccinated. It's safe and everybody should take care of

themselves and take care of each other."

The reopenings are occurring in the two states that have seen the most deaths from Covid-19 -- California with more than 63,000 and New York with 53,500. Tuesday, the US death toll from the pandemic passed 600,000. Cuomo noted that at one point, his state had a Covid-19 positivity rate of 48.16% -- once the highest positivity rate in the world. The governor said the positivity rate is now 0.40% -- the lowest rate in the country, according to Johns Hopkins University.

"We were alone, and it was frightening. It was like living through a science fiction movie ... people abandoned New York, but others stayed and others fought," Cuomo said. "Where are we today? We have the lowest positivity rate in the United States of America. ... We went literally from worst to first."

All state-mandated restrictions were immediately lifted across all

commercial and social settings, including the requirements on social gatherings, capacity restrictions, social distancing, cleaning and disinfection protocols, and contact tracing. Mask requirements will continue in pre-K settings, on public transit and in health care settings, Cuomo said.

"We're no longer just surviving. We're not in our homes afraid to go out," the governor said. "We're not in our homes disinfecting everything we that we can see. Life is not about survival. Life is about thriving." The governor also announced that all of the state's assets, including the Empire State Building, will be lit in blue and gold Tuesday night. Additionally, firework shows will occur at 9:15 p.m. ET at various sites across the state Tuesday night. Cuomo warned there are still things to be concerned about as New York recovers. "We still have to watch these variants of interest. We still have to



be careful." Variants of concern worry experts As coronavirus keeps spreading across the globe, it has mutated into more transmissible strains -- including the Alpha (B.1.1.7) and Delta (B.1.617.2) variants.

Both strains are now considered "variants of concern" by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which added the Delta variant now accounts for

close to 10% of US cases.

That means there's "evidence of an increase in transmissibility, more severe disease (e.g., increased hospitalizations or deaths), significant reduction in neutralization by antibodies generated during previous infection or vaccination, reduced effectiveness of treatments or vaccines, or diagnostic detection failures," the CDC says.

Why dinner should be the lightest meal of the day



When you're asleep, the body needs to focus on rest and repair. In addition, your basal metabolic rate drops, further hampering digestion of food and absorption of nutrients.

It is a proven fact that heavy dinners contribute to weight gain. As the adage goes, 'Breakfast like a prince, lunch like king and dine like a pauper'. And that's as true today as when

that advice was coined. Through the day, even with a sedentary lifestyle, the body is awake and active, and that means it can digest its food effectively, and begin to use the energy created. A heavy dinner, however, means that in the sluggish hours of sleep, the body is simultaneously trying to do what it's meant to do - rest and repair - and what it now needs to do, which is digest the large meal you downed. "It doesn't help that, when you're asleep, your basal metabolic rate drops, further hampering digestion of food and absorption of nutrients," says Dr Komal Malik, a dietician at Max Smart Hospital. So what time should you have dinner? Dr Komal

recommends you eat your last meal / snack / indulgence of the day a minimum of two hours before bedtime. "In terms of how your body works, the ideal dinner time is 8 or 8.30 pm. That way there are still enough hours to digest and process the food before the body begins to get sluggish before sleep." An ideal dinner should be low on fats, sugars and carbohydrates. You're best off eating soups, khichdi, dalia, roti-sabzi and dal, or something fresh and healthy like a quinoa salad. The meal should be a combination of protein and fiber. Opt for complex carbohydrates like rotis instead of simple carbs like rice and white bread.

Healthy greens: Other leaves Popeye would love

Amaranth, moras, moringa, mustard or turmeric - go beyond spinach and add these leaves to the traditional Indian diet and reap the healthy benefits

is steamed, mashed and sautéed with spices. "Amaranth leaves are rich in antioxidants, phytonutrients, minerals and vitamins and are a good source of soluble and insoluble dietary fiber," says nutritionist Sheela Joseph.

It boosts the metabolism and is therefore recommended for those with high LDL or bad cholesterol and those trying to lose weight. It is rich in Vitamin K, which boosts bone health.

"Amaranth leaves have three times more calcium and niacin than spinach. They help counter anaemia as they are a very rich source of iron. And the leaves are high in protein content", says fitness expert Nawaz Modi Singhania. Moras -Also known as sea purslane, Moras grows in the nutrient-rich waters near

mangroves. These leaves can be used in salads, theplas, falafel etc. Because it grows on salty land, it has a salty mineral aftertaste, which is why it is used during salt-free fasting days by communities like the Gujaratis. These leaves are easy

to use - just chop them up and put them in a soup, salad, curry or bhajjya. They even add an earthy flavour to the dish. "This plant is very rich in vitamin C and has been used to treat scurvy in the past. It also has mild antibacterial and antifungal properties," says Joseph. Turmeric - These leaves contain



There's a whole world of greens out there, packed with nutrients and available in a range of versatile flavours. Here's a look at five leaves a desi Popeye would have liked. These are greens that were part of traditional Indian diets and are now being rediscovered. The best part, you can even grow them in large pots in your home. Amaranth Grows across the country, and is available in green, gold, purple and red. It is sold as chaulai in Hindi-speaking regions; cheera in Kerala; and eaten as keera in masiyal in Tamil Nadu, where it

"The active ingredient curcumin promotes healing, which is why a paste from the leaves can be applied even externally, to treat minor burns, cuts and injuries," says Joseph. Turmeric leaves are used in curries in Goa. In Kerala, they are added to ghee-based sweets or pickled for later use.

The Technology Paradox

By: KA Badarinath

Technology works weirdly. The human mind behind evolving technologies globally is all the more weird. When Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a call to undertake research in areas of technology, innovation and development to further socio-economic progress, there were sneers and jeers, especially the cynics. Reports appearing in the media seek to underline the significance of reorienting technology and scientific research to further Bharat's development and economic prosperity.

But, instances of technology manipulation have shaken Bharat's conscience. Mahadev app is one of several fraudulent platforms that crept into the system and helped the crooks



promise of big money may investment instruments apart



from drumming up support as well as marketing Ponzi schemes. Genuine investors and the savings of hard-working people were bound to be lost to unscrupulous elements that manipulated technology to perpetuate financial crimes. A recent cash-for-questions scam being

are bound to have a hay day given issues relating to safety, accountability and transparency of technology-driven, AI-propelled processes that govern the world of finance, banking, insurance, pension funds and markets. UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak had recently compared dealing with AI to the emergence of the internet or electricity several decades earlier. Rishi Sunak is right when he says that AI brought with it fears that are unparalleled in the history of human evolution. Apart from large-scale frauds, AI and other cutting-edge technologies have also brought fears of cyber-attacks and disinformation as it is an effective tool in the hands of criminals and terrorists. Though the Bletchley Declaration boasted of 29 countries including China and the European Union being signatories to an alliance on AI, there were enough naysayers, especially the technology honchos of Meta and Tesla variety. From simple financial frauds to dictating political conversations, technology has emerged as the biggest threat in the hands of lumpen elements, terror mongers of every shade, variety & religious denomination apart from human disruptors. Moulding technology for human welfare, progress and development, and the spread of prosperity is the biggest challenge.

launder money, spread corrupt practices and bankroll political parties. About 22 such apps and websites were either restricted or banned completely by Bharat's government this Sunday.

Reports quoting Enforcement Directorate documents suggest that Rs 508 crore was paid to Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel as kickbacks for facilitating technology-driven betting, apparently managed and manipulated from Dubai. These funds were to support the campaign of the Indian National Congress fighting anti-incumbency in legislative assembly elections. Promoting corrupt practices through the instrument of technology is what has come to the fore. Weird brains behind crafted technology platforms to further betting and entice vulnerable people with the

require closer scrutiny. Making a conscious attempt to hoodwink law enforcement agencies by harvesting technology to 'rob' people of their hard-earned money needs to be recognised by 'evolved societies' that push for big technology foray.

It's not just technology software programmed betting apps that wreaked havoc on gullible people in Bharat as was the case with the Mahadev app that was largely operated and managed from Dubai by its promoters and were hand in glove with Bhupesh Baghel government's bigwigs and ruling party bosses in the state. At a meeting of Thinkers Forum in Karnataka, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently pointed to technology-driven apps that were used by fraudsters and speculators to work up or pull down specific stocks and

investigated by an ethics committee of Parliament also has a similar narrative. The accused Member of Parliament from the Opposition, Trinamool Congress' Mahua Moitra apparently passed on her official mail login and passwords to corporate houses. The mail ID of this jet-setting MP was used and abused by corporate houses to steer Parliamentary discussions on issues that possibly relate to them. Dubai was the favourite destination

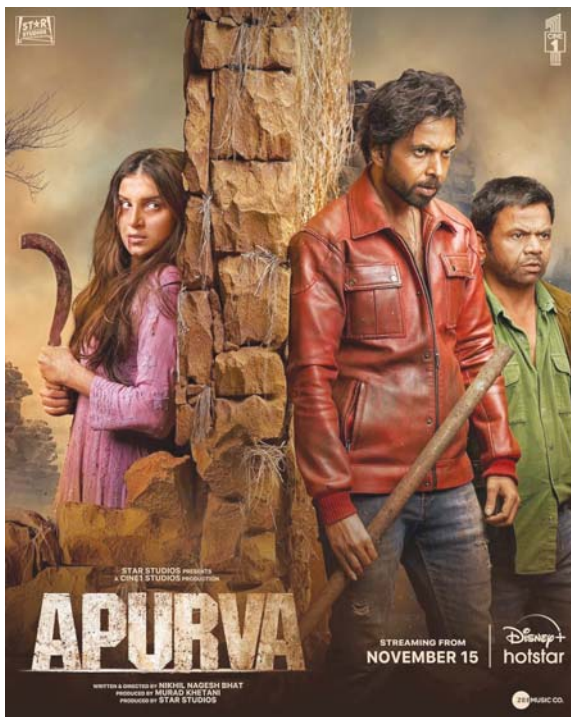


Tara Sutaria: People perceiving me as 'too urban' affected my career

Tara Sutaria will next be seen in Disney+ Hotstar film 'Apurva,' which also stars Abhishek Banerjee and Rajpal Yadav. The actress made her debut with 'Student Of The Year 2' alongside Ananya Panday and Tiger Shroff. However, her career failed to take off following other releases. In an exclusive chat with IndiaToday.in, Tara spoke about how people tried to box her, and how filmmakers couldn't see her beyond 'urban' roles. When asked if Tara feels filmmakers did not see her beyond her perceptions in the industry, the actress agreed and told IndiaToday.in, "I did feel that. For a couple of instances in my career,

I definitely did feel that way. And I think a lot of young actors do feel that way. It is a mistake that I made actually, a lot of people don't know very much about me, and what I really stand for as a performer. I think the box that I was put in for whatever reason is something that I've been dying to get out from for a very long

time." She continued, "Of course, it all depends on who you know, how you present yourself. And I don't mean, just in terms of looks, I mean, in terms of when you go for meetings, when you're giving



interviews, I think somewhere along the line, people perceived me to be a certain way. Whether that's because of certain choices I made in terms of my career choices, or just maybe how I was presenting myself, people I think have misunderstood a lot if I can say that about me." **THEY PERCEIVED ME TO BE 'TOO URBAN'**

When asked to explain exactly what does she feel people misunderstood about her, Tara shared, "I think people see me as this very urban person, which for sure I am, because I've been born and raised in Mumbai. But as a human being, I'm someone who's always observed people from everywhere. That's something I've really enjoyed doing all my life. And that's the job of any actor, but I feel like women, young women, actors, we tend to put everyone in a box for some reason. And then we don't like to take them out of that box. And we tend to judge very well. I think that definitely happened with me in my career."

Tara further elaborated, "This is the kind of film (Apurva), that I've always wanted to do vis-a-vis to what I've actually done. Obviously, I am very grateful for what I've done so far. But this is really like me and not anything you've really seen me do before. That's a part of me, a very big part of me."



Sara Ali Khan clarifies she's not dating Shubman Gill

Mumbai-Actress Sara Ali Khan, who is known for films like 'Zara Hatke Zara Bachke', 'Atrangi Re', 'Kedarnath' and 'Simmba', has clarified that she is not dating Indian cricketer Shubman Gill, who is currently busy with the ongoing World Cup.

Sara is set to appear on the popular chat show 'Koffee With Karan' in its season 8 along with actress Ananya Panday. Sara issued a clarification during the course of the episode as per the latest promo of the show.

The promo 'the show host Karan Johar telling Sara: "There

were alleged rumours about you dating Shubman Gill."

To which she quipped: "You have got the wrong Sara, guys. Sara ka saara duniya galat Sara ke peecche pada hai."

The actress was referring to Sara Tendulkar, the daughter of the India cricketing legend Sachin Tendulkar, whose record of the most centuries in One Day International was recently equalled by Virat Kohli who has been in terrific form during this World Cup. Kohli made a stellar comeback as he smashed his 49th ton during the recent match between India and South Africa during the

ongoing World Cup.

During the match, Shubman was also teased by the spectators with Sara's name to which Kohli jumped and asked them to call the cricketer by his name pointing to his name written at the back of his jersey. Meanwhile, the upcoming episode of 'Koffee With Karan' promises a fun ride as the conversation will centre on ex-partners of the actresses. A whole lot of laughter, revelations and candid conversations will fill up the episode as the show host Karan Johar reveals: "You both have ex-boyfriends in common."



'The Marvels' first reactions: Internet calls the film 'light, breezy blockbuster'

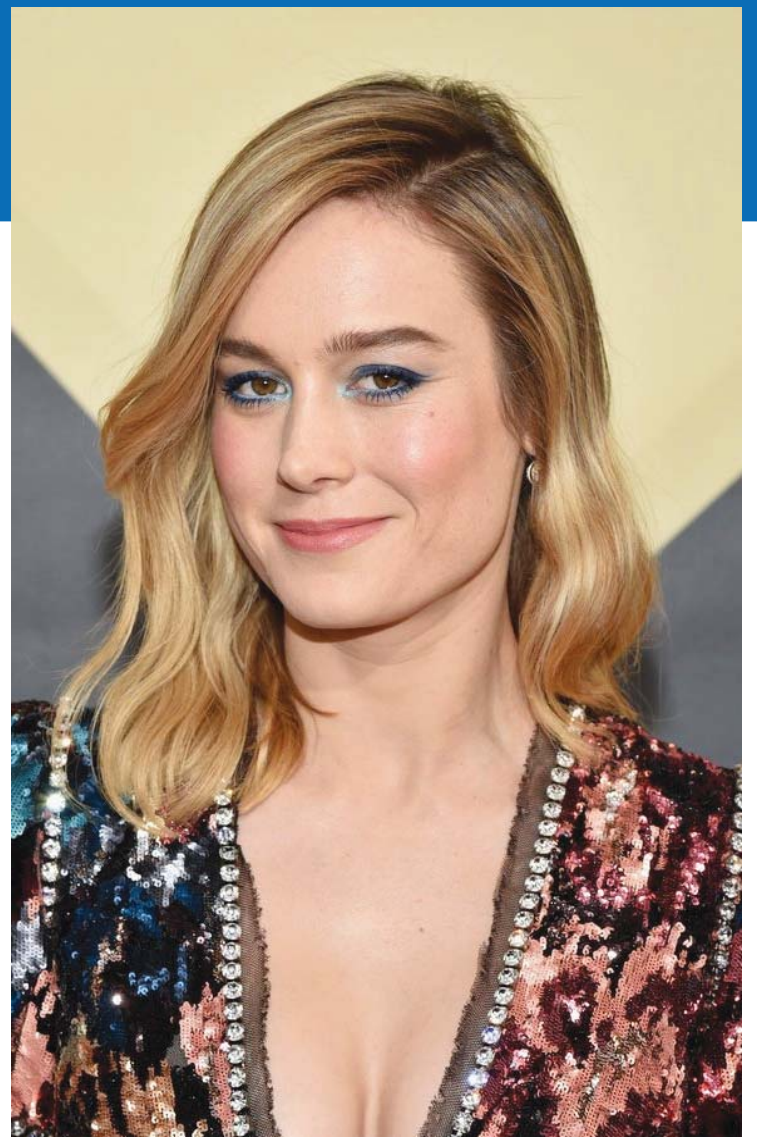
'The Marvels' first reactions: Internet calls the film 'light, breezy blockbuster' Ahead of its release, Nia DaCosta's 'The Marvels' held a premiere in Los Angeles, evoking a flood of first reactions on social media. Initial reactions suggest that it is a must-watch Marvel film with plenty of MCU interconnectivity. Nia DaCosta's 'The Marvels' is ready for its big screen debut, with a premiere recently held in Los Angeles. Initial reactions on X, formerly known as Twitter, suggest the film is a must-watch.

'THE MARVELS' TWITTER REACTIONS OUT
X (previously known as Twitter) is currently flooded with the first reactions for Nia DaCosta's



upcoming film, 'The Marvels'. Users have described the film as fun, action-packed, and precisely what a comic book movie should be. An X user wrote, "The best part of the MCU has always been seeing different character interactions and this has been something missing from prior entry. The whole cast is great but Iman Vellani steals the show and cements Ms. Marvel as the future of the MCU (sic)." The Marvels was also praised for its

ample MCU interconnectivity without being overwhelming. Imaan Vellani's portrayal of Kamala Khan, also known as Ms. Marvel, was highly praised, with some users stating she was born to be an MCU star. Her film 'The Marvels', set to release on Diwali in India, unites three female superheroes: Carol Danvers or Captain Marvel (Brie Larson), Kamala Khan or Ms. Marvel (Iman Vellani), and Captain Monica Rambeau (Teyonah Parris). 'The Marvels' is slated for a November 10 release in theatres in English, Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu.



Gal Gadot to screen footage of horrifying Hamas massacre in Israel

In a deadly attack, the Palestinian Islamist militant group Hamas launched its biggest assault on Israel in years on October 7. Israeli actor Gal Gadot has now organised a screening of the graphic footage collected from the Hamas attack. It will be shown to an audience of prominent Hollywood figures in Los Angeles and New York. The footage has been aired under the title 'Bearing Witness to the October 7th Massacre'. According to media

reports, the harrowing footage, collected by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), was shown to a select group of journalists in Israel on October 23. Another screening took place for UK journalists in London later. As per The Jewish Chronicle reports, around 120 prominent figures in Hollywood have been invited to attend the screening organised by Gal Gadot. Filming or use of the phone is strictly prohibited during the event.

All yours: Did Shikhar just make his relationship official with Janhvi Kapoor?

Janhvi Kapoor's rumoured romance with Shikhar Pahariya has been the talk of the town, with the duo being seen together on multiple occasions. Starting from attending various Bollywood parties to jetting off together on getaways, the two have left fans guessing about their relationship status. While they haven't made things official, however, their recent banter has sparked rumours that something is brewing between the two. **SHIKHAR CONFIRMS HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH JANHVI?** While the Internet is still captivated by the pictures of Ananya Panday and Aditya Roy Kapur's romance, others can't get enough of



Janhvi Kapoor and Shikhar Pahariya's cute banter on social media. Although Janhvi and Shikhar have not yet commented on their romance, their cute displays of affection on social media seem to confirm the long-standing rumours. Their comments on their BFF Orry's post have now caught the attention of many. Janhvi and Shikhar's common friend, Orhan Awatramani aka Orry recently posted a video on Instagram that featured the starkids including Suhana Khan, Sara Ali Khan, Khushi Kapoor and Janhvi's rumoured beau Shikhar Pahariya. Janhvi commented below the video and soon after that Shikhar wrote, "I'm all yours." However, all these conversation has been removed now.

Sunny Leone, Neil Nitin Mukesh, Esha Gupta to judge mentor-based fashion reality show

Mumbai- Actors Sunny Leone, Neil Nitin Mukesh and Esha Gupta are all set to turn judges for unique mentor-based reality show 'Glam Fame', which will set ablaze the dreams of aspiring models across India. With a panel of distinguished judges, contestants will have the privilege of tapping into their profound insights and industry expertise. Guiding and shaping the emerging talents at every step are esteemed mentors Rohit Khandelwal, Santoshi Shetty, Dinesh Shetty, and the renowned fashion and lifestyle photographer, Dabboo Ratnani.

The captivating journey of 'Glam Fame' season one will unfold across 10-12 compelling episodes. It's a unique platform dedicated to nurturing raw talent and guiding individuals through the intricate world of modelling. Aspiring candidates from all corners of India will



be meticulously selected through a rigorous digital screening process, and those who make the cut will set out on an exhilarating journey, featuring personal interviews and group discussion rounds conducted across 12 major cities.

Throughout the series, viewers will be captivated by the contestants' compelling evolution in areas of grooming, fitness, portfolio development, and choreography. As the journey unfolds, the contestants will encounter distinctive challenges and hidden elements designed to test their

resolve and determination, ultimately allowing the most exceptional talents to shine brightly in the grand finale.

Wearing the judges' hat for the first time, Esha said: "Having been a model myself, it's truly exciting to engage in mentoring, celebrating, and guiding all the aspiring models out there through the challenges they face in this industry. It's like the best show I could have been a part of and I'm very enthusiastic about this journey." Neil shared: "Growing up in a family deeply connected to the industry, with my father, Nitin Mukesh, and my grandfather, the legendary Mukesh Ji, I've witnessed the ebb and flow of trends over the years. This understanding of the industry's dynamics is crucial. I believe that for a model to set trends, they must first comprehend the existing trends and the immense potential this platform offers to these young men and women."

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Salman Khan BREAKS SILENCE on Tiger vs Pathaan With Shah Rukh Khan: 'I Will Be There...'

Salman Khan, who is currently gearing up for the release of Tiger 3 along with Katrina Kaif, has seemingly confirmed that he is doing YRF's Tiger vs Pathaan with Shah Rukh Khan. There are strong reports that Salman and Shah Rukh

a fierce face-off between India's two biggest superstars – Shah Rukh Khan and Salman Khan. The spy universe includes the first and second installments of Tiger film, War, and the recently released Pathaan. Including



War 2, Tiger vs Pathaan becomes the seventh movie in the Umbrella franchise. The upcoming title of the universe includes Tiger 3, which will hit the big screens on Diwali, and War 2.

Tiger vs Pathaan will begin filming for Tiger vs Pathaan after the release of their respective movie Tiger 3 and Dunki. In an interview with Variety, Salman was asked about the timeline on Tiger vs Pathaan and when he would start shooting for the same. "Tiger is always ready – so whenever things are locked – I will be there," the Bollywood superstar said. While the plot of the movie remains unclear, the title indicates it might chronicle

will reportedly be directed by Siddharth Anand and he is apparently charging Rs 40 crore for the same. "Siddharth Anand will be paid Rs 40 crores as directorial remuneration for Tiger vs Pathaan. This is the highest that a banner has paid any filmmaker to date and it's their way of felicitating Siddharth Anand for living on to the expectations of delivering tentpole entertainers time and again.

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Loan apps harassing women by morphing their images to extort money, alleges singer Chinmayi Sripada

A deepfake video featuring actor Rashmika Mandanna sent shockwaves through the internet, raising concerns about the dangers of artificial intelligence. In the wake of this unsettling incident, singer Chinmayi Sripada spoke out against the misuse of AI technology. She pointed out that these manipulated videos aren't just targeting celebrities but common people as well.

Chinmayi, in a post supporting the actor, called for legal action against those who misuse deepfake technology and sounded the alarm about how it could become the "next weapon to extort, blackmail, and even harm women."

"Deepfakes could be used as a means to target and harass girls, extort money from them, or even commit sexual assault. Their families in small villages or towns might not understand the gravity of the situation when their honor is at stake," the singer emphasized on a social media platform. Furthermore, Sripada revealed that women who have borrowed money from loan apps are being harassed by collectors who manipulate their images into explicit content, intending to extort money from



them. She explained that deepfakes are becoming increasingly sophisticated, making it harder for the average person to detect them. She urged for a nationwide awareness campaign to educate the public about the dangers of deepfakes and encouraged people to report such incidents instead of taking matters into their own hands. The shocking video that went viral featured what seemed to be Rashmika Mandanna entering an elevator. In reality, the video was manipulated using

deepfake technology, with British-Indian influencer Zara Patel's face replaced by Rashmika Mandanna's. Responding to the trending video, the actor expressed her fear and distress, stating, "I feel really hurt to share this and have to talk about the deepfake video of me being spread online." Recognizing the gravity of the situation, the central government has taken action by sending an advisory to social media platforms to address the issue of deepfake videos.

Megan Fox talks about miscarriage with Machine Gun Kelly, calls it 'very difficult'

Megan Fox recently opened up about a very personal and devastating time in her life with Machine Gun Kelly. She sat down for a conversation with Good Morning America this week to discuss her new poetry book, 'Pretty Boys Are Poisonous'. The actress, 37, describes a miscarriage in two of her poems in the book. In an interview about the collection with Good



Morning America, Fox talked about the miscarriage she experienced alongside fiancé Machine Gun Kelly (real name Colson Baker).

"I've never been through anything like that in my life. I have three kids, so it was very difficult for both of us and it sent us on a very wild journey together and separately trying to navigate, 'What does this mean?' and 'Why did this happen?'" she shared. "I want to hold your hand / hear your laugh," she writes in the poetry book, later adding "but now / I have to say / goodbye." She also includes a line about imagining holding her baby girl "as they rip you from my insides."

US Invests \$553 Million In Adani Port In Sri Lanka To Curb China's Influence

The US will provide \$553 million in financing for a port terminal in Sri Lanka's capital being developed by billionaire Gautam Adani, as New Delhi and Washington look to curtail China's influence in South Asia.

The funding from International Development Finance Corp. underscores renewed US and Indian efforts to loosen Beijing's sway over Sri Lanka after Colombo borrowed heavily to splurge on Chinese port and highway projects before its economic meltdown last year. For Mr Adani, US money may offer a stamp of legitimacy after allegations of fraud by short seller Hindenburg Research erased billions from the conglomerate's market value earlier this year.

The deepwater West Container Terminal in Colombo is the US government agency's largest infrastructure investment in Asia, and among its biggest globally. It will bolster Sri Lanka's economic growth and "its regional economic integration, including with India, a key partner to both countries," DFC said in a statement. The funding is part of a global acceleration of DFC investments that totaled \$9.3 billion in 2023. A US official described the Sri Lanka port financing as emblematic of the US commitment to be more engaged in development projects across the Indo-Pacific.

China had invested about \$2.2 billion in



the island nation as of the end of last year, its biggest foreign direct investor. US officials have publicly criticized Sri Lanka's little-used southern Hambantota port as unsustainable and part of what it calls China's "debt-trap diplomacy."

DFC said it will be working with sponsors John Keells Holdings Plc and Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone Ltd., relying on their "local experience and high-quality standards."

Colombo's port is one of the busiest in the Indian Ocean, given its proximity to the international shipping routes. Nearly half of all container ships pass through its waters. The DFC said it's

been operating at more than 90% utilization for two years and needs new capacity. The US funding may serve as an endorsement for the short seller-stung Adani Group, as well as the controversial port project in which it holds a majority stake. The conglomerate has been fighting a raft of corporate fraud allegations leveled by Hindenburg Research and various media investigations, which it has repeatedly denied.

DFC, a development finance agency launched under the Trump administration, was established to aid developing nations while advancing US foreign policy goals. It struggled at first to stake out projects around the world due to the Covid-19

pandemic. But funding has accelerated in recent years and the agency has helped Washington close the development spending gap with China's much more higher-profile Belt and Road Initiative, according to a new report from the AidData institute at William & Mary in Virginia.

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The DFC's funding will create "greater prosperity for Sri Lanka - without adding to sovereign debt - while at the same time strengthening the position of our allies across the region," said Scott Nathan, the DFC's chief executive officer.

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Jaishankar, Blinken discuss strategic partnership, Indo-Pacific at India-US key meet

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, during the 2+2 India-US ministerial meet, said "We are bolstering our partnership in international security and specifically working to promote rules-based order".



The India-US '2+2' foreign and defence ministerial dialogue was held on Friday in New Delhi. During the meeting, India and the US discussed global strategic partnership, defence cooperation, emerging technologies, people-to-people ties, and regional concerns in the Indo-Pacific, as well as the Israel-Hamas conflict.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin represented the American side, while the Indian delegation was headed by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

Highlighting that India and the US are exploring cooperation in domains such as critical technologies, civil outer space and critical minerals, along with already established areas, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said that the meeting aims towards "building a forward-looking partnership while we construct a shared global agenda".

"In the 2+2, we will undertake a comprehensive overview of cross-cutting strategic, defence, and security ties, technology and supply chain collaborations and people-to-people exchanges... Our trade is today in excess of USD 200 Billion... 2,70,000 Indian students study in the United States, and we have a diaspora of 4.4 million. A key focus of our discussions

today will be the Indo-Pacific region," Jaishankar said. Referring to the Israel-Hamas war, Jaishankar said the situation in the Middle East was a big concern. He said, "India has always advocated the resumption of direct negotiations towards establishing a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine living within secure and recognised borders, side-by-



side at peace with Israel." He also said PM Modi's state visit to the United States in June opened a new chapter in the India-US relationship. Meanwhile, Antony Blinken said that the 2+2 dialogue would be an opportunity to advance India-US relations. He noted that both countries have a robust partnership and are

deliberating on matters with implications for the future. "We are bolstering the partnership in international peace, security and specifically working to promote rules-based order, and uphold principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. Our defence cooperation is a key pillar of that work," Blinken said. The top US diplomat said,

"We are promoting a free and open, prosperous, secure and resilient Indo-Pacific, including by strengthening our partnership through the Quad with Japan and Australia". He noted that the two nations were "deepening the remarkable ties between our people, which is really at the heart of everything" and stressed

exploring new educational exchanges, travel between our countries and reducing Visa wait times. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh noted that defence is an important pillar of India-US bilateral ties. He said the India-US bilateral relationship has seen a "growing convergence of strategic interests and enhanced defence, security and intelligence cooperation." "Defence remains one of the most important pillars of our bilateral relationship. Your visit to India is at a time when India and the US are closer than ever before," Singh said. He added "In spite of various emerging geopolitical challenges, we need to keep our focus on important and long-term issues. Our partnership is critical for ensuring a free, open and rules-bound Indo-Pacific region". Lloyd Austin, US Defence Secretary said, "We are meeting at a time of great momentum". "In the face of urgent global challenges, it's more important than ever that the world's two largest democracies exchange views, find common goals, and deliver for our people. We've made impressive gains in building our major defence partnership over the past year, and that will help us contribute even more together to the cause of peace and stability," he stated. The 2+2 dialogue is a key diplomatic initiative expected to carry out a comprehensive review of fast-expanding India-US strategic ties.

Bharat's Model of Economic Growth Cannot Be Built on Western Models



Policymaking in the agriculture space is rife with several myths, misconceptions, and assumptions. Unlike other spaces where lobbyists ensure that their current practices are part of policy thinking, agriculture is dominated by “bad” actors; these include research organisations and non-profits that are out of touch with reality, yet dictate policy. This is why antiquated models continue to dominate policymaking and thinking.

Institutional knowledge is a challenge to learning or building something new. Old mental models are like stereotypes; they force us to retrofit new information into old models. The challenge is that over a period, if these models are not updated or these assumptions are not questioned from a public policy point, then it creates more challenges than it solves. Trying to fit economic roadmaps followed by other countries decades ago to a populous country like India is one such thinking. A vast number of our models for developing policy still believe that the way to a developed economy is to move people out of agriculture, into manufacturing and services.

The Lewis Model for structural development, developed by economist W Arthur Lewis in the mid-1950s, remains the underlying assumption for this policy-making model. Lewis, a West-Indian economist, sharpened these models for England and believed this could be adopted by any developing country. He won a Nobel Prize for it, and the rest of the world continues to follow this model. The model used pre-war data from England to build a model for an economy of around 50 million people; its current population is around 67 million. 70 years or more old model of the economic system is not relevant in a world where automation has changed manufacturing employment and artificial intelligence (AI) is changing the services sector at an exponential daily pace. It surely cannot be used to frame policies that call for moving 400-odd million Indian

farmers out of agriculture into manufacturing and services.

The Lewis model states that the early stages of a country's development will be employed by the agricultural sector for subsistence. The agri-labor is typically underemployed with marginal productivity declining with time. As manufacturing and services rise, agriculture becomes a smaller part of the national revenue, and the manufacturing/services share rises.

The GDP shift from agriculture to other sectors also leads to previously underemployed agricultural labour in other sectors. This creates higher wages and is a sign of economic growth. Its biggest assumption is that as labour moves away from agriculture, those that remain have access to larger landholdings with which they can afford to industrialise and produce at larger scales.

Let's pause and understand whether this is happening in India. Our manufacturing sector has grown but landholding has decreased instead of increasing because of population growth and fragmented landholdings as families grow and divide. Typically, in a farmer's family, the males move out to the city leaving children, wives, parents and siblings behind. The only reason they survive the uncertainty of farming is because of the assured income of the few from urban centres.

If the Lewis model worked as it was supposed to, we would not see such a large population continuing to survive in rural areas. After all, manufacturing and services have grown enormously, accounting for more than 80 per cent of gross value added to the economy, and they employ 56 per cent of the population. A NITI Aayog paper from 2022 highlights four structural paths that farmers could find themselves on: the Farmer Developing Path, the Lewis Path, the Lewis Trap, and the Farmer Excluding Path. Dorin Et al. first identified these paths using the Labour Income Ratio (LIR) – the ratio between agriculture's share of value in the total value added to an economy and the

share of farmers in the total labour employed – which measures a region's reliance on agriculture in relation to its economy and workforce.

Changes in LIR over time can be used heuristically to place the farmers of a region in one of the four structural paths. If a region's LIR is high and increasing over time, it is likely to be on the Lewis Path; if a region's LIR is low and decreasing over time, it is likely to be on the Farmer Excluding Path; if a region's LIR is high but decreasing over time, it is likely to be on the Lewis Trap; finally, if a region's LIR remains stable over time then it is likely to be on the Farmer Developing Path. The NITI Aayog paper used LIRs for each Indian state to assign them to their respective path.

The Lewis Path is the structural path that farmers would find themselves in if Lewis' predictions for the agricultural sector play out as they should. In the Lewis Path, the total number of farmers decreases, leaving the remaining farmers with larger landholdings with which they can produce more as per the NITI Aayog paper written in 2022. The share of farmers in the workforce decreases; this raises agricultural productivity at a pace that is faster than overall agricultural output. While each farmer is producing more, collectively they are still farming the same amount of land, so the rate of increase in agricultural output isn't as high and the prices for agricultural output remain stable. Here, LIR tends to be 1 because there are fewer farmers as a share of the total workforce, while agricultural output as a share of the total value added to the economy does not change very much. In the Farmer Developing Path, the share of the value of agriculture grows larger without much change in the share of the value of the other sectors because of the relatively high growth in demand for agricultural products. On this path, agricultural workers see rates of increase in wages that are higher than in other sectors of

the economy. The amount of labour employed in the agricultural sector increases. As wages in the agricultural sector increase, workers move back to this sector. However, because there is not enough land available for everyone who wants to farm their own land, the number of people entering this sector does not increase at a faster rate than the demand for agricultural products and the value that agriculture is adding to the economy. The LIR tends towards 1 in the Farmer Developing Path. The Lewis Trap is almost the exact opposite of the Lewis Path. The agricultural workforce increases without a proportional increase in the amount of land available for cultivation. Labour productivity in agriculture grows at a slower rate than the average labour productivity, which leads to a divergence in agricultural and non-agricultural wages. In the Farmer Excluding Path, the number of farmers decreases while the incomes between the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors diverge. Farmers are fewer, and they are relatively poorer than workers in other sectors. The NITI Aayog paper presented data showing that from at least 1993, all but three of the Indian states were on the negative structural paths of the Lewis Trap or Farmer Excluding. As a whole, the country was on the Lewis Trap path since at least 1993; in 2010, however, the country entered the Farmer Excluding path. The agricultural workforce was not falling, it was increasing. The paper says this could be a result of the Covid pandemic which saw massive levels of migration of urban workers back to their rural homes, this shift could be temporary in nature. Although the productivity of land has increased, the falling sizes of landholdings are ensuring that India's agricultural labour productivity is growing slower than its non-agricultural labour productivity. This is the opposite of what was to happen according to Lewis' model of structural transformation.

Haryana Curbs Stubble Burning but Punjab Smoulders, Why High AQI in Delhi-NCR is Public Health Crisis

Every year in the period between September and November, coinciding with the festival of Diwali, farmers in North India set millions of tonnes of paddy straw on fire turning Delhi's air toxic. Amid a retreating monsoon, north-westerly winds carrying plumes of smoke from farm fires far away flow slowly towards the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR) where toxic pollutants are trapped in the cold winter weather, forming a 'gas chamber'. While road traffic and industrial pollution are year-round sources of the smog—a culmination of stubble burning and changing weather patterns are at the heart of the tragedy that seals New Delhi's fate. Over 71 million people in Delhi-NCR are exposed for several weeks to severely unhealthy levels of air quality. Millions more are affected in adjoining states of North India. Most residents are known to develop a cough and face irritation in the eyes. More serious patients land up in emergency rooms complaining of respiratory constraints and heart issues. The crisis has sparked a political blame game between the governments of AAP-ruled Punjab and Delhi on one side and BJP-ruled Haryana and the Centre on the other even as the people of Delhi suffer an urgent health crisis. Instead of treating the crisis as a foremost public health issue, state administrations have struggled to curb the menace with varying success. A comparison between Punjab and Haryana is rather lopsided. While Haryana has managed to curb 38% of stubble burning incidents, Punjab's initial gains are rapidly coming undone with farm fires back on the rise in November. While Haryana accounts for only 5% of total fire incidents this season, Punjab accounts for 65%. Despite having AAP governments in New Delhi and in Punjab, the two states have failed in coordination and taking sweeping action against stubble burning.

PUNJAB FALLS SHORT

Around 32 lakh hectares is cultivated for paddy in Punjab as compared to Haryana's 15



lakh hectares, but the state still lags disproportionately behind its neighbour in reducing the menace of farm fires. According to the records provided by the Punjab government, the period between September 15 and November 8, 2023 marked a 30% reduction in farm fire incidents from the same period in 2022 and 45% from 2021. While Punjab showed a promising reduction in incidents in October, that changed rapidly in the last two weeks. Around 66% of the 22,981 reported incidents of straw burning in Punjab have occurred in the first eight days of November alone. Punjab has even drawn the ire of the Supreme Court of India. On Tuesday, the Supreme Court pulled up the Punjab government urging the state to stop the fires immediately. "We want it (stubble burning) stopped. We don't know how you do it, it's your job. But it must be stopped. Something has to be done immediately," the Supreme Court said to the Punjab government. The Supreme Court even endorsed the Centre's attempts to promote a switch from paddy to alternative crops in Punjab. "The switch over can only occur when the MSP is not granted for paddy but is given to an alternative crop, something which the Central Government in any case is seeking to encourage by growing and utilization of the traditional crops," it observed. News18 spoke with Adarsh Pal Vig, Chairman of the Punjab Pollution Control Board, who is

hopeful for better days ahead even as he acknowledges that more needs to be done. "The number of fire incidents are on the decreasing trend from the previous years. Our target is to reduce the incidents by 50% minimum. Initially, we were achieving around 58-59% reduction but the previous few days have put us under 35%. The days ahead are critical," he told us. In Punjab, around 8,000 officers have been deployed to tackle the problem of stubble burning, Vig told News18.

"All deputy commissioners are reviewing the situation on the ground. They have been guiding the farmers, making the machines available to them and asking them to go for in-situ management of the residue," he said while also adding that the state must target 100% reduction or zero stubble burning.

But it is no easy task for officials to get the farmers on board. In Punjab's Bathinda district, a group of farmers were filmed disobeying the instructions of a farm fire prevention team and even allegedly compelled an officer to join them in igniting a pile of stubble. Unlike Haryana, governments of Punjab and Delhi recently had dropped the plan to provide cash incentives to farmers for not burning crop residue. This came after the Centre rejected their proposal to bear 60% of the cost. Politicking over this incentive has cost the residents of Delhi, the air they breathe.

HARYANA LEADS THE WAY

Haryana's performance comes in stark contrast with that of Punjab. The state is on a downward trend with 1,605 total reported incidents of stubble burning. It has registered a 38% reduction in farm fire incidents from the previous year. The state is reporting a fall in incidents by almost 64% as compared to the same period in 2021. Nirmal Kashyap, Senior Environmental Engineer at the Haryana Pollution Control Board, told News18 that "the goal was to have zero active fire locations by next year." "The government has taken many good initiatives for the state, starting from incentives for farmers, transportation costs for Gaushalas, additional cash incentives for villages in red and yellow zones and so on," Kashyap remarked in conversation with News18. Unlike Punjab, the Haryana government is fully incentivising farmer communities that are not involved in stubble burning. Incentives worth Rs 1,000 per acre for each Panchayat that does not indulge in stubble burning have been offered. An area of almost 11 lakh acres has been registered under this incentive scheme. Fines worth Rs 32.55 lakh have been slapped so far on those continuing the practice. Almost 50% of Haryana's paddy are basmati varieties of rice that leave longer bits of straw on harvest which the farmers use as crop fodder instead of burning. In fact, the state government is covering the transportation costs to facilitate

the transfer of straw from the farmer to the state's many Gaushalas (cow sheds).

Another initiative of the Haryana government is a crop diversification drive which has been urging farmers to diversify away from water intensive paddy to alternatives like maize or millets. An incentive of Rs 7,000 per acre of land diversified away from paddy with an alternative crop is being offered to farmers under the Mera Pani Meri Virasat scheme. 71,435 acres of land have been registered under MPMV.

Villages have been divided as green, yellow and red villages. Around 147 have been marked as red as they have more than six active fire locations. This identification system helps officials to efficiently target straw burning hotspots.

The government of Haryana is offering additional incentives of Rs 1,00,000 and Rs 50,000 for panchayats in the red and yellow zones respectively, that do not engage in stubble burning.

STUBBLE CAN 'FUEL' INDIA, BUT FARMERS NEED TO BUY IN

While both the state administrations of Punjab and Haryana have tried to lean on innovative solutions, acceptance by farmers has been varied. It has been an uphill task for officials to convince farmers to embrace new technologies. Initially, farmers in Punjab were receptive to buying machinery like the 'happy seeder' under the Crop Residue Management (CRM) Machinery scheme. However, their demand has dropped since. Despite subsidies for the machines, farmers are still reluctant owing to expensive prices and increased operational costs due to the use of diesel in these machines. Straw is a good source of biofuel. Farmers who bought balers this season have hit a jackpot selling bales of straw to biomass and boiler plants for lakhs of rupees. Srikanta K Panigrahi, Director General at the Indian Institute of Sustainable Development remarked how pellets made of straw could benefit farmers and fuel the country too.